ON THE CIRCUIT

THE CHITLIN' CIRCUIT AND SEGREGATED BLACK ENTERTAINMENT IN JIM CROW GEORGIA

YOUR TOUR STARTS SOON!

HERITAGE TRAIL HISTORIC CONTEXT

GEORGIA'S BIG ACTS, LOCAL VENUES, AND TOP PROMOTERS

ON STAGE

TOP RHYTHM & BLUES REVUE

GET YOUR TICKET

"PROVE IT ON ME"

MA RAINEY

GEORGIA'S TOP JUKE JOINT CONTEXT

PLEASANT HILL'S VERY OWN

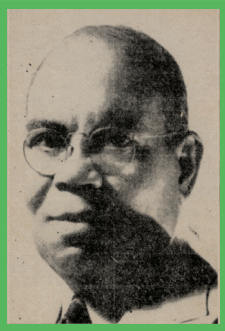
LITTLE RICHARD

"GOOD GOLLY, MISS MOLLY"

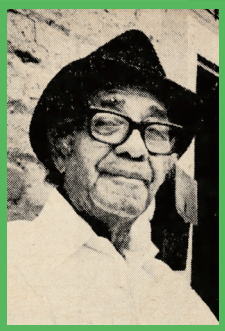
GET IN LINE!

BB BEAMON

REESE DUPREE



CLINT BRANTLEY



OUR TOP PROMOTERS

BRINGING THE MAGIC...

VFW POST 3910 | MANHATTAN CLUB | THE ALBANY THEATER

& MORE!

...TO OUR LOCAL VENUES.

NEW SOUTH ASSOCIATE

Lucky Millinder Performance at the Atlanta Municipal Auditorium, 1940s.

(Source: Performance and City Auditorium, *James Neal Montgomery collection*, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System)

FOX THEATRE ATLANTA

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT *of* COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

CHITLIN' CIRCUIT

HERITAGE TRAIL HISTORIC CONTEXT

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Dance at the Atlanta Municipal Auditorium.

(Source: Performance and City Auditorium, *James Neal Montgomery collection*, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System)

FOREWORD

BY MARY W. JOSEPH

This document serves as a historic context statement to educate the public about Georgia's rich history of African American entertainment through the lens of the Chitlin Circuit, which was big in the 1920s until the early 70s that were places of entertainment in segregated America. When I began my position at the Historic Preservation Division (HPD), I discovered a collection of research started by the Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network (GAAHPN) and one of my predecessors, Jeanie Cyriaque. Their work laid the foundation for this initiative to create a heritage trail, highlighting the important legacy of the Circuit; however, it had not yet been completed.

This context statement is our continuation of their important work and the first step in establishing a heritage trail. This context not only deepens our understanding of Georgia's African American history but also opens the door to further research and discovery. Through connections already made from this project, we hope to connect and engage more people, institutions, and organizations to uncover amazing stories and sites that brought these entertainment spaces to life in the segregated South. Future phases will not only highlight performance venues, but also the places where artists lodged and restaurants that welcomed them during a time of segregation.

We hope this context statement will not only educate but also inspire. Despite the many barriers faced, music, comedy, and dance have always been vital to the human experience. For African American communities, these performances provided much-needed moments of joy, escape, and connection. The venues that hosted them—whether theaters, lively clubs, or humble juke joints—are more than just entertainment spaces; they are enduring symbols of cultural pride, creativity, and achievement. We are deeply grateful to the Fox Theatre Institute and New South Associates for their funding and collaboration. Their support, along with the pioneering efforts of GAAHPN and Jeanie Cyriaque, has been instrumental in bringing this project to life. Without their dedication, this important chapter of Georgia's history and the stories of artists, venues, and experiences may have remained untold. I am proud that phase one is complete and look forward to what lies ahead.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank the many people across Georgia who helped make this project a reality. First, we extend our gratitude to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Historic Preservation Division and Mary W. Joseph, who recognized the need to elevate this important part of our state's history and developed a creative and engaging approach to present these stories to the public. The basis for this work was first created by former African American Programs Coordinator at the Historic Preservation Division, Jeanne Cyriaque, and we are grateful for her work on the Chitlin' Circuit. Our sincere thanks to the Fox Theatre for providing the funding for this project through their Fox Gives grant program and to Leigh Burns, Director of Community Partnerships, who helped oversee the elements included in this phase of the project and organize public engagement. We would also like to thank Maya Henry, intern with the Historic Preservation Division, and Joyce Law and Natasha Washington, both with the Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network (GAAHPN), who all brought fresh insight and ideas during this phase of the project, helping to guide the topics selected for research and review earlier drafts of the document. GAAHPN is a dedicated group of volunteers focused on preserving historic sites connected to Georgia's African American heritage.

Next, we would like to thank the archival repositories that made their collections available for research during the creation of this document. The Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History provided access to the papers of James Neal Montgomery, permitting the authors to peer into the world of the Chitlin' Circuit in Atlanta through his letters and other materials. Similarly, the Middle Georgia Archives at the Washington Memorial Library in Macon allowed us to search through the materials of Clint Brantley and Charles H. Douglass, providing perspectives on Black entertainment in Georgia during nearly the entire life of the circuit. We would like to specifically thank Muriel Jackson, the Head of Genealogy and the Historical Room at Washington Memorial Library, for her guidance through these materials and efforts to contact community members who remembered specific people and places in Georgia's Chitlin' Circuit history. Through her connections, we were fortunate to meet Newt Collier and Dr. Walker J. Searcy, Jr. We are indebted to these two community members, who aided the project by discussing their memories of the entertainment industry and nightlife during the twentieth century.

Beyond these two repositories, libraries, historical societies, and individuals across the state made themselves available to our questions about Chitlin' Circuit venues in their areas. Their assistance allowed us to include circuit locations from across the state in our mapping, helping to make the project reflect a wider geographical range. We would like to thank Evan Leavitt, creator of *The Soul of Georgia* digital exhibit through the Georgia College Special Collections, for his guidance early in this project and his previous work mapping Chitlin' Circuit venues in the Milledgeville area. We are also grateful to Macon music historians Jessica Walden and Jamie Weatherford for their assistance in locating Macon area clubs and other resources.

Finally, we would like to recognize the efforts of the many entrepreneurs, artists, and event attendees who uplifted and celebrated Black art during the oppressive Jim Crow era in Georgia and across the country. Through both their work and leisure, participants of the Chitlin' Circuit left an indisputable mark on American entertainment, bringing Black artistry first to their own communities and then to the world.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On the Circuit: The Chitlin' Circuit and Segregated Black Entertainment in Jim Crow Georgia serves as Phase One of a multi-year project aiming to develop a Chitlin' Circuit Heritage Trail in Georgia. Prior to this project, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Historic Preservation Division identified the need to acknowledge and educate the public about the vibrant and resilient Black entertainment industry that developed throughout Georgia during the Jim Crow era. In 2024, the Fox Theatre awarded the Historic Preservation Division a financial grant through its Fox Gives program to fund research, documentation, and planning for a historic trail to meet this need. As discussed above, the following historic context and associated information will serve as the foundation for the development of this future trail.

As a result of the research conducted for this historic context, 89 locations in Georgia that served as venues during the Vaudeville and Chitlin' Circuit eras were identified. Of that number, 20 have an unknown status (22.5%), 39 are non-extant (43.8%), and 30 are extant (33.7%). The regions with the greatest number of identified sites are those that contain some of the state's largest cities, where there were more historic newspapers available for research. Those regions are: Region 12 (Coastal), which contains 22.7% of the identified sites and the city of Savannah; Region 6 (Middle Georgia), which contains 27.3% of the identified sites and the city of Macon; Region 3 (the Atlanta Regional Commission), which contains 16.7% of the identified sites; and Region 7 (Central Savannah River Area), which contains 9.1% of the identified sites and the city of Augusta. Regions 4 (Three Rivers) and 9 (Heart of Georgia Altamaha) have no representation, and Regions 1 (Northwest Georgia), 2 (Georgia Mountains), 5 (Northeast Georgia), 8 (River Valley), 10 (Southwest Georgia), and 11 (Southern Georgia) all have 5 or less venues.

In addition to the historic context, this document includes select case studies of Chitlin' Circuit venues from across the state of Georgia. These can serve as a starting point for developing a list of sites for inclusion on the heritage trail. The final chapter presents a review of existing heritage trails and recommendations for planning for the next phases of the heritage trail. Additionally, recommendations for further research are included in this chapter.

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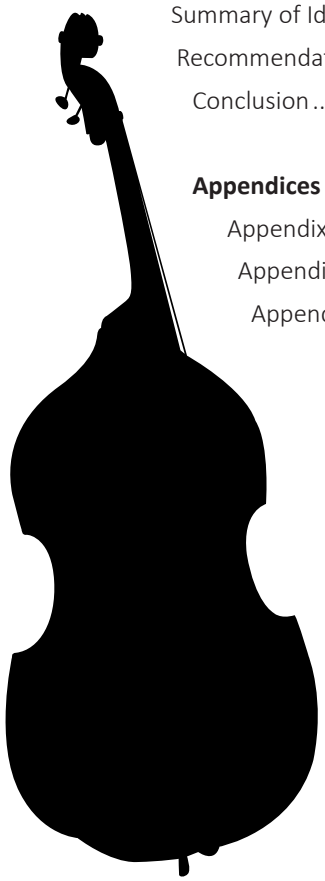


(Source: Performance and City Auditorium, *James Neal Montgomery collection,* Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System)

CHAPTER ONE | INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Document

On the Circuit: The Chitlin' Circuit and Segregated Black Entertainment in Jim Crow Georgia was created to serve as a reference tool in the development of a Chitlin' Circuit Heritage Trail in Georgia. The document addresses essential information needed to interpret circuit-related sites across the state, including providing a basic definition for the Chitlin' Circuit and discussing the circuit's origin on the national/regional level. The role of Georgia within the circuit is reviewed in the document as well, identifying and detailing examples of significant people and places in the state. A select number of circuit-associated sites were chosen as case studies to serve as potential locations on the future heritage trail and provide a blueprint for other places to be incorporated during the trail's development.

Project Description

The creation of *On the Circuit: The Chitlin' Circuit and Segregated Black Entertainment in Jim Crow Georgia* serves as Phase One of a multi-year project aiming to develop a Chitlin' Circuit Heritage Trail in Georgia. Prior to this project, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Historic Preservation Division identified the need to acknowledge and educate the public about the vibrant and resilient Black entertainment industry that developed throughout Georgia during the Jim Crow era. In 2024, the Fox Theatre awarded the Historic Preservation Division a financial grant through its Fox Gives program to fund research, documentation, and planning for a historic trail to meet this need. As discussed above, the following historic context and associated information will serve as the foundation for the development of this future trail.

(Source: Unidentified Coed Groups, *James Neal Montgomery collection, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System*)

The Chitlin' Circuit was a form of Black empowerment during the stifling period of segregation in the United States. It consisted of segregated Black entertainment spaces that operated as part of an unofficial network stitched together by booking agents, regional promoters, artists, and venue owners. Between the vaudeville era of the early twentieth century and the increasing popularity of soul music in the early 1960s, Black entrepreneurs used innovative business practices and networking to uplift Black art and bring it to their local communities. The network they built

covered the Southern United States and stretched into other regions, including the Midwest, Mid-Atlantic, and Northeast, bringing Black entertainment to Black communities at a time when Black artists and patrons were excluded or discriminated against at larger mainstream venues. Though most of the available archival collections and secondary sources related to the Chitlin' Circuit in Georgia highlight people and places in major urban centers like Atlanta and Macon, a fact reflected in the body of the following historic context, the circuit reached into communities of all sizes across the state. Examples of other towns and cities that are home to identified sites associated with the Chitlin' Circuit include Athens, Augusta, Columbus, Darien, Milledgeville, Rome, Savannah, and Toccoa. A more detailed definition of the Chitlin' Circuit is provided in the introduction to Chapter 3.

Within this document, the historic context in Chapter 3 provides an overview of the history of the Chitlin' Circuit in Georgia, placing it within the network's national and regional contexts and highlighting significant people and places across the state. This information will be used to contextualize sites on the future heritage trail, connecting them to the larger history of the circuit on both the state and national level. Case studies for potential sites on the heritage trail are described in Chapter 4. The case studies were selected with the goal of representing a variety of site types and areas of the state, using the geographic divisions of the twelve Georgia Regional Commissions to direct decisions regarding the latter. All the Chitlin' Circuit venues identified during this project are listed in Appendix 1. Though not a comprehensive list, Appendix 2 provides the names of artists who performed at circuit venues in Georgia. Appendix 3 contains a glossary of terms associated with the history of the Chitlin' Circuit in Georgia.

(Source: Performance and City Auditorium, *James Neal Montgomery collection, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System*)

CHAPTER TWO | METHODOLOGY

The Fox Theatre and Georgia's Department of Community Affairs commissioned New South Associates to create a historic context of the Chitlin' Circuit in Georgia. The project sponsor contributed to the study outline and provided guidance throughout the project.

The geographic study area for the Chitlin' Circuit Historic Context includes all 12 Georgia regions. Regions 3 (the Atlanta Regional Commission), 6 (Middle Georgia), and 12 (Coastal) yielded the most information about the circuit in Georgia, a bias caused by the availability of archival collections and historic newspapers from those areas of the state and the limited time available during this phase of the project. Investigations into the Chitlin' Circuit in Region 9 (Heart of Georgia Altamaha) and Region 4 (Three Rivers) yielded no information. Future research should target the nine underrepresented regions through in-person research at local libraries and community outreach.

Archival and Secondary Research

Archival research was initiated through the development of a research plan that identified major repositories, both for online and in-person collections that would be part of the research efforts. Online repositories were investigated first. These included the New York Public Library's Digital Collection of *The Green Book*, the Digital Library of Georgia's Historic Newspapers Collections, Newspapers.com, and Heritage Auctions.com. Researchers examined each of the available copies of *The Green Book* in the New York Public Library Collection, searching for a base line list of music venues in the state of Georgia. Once names of venues were located, they were researched on Newspapers.com and in the historic newspapers available through the Digital Library of Georgia. Newspaper research yielded valuable information about venue addresses, dates of operations, events, performances, promoters, and artists that played at each location. Newspapers that were reviewed include *The Savannah Tribune, The Maroon Tiger, Atlanta Daily World, The Herald, The Atlanta Inquirer, The Augusta News Review, The Atlanta Voice, The Macon Telegraph, the Indianapolis Recorder, Chicago Defender,* and *Pittsburgh Courier*. HeritageAuctions.com was used to find concert posters from artists within the period of significance, both in Georgia and nationally. Georgia's Full Story Context was also reviewed to gather information about the Chitlin' Circuit in Georgia.

In addition to online research, in-person archival research was conducted at the Washington Memorial Library in Macon and the Auburn Avenue Research Library in Atlanta. The Middle Georgia Archives at the Washington Memorial Library houses two collections of interest: the Afro-American Cultural Project papers, which contain a small collection of materials related to the work of Clint Brantley, a regional promoter, and the Charles Henry Douglass, Jr. Business Records collection, the extensive set of records related to Douglass' businesses in Macon, including his theater and its relationship to the Theater Owners' Booking Association. The James Neal Montgomery collection at the Auburn Avenue Research Library yielded information about Montgomery's work as a regional promoter in the Atlanta area.

Currently, there is one major secondary source that influences most historic research on the Chitlin' Circuit – Preston Lauterbach's *The Chitlin' Circuit and the Road to Rock 'n' Roll*. This monograph was instrumental in shaping the authors' understanding of the Chitlin' Circuit, and it guided the development of this historic context. Another

significant secondary source was Michelle R. Scott's *T.O.B.A. Time: Black Vaudeville and the Theater Owner's Booking Association in Jazz-Age America*, which provided information on the vaudeville circuits of the first three decades of the twentieth century that served as precursors to the music-oriented Black entertainment circuits of the mid-twentieth century. Many other secondary sources were consulted to gain insight into details of life on the circuit, including biographies of major Black artists, regional entertainment histories, genre-focused histories of music in the United States, and journal articles covering a range of topics, from circuit-specific history to urban renewal.

Outreach to Libraries and Historic Societies

Researchers attempted to contact historic societies and preservation committees in nine of the twelve regions. These nine regions include. Region 1 (Northwest Georgia); Region 2 (Georgia Mountains); Region 4 (Three Rivers); Region 5 (Northeast Georgia); Region 7 (Central Savannah River Area); Region 8 (River Valley); Region 9 (Heart of Georgia Altamaha); Region 10 (Southwest Georgia); and Region 11 (Southern Georgia). Researchers called and emailed the Albany Civil Rights Museum, the Augusta Historical Society, the Dublin-Laurens Heritage Center, the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission, Historic Athens, the Historic Columbus Foundation, the Jack Hadley Black History Museum, the Lowndes County Historical Society and Museum, the Pike County Historical Society, the Rome Historical Society, the Stephens County Historical Society, and the Thomasville History Center.

Existing Heritage Trails Reviewed

In order to explore how the future Georgia Chitlin' Circuit Heritage Trail could be organized and look like, the authors reviewed the National Trust for Historic Preservation's "Seven Tips to Create a Heritage Trail" and existing heritage trails from the National Park Service, Explore Georgia, National Trust for Historic Preservation, and American Trails. These existing heritage trails include the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, the U.S. Civil Rights Trails, and the Columbus, Georgia Black Heritage Trail.

City Auditorium (Source: Performance and City Auditorium, *James Neal Montgomery collection, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System*)


LENOX
J.K. CAFE NO.2
ROYAL CROWN
COLA

CHAPTER THREE | HISTORIC CONTEXT

Introduction

Defining the Chitlin' Circuit

What is the Chitlin' Circuit? What types of entertainers and venues were included in its network? When and where did it operate? Since the term first appeared in publications in the mid-to-late 1960s, there have been a variety of answers to these questions. Many attempts at a definition focus on the musical aspects of the network, while others include other artforms or types of entertainment (Leimkuehler 2021; Lovece 1989). Some discussions of the circuit limit its extent to smaller venues, while others acknowledge performances at major auditoriums or theaters (Lacy 2001; Oppy 1977). Decades included in these answers typically range from the 1930s to the 1960s, with the 1940s and 1950s being the most common eras highlighted, though there are occasional references to its existence even in the late twentieth century (Lauterbach 2011; McKenna 1989) . Similar circuits that are not often included in descriptions of the Chitlin' Circuit existed during the first three decades of the twentieth century as well (Fischler 1968; Leimkuehler 2021; *News Journal* 1991; Yarborough 2017). As far as its geographic extent, many descriptions focus on venues in the South, while others acknowledge the circuit reached into the Midwest and Northeast too (Frolik 1978; Lauterbach 2011:9; McBride 1987; *United Press International* 1987). Amidst all this variety, there is one unifying element – that the Chitlin' Circuit worked to bring Black entertainment to Black communities across the country during the era of racial segregation. The circuit centered the Black experience in the entertainment industry during a time when Black artists struggled to gain mainstream recognition and when Black audiences were relegated to substandard areas of segregated interracial facilities, if they were allowed to attend at all. The venues of the Chitlin' Circuit placed the spotlight on Black acts and provided Black attendees with front-row access to these performances. By highlighting this key aspect of the Chitlin' Circuit, the general definition becomes more inclusive, and its rich history becomes clearer.

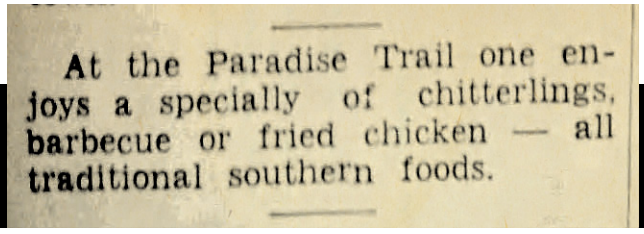
> **"Marion Stroud provided us a fine place to go to when we could not go to the white places. It made us feel good and proud, like we were somebody."**
>
> The Obituary of Marion Stroud, owner of the House of Blue Lights juke joint in Athens, in *Zebra Magazine* (*Zebra Magazine* 1995)

The Chitlin' Circuit takes its name from chitlins, or chitterlings, a dish consisting of fried or stewed hog intestines. During the antebellum period, hog intestines were viewed as an undesirable food by plantation owners and were relegated to the enslaved population. While chitlins were a common food across racial lines in the South during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the dish maintained a lower-class reputation throughout this era. Following the Great Depression, poor white

(Opposite) Undated Photograph of a Crowd Gathered outside the Lenox Theatre in Augusta, Georgia (Source: Historic Augusta)

Grocery Store in Detroit, Michigan with Window Advertisements for Several Pork Products, including Chitlins. (Source: Library of Congress)

Southerners transitioned to only eating chitlins in the privacy of their homes, and the food disappeared from the menus of white-serving restaurants across the South. Conversely, Black people continued to eat chitlins which gave it a stronger association with Southern Black foodways.



At the Paradise Trail one enjoys a specially of chitterlings, barbecue or fried chicken — all traditional southern foods.

Advertisement for the Paradise Trail, a Macon-Area Venue on the Chitlin' Circuit that Served Chitlins
(Source: *The Macon Telegraph*, October 9, 1942)

Though the exact origin of the term “Chitlin’ Circuit” is unknown, the expression certainly predates its appearance in print. “Chitlin’ Circuit” did not appear in national newspapers, including Black publications, until the mid-1960s. The earliest identified reference to the Chitlin’ Circuit is in a 1966 *Oakland Tribune* article covering artist Lou Rawls. At a concert in Oakland, California, Rawls told the crowd that he’d “been recording for Capitol [Records] for five years and all that time, [he’d] been called ‘an up-and-coming young blues singer,’” then clarifying that the title “up-and-coming young blues singer” referred to “the [artists] who get to entertain only on the Chitlin’ Circuit. That’s night clubs” (Wilson 1966). Between the late 1960s and the mid-1970s, use of the term in newspapers increased, offering brief definitions like, “any place white people [didn’t] go to see Black people [perform],” “a loose, unofficial string of tiny clubs,” and simply, “Southern dives” (Lalli 1977; *Memphis Press-Scimitar* 1969; *United Press International* 1976). By the mid-1980s, Chitlin’ Circuit was a well-established term in the mainstream reporting of Black artists in the music industry, typically referring to their work prior to finding fame (Kaye 1985; Warden 1988). In the final years of the twentieth century, “Chitlin’ Circuit” began to be used to describe touring Black theatre productions that were intended for Black audiences, but by the 2010s, it reverted to being mostly applied to the historic entertainment network discussed in this document (Frelix 2010; Gant-Hill 1997; Jordan 2011; Lowry 2003).

Roles on the Circuit

The Chitlin’ Circuit is largely remembered for the many Black artists who performed on its stages and then transitioned into the mainstream, but it was the people offstage who were responsible for building and maintaining the network that provided the spotlight for these artists. Promoters, booking agents, venue owners, and artist managers formed business relationships that allowed for the continuous flow of Black entertainment into hamlets of all sizes across the Eastern United States during the life of the Chitlin’ Circuit. These roles were extremely fluid and show business entrepreneurs often held two or more circuit-related jobs at a time. It was common for a promoter to purchase or lease their own venue so they could guarantee a stage to bring talent to their area, and venue owners often hired house acts who they would book out to other clubs in their region. Roles also shifted over time, with many regional promoters and booking agents starting their careers as artists and then using their connections in the industry to start promoting or booking acts themselves. This context focuses on many of the key people working in these behind-the-scenes roles, plugging towns and cities across Georgia into the Black entertainment circuits of the twentieth century.

Though entrepreneurs regularly shifted between roles on the Chitlin’ Circuit, each of the job titles they held had specific responsibilities. A **regional promoter** was someone who advertised an event and oversaw ticket sales. They were responsible for placing advertisements in newspapers, distributing posters, and coordinating where tickets were sold. Beyond the basic promotion aspect of this job, promoters also served as the local contacts for booking agents, typically using their relationships with area venues to book talent on behalf of the agent. After booking the artist, the regional promoter also secured necessary permits and arranged the lodging and transportation for the visiting entertainers. A **booking agent** was the person representing an artist’s interest in terms of securing gigs. Often working as part of a larger agency, the agent stitched together tours for the artists they represented by working with local promoters to book performances throughout the country. In the twentieth century, the title “promoter” was regularly used to describe the work of a booking agent, so context is often needed to discern which role a person was acting in for specific events. Occasionally, booking agents were also **artists’ managers**, though those roles were usually distinct, with the managers hiring booking agencies specifically to build tours and handle the logistics of live performances. The **venue owner** was simply responsible for their

Regional Promoter James Neal Montgomery with Jazz Musician Erskine Hawkins
(Source: J. Neal Montgomery with Unidentified Persons, 1940-1950, James Neal Montgomery collection, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System)

performance spaces, and most maintained relationships with local promoters to bring talent to their businesses. In the earliest years of Black entertainment circuits, the networks were operated by booking agents and venue owners, with publicity for events handled by the venue owner rather than a separate promoter. The role of the regional promoters developed in the late 1920s and early 1930s as local orchestras began touring across small areas. At the height of the Chitlin' Circuit, between the 1940s and 1950s, all of these roles played a significant part in the operation of the Black entertainment circuit.

Vaudeville and Early Segregated Black Entertainment Circuits

Developing Black Theater Circuits in the Jim Crow Era

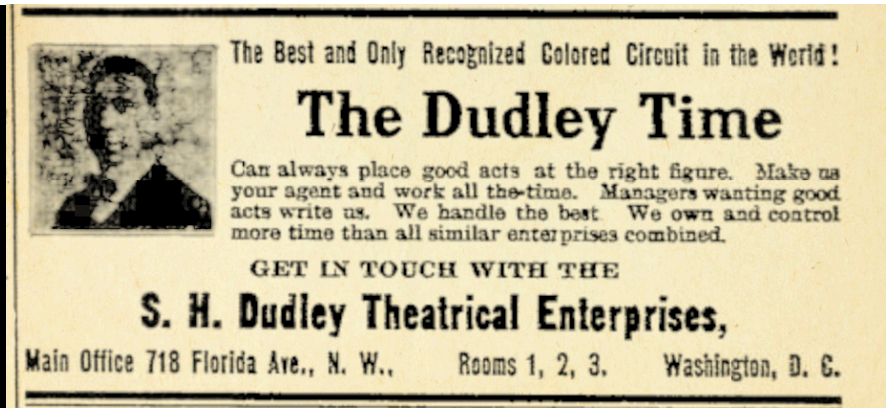
The early-to-mid twentieth-century Chitlin' Circuit that supported the development of new musical forms in the United States was rooted in earlier performance networks, which were similarly established to meet the needs of Black entrepreneurs, entertainers, and patrons living and working in the Jim Crow-era South. Networks of segregated Black venues elevated and supported Black artists, sustained Black-owned businesses, and centered the experience of Black patrons, allowing them to avoid the humiliation and substandard quality of segregated spaces in interracial venues. In the early twentieth century, when the first Black entertainment circuits developed, vaudeville reigned as the country's most popular form of entertainment. Vaudeville shows combined several distinct acts into

Two Broadsides Advertising the Florida Blossoms Minstrels, an All-Black Vaudeville Troupe Created by Charles H. Douglass, a Black Macon Businessman and Owner of the Douglass Theatre
(Source: Swann Auction Galleries)

one production, and performances typically included dancing, singing, comedy, acting, various talents, and, often, minstrelsy. Among mainstream vaudeville troupes, Black performers typically comprised only small percentages of the casts. When they were included, they were usually placed at the beginning or end of a show when attendance was lower. Black entertainers also formed their own troupes, but gaining access to major stages continued to be an issue, and the success of Black troupes was often still limited compared to white vaudevillians. Though Black art and culture often served as the inspiration for many vaudeville acts, even if in caricature, Black ownership and authority were uncommon in vaudeville at the turn of the twentieth century. Between 1900 and 1930, increased Black ownership of theaters and vaudeville companies, and eventually the circuits that better linked these entities, helped shine the spotlight on Black performers and bring entertainment to Black communities across the country (Scott 2023:12–19).

In the early years of the twentieth century, newly opened Black-owned theaters increased opportunities for Black performers, strengthened local Black economies, and provided safe and respectable entertainment experiences for Black communities in cities throughout the eastern half of the United States. The Pekin Theatre opened in 1904 as Chicago's first Black-owned theater, and it quickly developed into a Black institution in the city. The theater operated with an all-Black vaudeville cast and Black employees in management and other offstage roles (Scott 2023:15–17, 23–24). The theater's success drew the attention of Sherman H. Dudley, a noted Black vaudeville performer and one of the earliest Black managers of a vaudeville company (Scott 2023:22). Inspired by the Pekin, Dudley dreamed of a future for Black entertainment with "a chain of Negro theatres, controlled by a syndicate of Negro managers, duplicating in every city in the country where there is a considerable colored population"(Thompson 1907). Between 1911 and 1912, Dudley placed advertisements in the Indianapolis-based Black-owned newspaper *The Freeman*, calling for wealthy Black men to join him in purchasing theaters to establish a network like the one he described years earlier. Though Dudley aspired to extend the network across the South, including to places like "Oklahoma, Texas, Tennessee, and Georgia," his "Dudley Circuit" was concentrated to the Mid-Atlantic, Upper South, and Northeast when it first began operating in the summer of 1912 (Scott 2023:23).

Advertisement for the Dudley Circuit in *The Freeman*. "Time" was another word for the performance dates provided by a circuit during the vaudeville era. (Source: *The Freeman*, May 31, 1915)



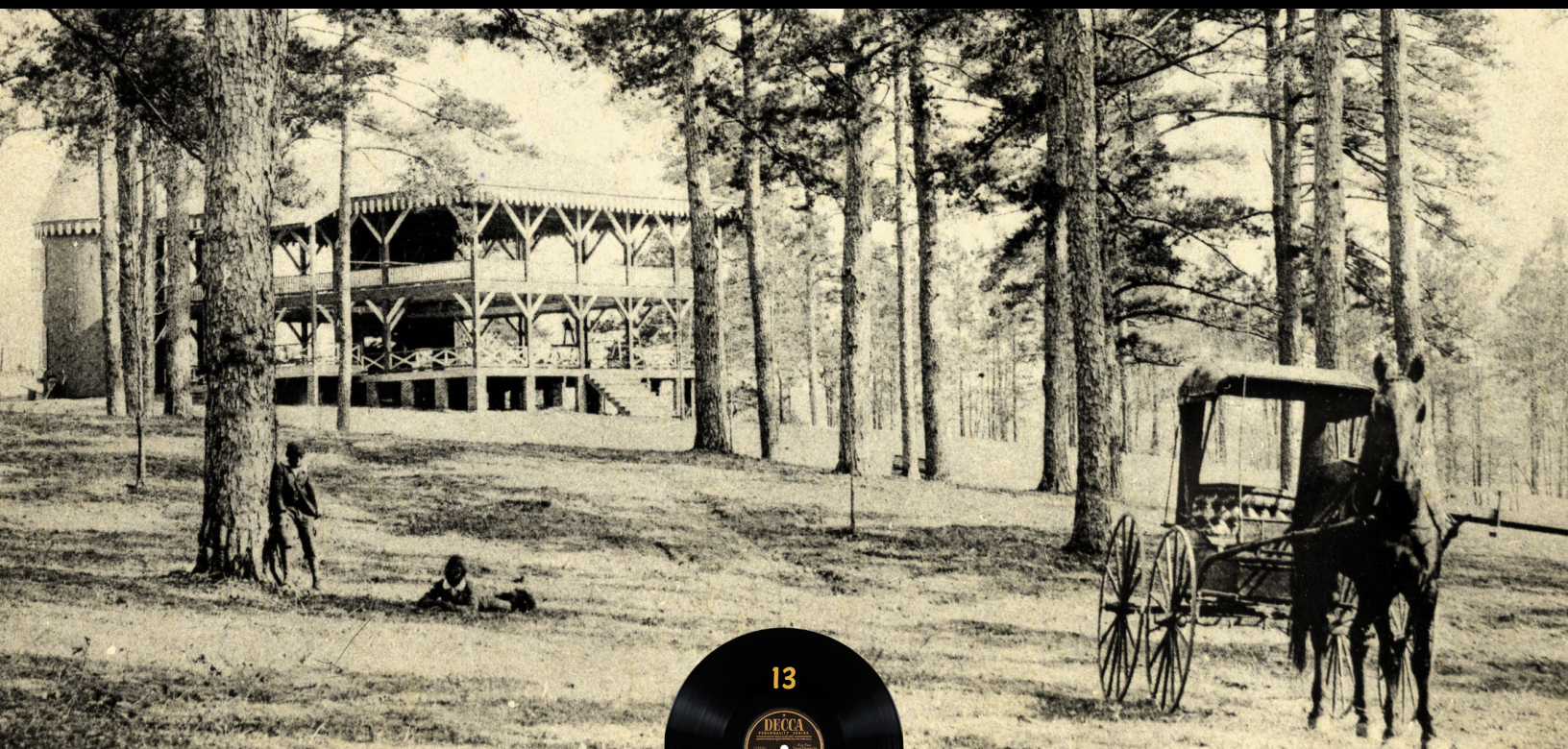
Based out of Dudley's headquarters in Washington, D.C., the Dudley Circuit initially included theaters in New York, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Baltimore, Maryland; Newport News, Norfolk, and Richmond, Virginia; and its home city, Washington, D.C. (Knight 1987:159). Though Black-owned entertainment venues were operating in Georgia by 1912, the earliest known Georgia theater to be included in the Dudley Circuit was the Arcadia Theater in Savannah, which opened in 1911 and was first listed as part of the circuit in March 1913 (Dudley 1913). By that time, more than 10 Black-managed or owned theaters had opened in Georgia, including the Vendome in Atlanta, which opened before 1903 (*Atlanta Georgian* 1907; *The Freeman* 1907). Most of the segregated Black theaters in

Georgia that operated before or near the beginning of the Dudley Circuit were owned by white businessmen but often had Black managers and staff. One example of this arrangement was found at the Central Theater in Atlanta, which was owned by Charles H. Bailey and Lionel D. (known as L.D.) Joel, white entrepreneurs who operated their own circuit in the early 1910s. Bailey and Joel hired Black vaudevillians and businessmen Tim Owsley and Billy King to work as amusement director and assistant manager, respectively, at the Central Theater (King 1912a; *The Freeman* 1911c). Georgia listings on the Dudley Circuit were not as common as theaters in the states closer to the network's headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Georgia's First Circuit of Segregated Black Theaters

As noted above, other theater owners developed regional networks of segregated Black theaters in the 1910s. Still, many of these owners were white and did not share Dudley's focus on Black ownership. L.D. Joel formed the earliest known Black theater circuit in Georgia in 1910, shortly after moving to Atlanta from Jacksonville, Florida, and partnering with Charles Bailey at the Arcade Theatre (later known as the 81 Theatre) (Joel 1910a; Scott 2023:52; Smith 2006:84). In November of that year, an article and advertisement in *The Freeman* announced the creation of the Southern Vaudeville Circuit (SVC), which included four white-owned theaters: the Arcade Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia; the Queen Theatre in Montgomery, Alabama (owned by Jason S. Chambers); the Layman Theatre in Mobile, Alabama (owned by Charles Layman); and the Belmont Theatre in Pensacola, Florida (owned by Mitchell Jacoby) (*The Freeman* 1910c). Joel, who regularly billed himself in the press as "the theatrical king," served as the secretary, treasurer, and booking manager of the new circuit (Joel 1910b). By April 1911, the circuit had grown to include theaters in Athens, Augusta, and Macon, though the names of the theaters in these cities are unknown (Simpson 1911). Segregated Black theaters that were operating in these Georgia cities between 1910 and 1911 include the Morton and Pastime Theaters in Athens, the Star Theater in Augusta, and the Douglass (originally spelled Douglas) Theatre and Ocmulgee Park in Macon (Douglass 1915; *The Freeman* 1910a, 1910b, 1911a, 1911b).

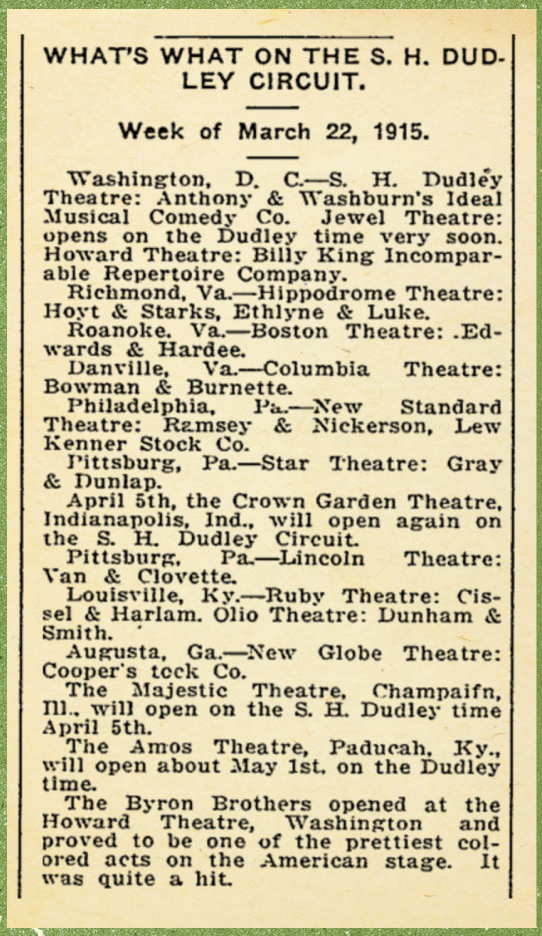
Ocmulgee Park, Macon, 1894 (Courtesy of the: Middle Georgia Archives, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, GA)



Advertisement in *The Freeman* for the Southern Vaudeville Circuit, the Earliest known Black Entertainment Circuit in Georgia (*The Freeman*, November 5, 1910)

The SVC expanded in June 1911 when Joel and Bailey entered a new partnership with Fred A. Barrasso, a Memphis-based theater owner (Joel 1911). Barrasso had previously established a separate circuit in mid-1910. Known as the Tri-State Circuit, Barrasso's network connected venues in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee (Abbott and Seroff 2017:231–233; Barrasso 1910; Benbow 1910; Carter 1911). With the addition of Barrasso's connections, the expanded SVC, also referred to as the Joel-Bailey-Barrasso Circuit, created a network of theaters across Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Tennessee; however, all the theaters included and the length of time this geographic range lasted are both unknown (Joel 1911). It is possible that the circuit, as it was initially described, was short-lived. In late June 1911, Fred Barrasso passed away (*The Commercial Appeal* 1911). Though Fred's brother, Anselmo, briefly continued operating the Tri-State Circuit, Joel and Bailey dropped the Barrasso name from descriptions of the SVC the next month (Huff 2014:35). In 1912, Bailey's name also disappeared from reports of the circuit, and by the end of the year, advertisements for both the Central Theater and the Dixie Theater (127 Decatur Street, Atlanta) listed Joel as "sole owner," suggesting he and Bailey were no longer business partners, at least in theater ownership (Abbott and Seroff 2017:235–237; King 1912a, 1912b; Whitney 1912). Available newspaper reports of the SVC do not include lists of participating theaters, making it difficult to determine the size of the circuit over time.

Between 1912 and 1913, Joel continued expanding the reach of the SVC by adding new theaters to its roster, including the Airdome Theater in Augusta and another unknown theater in Savannah (*The Freeman* 1913a, 1913b). He established a new company, the L.D. Joel Theater Company, to oversee his theaters and the circuit in



WHAT'S WHAT ON THE S. H. DUDLEY CIRCUIT.

Week of March 22, 1915.

Washington, D. C.—S. H. Dudley Theatre: Anthony & Washburn's Ideal Musical Comedy Co. Jewel Theatre: opens on the Dudley time very soon. Howard Theatre: Billy King Incomparable Repertoire Company.
Richmond, Va.—Hippodrome Theatre: Hoyt & Starks, Ethlyne & Luke.
Roanoke, Va.—Boston Theatre: Edwards & Hardee.
Danville, Va.—Columbia Theatre: Bowman & Burnette.
Philadelphia, Pa.—New Standard Theatre: Ramsey & Nickerson, Lew Kenner Stock Co.
Pittsburg, Pa.—Star Theatre: Gray & Dunlap.
April 5th, the Crown Garden Theatre, Indianapolis, Ind., will open again on the S. H. Dudley Circuit.
Pittsburg, Pa.—Lincoln Theatre: Van & Clovette.
Louisville, Ky.—Ruby Theatre: Cissel & Harlam. Olio Theatre: Dunham & Smith.
Augusta, Ga.—New Globe Theatre: Cooper's tock Co.
The Majestic Theatre, Champaifn, Ill., will open on the S. H. Dudley time April 5th.
The Amos Theatre, Paducah, Ky., will open about May 1st. on the Dudley time.
The Byron Brothers opened at the Howard Theatre, Washington and proved to be one of the prettiest colored acts on the American stage. It was quite a hit.

EVER EVOLVING

Throughout the era of segregated Black vaudeville circuits, connections between venues were rarely permanent. Theater owners jumped between circuits to best fit their economic or professional needs, meaning that a theater could be listed as part of a circuit one year (or week!) and dropped the next. Though lists of theaters on specific circuits cannot be neatly defined, this context notes theaters as part of specific circuits even if it is only mentioned once in available sources.

List of Venues Actively Participating in the Dudley Circuit during the Week of March 22, 1915. The New Globe Theatre in Augusta was listed as part of the circuit at this time. (Source: *The Freeman*, March 27, 1915)

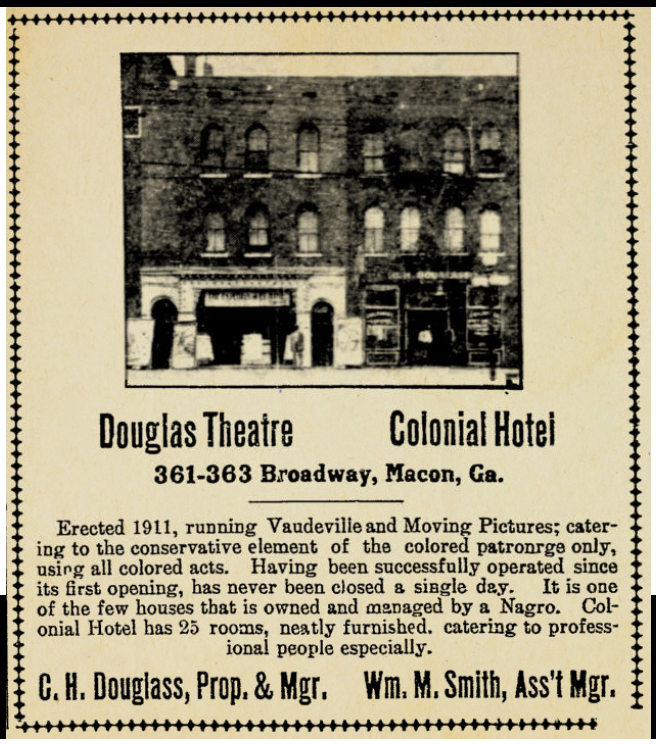
late 1912, but by mid-1913, the company was bankrupt, and Joel was forced to sell both the Central and Dixie Theaters in Atlanta (Ripley 1913; *The Freeman* 1913c). After losing $40,000 through his investments in the circuit, Joel relocated to Jacksonville, Florida, between late 1913 and early 1914, and references to the SVC and Joel in *The Freeman's* theater columns ceased (*The Freeman* 1914). The fate of Joel's SVC after mid-1913 is unknown, but Atlanta remained central to Southern vaudeville through the rest of the decade. In 1916, an article in *The Freeman* described the 81 Theatre, back under Bailey's control since 1912, as, "easily the Mecca of the South" (Abbott and Seroff 2017:237–238).

Partnering to Expand the Vaudeville Circuits

Though Dudley initially set out to create a Black-owned and controlled circuit, by 1913, he was collaborating with white theater owners to connect with more distant regional circuits and ensure the links between the venues across regions were secure. Dudley and his partners recognized a need to guarantee artists consistent pay scales, steady bookings across a wide geographic range, and reliable transportation regardless of the city they were in within a circuit's network (Scott 2023:48). Working together was also more profitable, since multi-regional circuits could support more acts and guarantee more extended periods of work, which in turn brought new shows to theaters on a more regular basis, enticing local audiences to attend performances at their local theater regularly. With these benefits in mind, an interracial group of theater owners and managers formed the Colored Consolidated Vaudeville Exchange (CCVE) in 1913, creating a circuit that stretched across the Midwest and Mid-

Douglass Theatre, circa 1925 (Courtesy of the: Middle Georgia Archives, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, GA)

Atlantic (Scott 2023:48–52). The partnership originally included early circuit architect Dudley; Martin Klein, a Jewish manager of Black theaters in Chicago; and Tim Owsley, the Black manager of the Crown Garden Theater in Indianapolis who previously worked in vaudeville theaters across the South. Though both Dudley and Owsley withdrew from the CCVE in the mid-1910s, Klein continued operating the circuit through the decade, joining with Charles Bailey of Atlanta for a short period in 1917 to expand the circuit into the Southern states (Abbott and Seroff 2017:238–241).



Douglas Theatre Colonial Hotel

361-363 Broadway, Macon, Ga.

Erected 1911, running Vaudeville and Moving Pictures; catering to the conservative element of the colored patronrge only, using all colored acts. Having been successfully operated since its first opening, has never been closed a single day. It is one of the few houses that is owned and managed by a Nagro. Colonial Hotel has 25 rooms, neatly furnished. catering to professional people especially.

C. H. Douglass, Prop. & Mgr. Wm. M. Smith, Ass't Mgr.

Douglass Theatre and Colonial Hotel Advertisement, 1915 (Source: *The Freeman*, December 25, 1915)

Douglass Theatre, circa 1940s with Hotel Space Occupying Old Theatre Building on the Left
(Courtesy of the: Middle Georgia Archives, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, GA)

When the United States entered World War I in 1917, many theater performers and patrons were drafted to serve in the military, and the country's vaudeville scene suffered. Even with the war's toll on casts and ticket sales, new circuits formed, including another network across the South. Georgia served as a pivotal meeting place for this circuit. In 1917, Samuel Reevin, a Jewish owner of Black theaters in Chattanooga, established the Mutual Amusement Company (MAC), which operated a small four-theater circuit between Tennessee and Alabama. Several months before the creation of the MAC, Reevin attended a meeting organized by Bailey in Atlanta, alongside Klein of the CCVE and


THE FREEMAN, AN ILLUSTRATED COLORED NEWSPAPER

The Mutual Amusement Circuit!

IS SUPPLYING ACTS TO THE FOLLOWING THEATRES:

Metropolitan Theatre — Memphis, Tenn. — A. Barrasso, Mgr.
81 Decatur — Atlanta, Ga. — Chas. P. Bailey, Mgr.
Lincoln Theatre — Pensacola, Fla. — Pete Delaney, Mgr.
Dixie Theatre — Bessemer Ala. — J. P. Arnold, Mgr.
Liberty Theatre — Chattanooga, Tenn. — Sam. E. Reevin, Mgr.
Douglass Theatre — Macon, Ga. — C. H. Douglass, Mgr.
Pike Theatre — Hobbs-Ala. — C. C. Schriver, Mgr.
New Queen Theatre — Birmingham, Ala. — J. L. Gilmer, Mgr.
Bijou Theatre — Nashville, Tenn. — Alfred Starr, Mgr.
Pekin Theatre — Savannah, Ga. — L. Dan Brudford, Mgr.
Strand Theatre — Jacksonville, Fla. — Buddie Allston, Mgr.
Lyceum Theatre — Cincinnati, Ohio — E. C. Cutler, Mgr.

Eastern, Northern and Western Acts, Teams, Singles, Trios, Novelty Acts and Stock Companies
Send in your open time; we have 22 consecutive weeks for you--No lay-offs, very small railroad fares, NO COMMISSIONS, good treatment and accomodation

WILL PLACE TICKETS ANYWHERE

Write or wire Sam E. Reevin Box 127, Sta. A Chattanooga, Tenn.

Advertisement for the Mutual Amusement Circuit with the 81 Theatre, Douglass Theatre, and Pekin Theatre Listed as Participants of the Circuit
(Source: *The Freeman*, September 14, 1918)

Macon-based theater owner Charles H. Douglass, to discuss the creation of a Southern circuit. Though Bailey and Douglass were not initially listed as part of MAC, in August 1918 they met with Reevin in Atlanta again and agreed to join the circuit, alongside eight other Southern theater operators, including: Anselmo Barrasso of Memphis; Alfred Starr, the brother of Milton Starr (discussed in the following section); and L. Don Bradford, the manager of the Pekin Theatre in Savannah, which Josephine Stiles owned (Abbott and Seroff 2017:241–244, 366).

Over the next two years, the established leaders of the country's Black vaudeville circuits continually swapped alliances to gain more control over talent booking across the Eastern United States. In mid-1919, MAC disintegrated and Reevin joined Klein's CCVE circuit, which had expanded since the mid-1910s to include venues across the Mid-Atlantic and South (Abbott and Seroff 2017:244; Scott 2023:51–52). Dudley rejoined CCVE in 1918, alongside Ernest L. Cummings, the owner of Pensacola's Belmont Theatre, one of the founding venues on L.D. Joel's original Southern circuit, the SVC. Together, Cummings, Dudley, Klein, and Reevin served as CCVE's directors, and in autumn 1919, they arranged a meeting with Bailey in Atlanta to convince him to join as well. Bailey agreed and was elected president of the organization, which was renamed the Southern Consolidated Vaudeville Circuit (SCVC). The partnership was short-lived though. Dudley, Klein, and Reevin divested themselves from the SCVC in January 1920 after Bailey was found to be paying performers less than the agreed upon price set by the circuit (Abbott and Seroff 2017:244–245). Dudley, Klein, and Reevin established the United Vaudeville Circuit (UVC) that month, and by the middle of the year, they managed booking for approximately 50 theaters across the Eastern United States (Abbott and Seroff 2017:246; Scott 2023:64). Their most significant rival was the organization they had just departed, the SCVC, which connected over 40 venues. Putting disagreements aside, "for the betterment of the entire show world," the UVC merged with the SCVC in July 1920, reuniting the partners Bailey, Cummings, Dudley, Klein, and Reevin once again, though only temporarily (Abbott and Seroff 2017:246). At the end of the year, Reevin split with the SCVC again to establish another new booking organization, setting the stage for the final struggle for control.

The Theater Owners' Booking Association

Merging the Many into One

In December 1920, Reevin partnered with Milton Starr, a white theater owner from Nashville, Tennessee, and three other Chattanooga-based white men to form the Theater Owners' Booking Association (TOBA) (Scott 2023:66–67). Reevin and Starr quickly realized the organization needed Dudley's connections to, and reputation with, Black theater owners to survive as a booking agency for Black-serving theaters (Scott 2023:70–73). At the same time, SCVC was rapidly losing key theaters to TOBA. As a benefit to the leaders of both organizations, Dudley and the SCVC met with TOBA's leaders in Chattanooga in May 1921 (Abbott and Seroff 2017:247–248). The Black press hoped the discussion would end the "vaudeville wars," the term theater columnists in Black newspapers used to describe the struggle for control over bookings that had gripped the industry for nearly a decade (Scott 2023:64, 72). The meeting was successful in that regard, and later that month, the SCVC merged with TOBA, almost doubling the number of TOBA-aligned theaters and expanding the organization's reach across the Southeast (Scott 2023:73). Dudley and Reevin's earlier partner, Martin Klein, joined TOBA in 1922. Klein was selected as head of TOBA's Midwestern Branch, while Dudley oversaw the Eastern Branch and Reevin managed the Southern Branch. These three men remained at the core of TOBA through the final years of the decade (Scott 2023:73–74, 158–159). With the merger of SCVC and TOBA, most of the networks created between segregated Black theaters in the 1910s were united into one circuit.

THOMAS A. DORSEY
(JULY 1, 1899 - JANUARY 23, 1993)

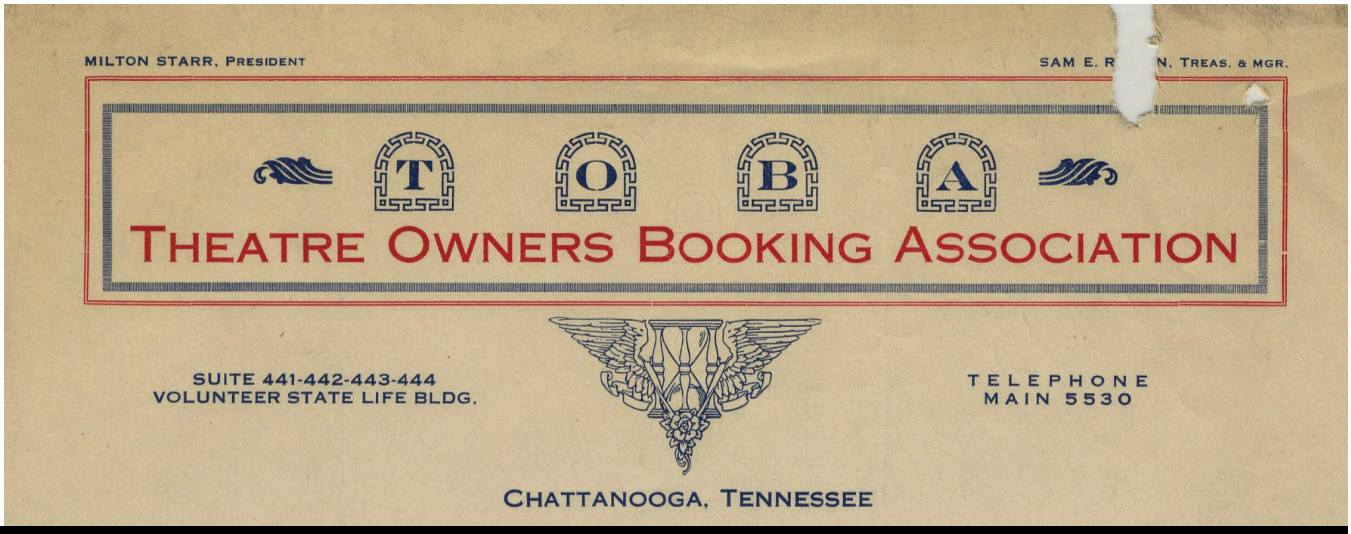
Thomas Dorsey
(Source: Blind Dog Radio Blog)

Thomas Dorsey with Mahalia Jackson
(Source: Atlanta History Center)

Thomas Andrew Dorsey was born in Villa Rica, Georgia. His dad was a preacher and Dorsey grew up singing and playing instruments for the church. In 1920, Dorsey coined the term gospel music after writing the song "If you see my Savior." Although he is credited as being the "Father of Gospel Music," he actually started his career as blues singer, Georgia Tom. Throughout the 1920s, he toured with Ma Rainey and guitarist, Tampa Red (Britannica 2025). While Dorsey was on tour in 1932, his wife died in childbirth and the child died a day or two later. This event changed him. He turned away from blues and dedicated his life back to gospel music. Dorsey composed "Take My Hand, Precious Lord" during his time of mourning. It went on to become a hit. Over the years, Dorsey wrote a number of songs and helped launch the careers of Mahalia Jackson and Sallie Martin. His song "Peace in the Valley" was covered by country artist Red Foley and later was made popular by Elvis Presley (Gospel Music Association 2024).

The Theater Owners' Booking Association in Georgia

While the management of TOBA operated outside of Georgia, largely in Reevin's office in Chattanooga, the organization's daily activities were tied to TOBA's member theaters, which dotted the circuit that stretched across the state. Theater owners joined TOBA by purchasing $300 worth of stock in the organization, which provided them with access to TOBA's contracted performers and gave them a vote in the activities of the business (Scott 2023:69). Reevin auditioned and hired the circuit's performers and then negotiated contracts with individual theater owners, offering varying prices for acts depending on their size and popularity. Theater owners in Atlanta, Augusta, Columbus, LaGrange, Macon, and Savannah joined TOBA, but not all of Georgia's segregated Black theaters operated as part of the circuit. Certain venues, including the Liberty Theatre in Columbus, encountered difficulty when trying to join the organization due to the presence of other TOBA theaters in their area (Williams 1925). A few theater owners also abandoned TOBA to form their own circuits or join other, smaller networks, while other owners never joined.



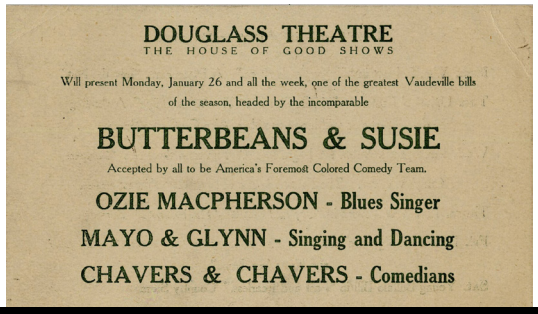
Theatre Owners' Booking Association Letterhead (Courtesy of the: Middle Georgia Archives, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, GA)

Charles H. Douglass, Macon

Several of Georgia's most well-known owners of segregated Black theaters were also major figures in the history of TOBA. The first segregated Black theater in Georgia to be incorporated into TOBA was the Douglass Theatre in Macon, Georgia. The theater's owner, Charles H. Douglass, was one of the original members of TOBA's Board of Directors. A seasoned Macon-area entrepreneur by the 1920s, Douglass operated a hotel alongside his theater and previously participated in the MAC and CCVE circuits (Scott 2023:68, 71). His businesses supported traveling Black entertainers, providing them with a venue to perform for the Black residents of Middle Georgia and a place to stay between shows. Though many high-profile acts performed on his stage, Douglass was often critical of the talent provided by TOBA, complaining of poor-quality shows and requesting cheaper prices to contract performers (Abbott and Seroff 2017:300; Johnson n.d.; Scott 2023:144–145). The Douglass Theatre was one of the most significant TOBA-era venues in Georgia, but as vaudeville and TOBA both suffered in the late 1920s, the theater began to operate at a loss (Douglass Theatre 1927; Johnson n.d.). In 1927, Douglass sold his shares of TOBA stock

Charles H. Douglass, circa 1920s (Source: Courtesy of the: Middle Georgia Archives, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, GA)

and either sold or leased the theater to Benjamin W. Stein, a white theater manager from Valdosta. Stein continued working with TOBA to book acts at the Douglass Theatre through 1929 (Johnson n.d.).

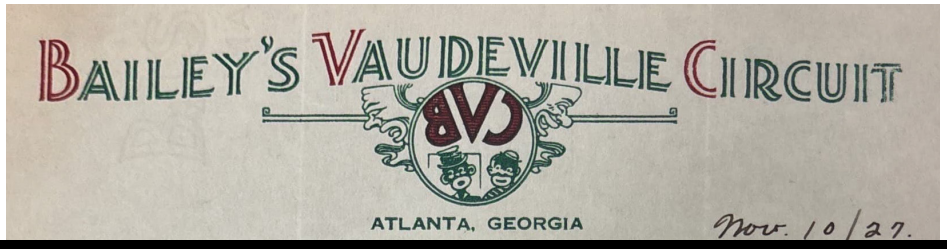


Advertising Card for Vaudeville Performances at the Douglass Theatre, which included Noted Entertainers Butterbeans & Susie, circa 1925 (Source: Courtesy of the: Middle Georgia Archives, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, GA)

Charles Bailey (Source: *The Freeman*, June 10, 1911)

Charles P. Bailey, Atlanta

Georgia was also home to one of the most infamous theater owners associated with TOBA, Charles Bailey. As described earlier, Bailey was an early participant in the circuits of segregated entertainment in Georgia, but he is most well-known for his overt racism and poor treatment of Black performers, including bill-topping artists Ethel Waters and Bessie Smith. Though seemingly contradictory, his venue, the 81 Theatre, is regarded as one of the most significant sites in the history of Black entertainment circuits and the evolution of the blues and later musical genres (Abbott and Seroff 2017:55, 295). Though Bailey joined TOBA when the SCVC was absorbed into the organization and served as a board member, he constantly fought with its other members, which resulted in him leaving TOBA for other circuits at least twice. In 1922, Bailey

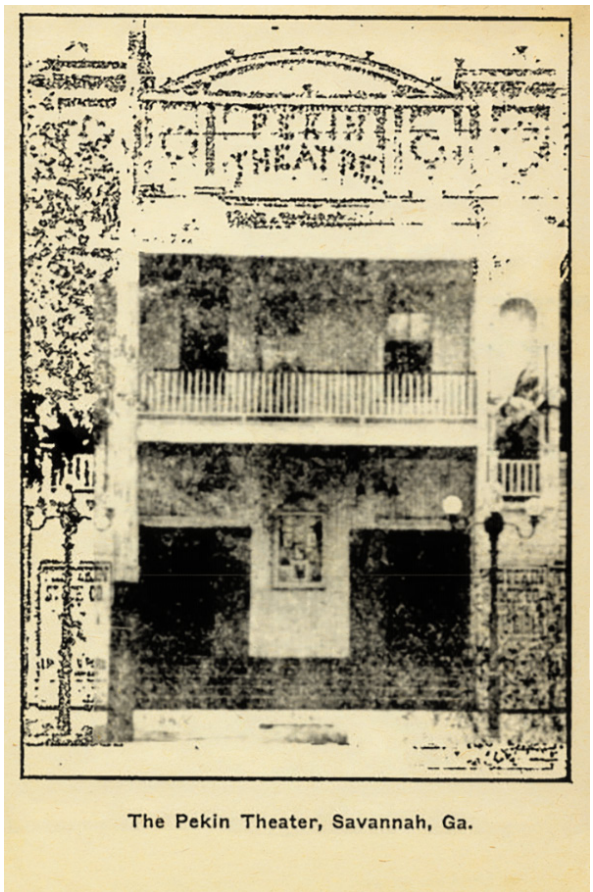


Bailey's Vaudeville Circuit Letterhead
(Source: Courtesy of the: Middle Georgia Archives, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, GA)

81 Theatre, Needs Caption
(Source: Cinematreasures.com)

split from TOBA to help form the short-lived Managers' and Performers' Consolidated Circuit (MPCC), which was established by Ernest Cummings to serve theaters across the South, including several in Georgia (Abbott and Seroff 2017:296; *The Billboard* 1922). Bailey returned to TOBA by the mid-1920s, only to leave again in 1927 to form his own circuit, the Bailey Vaudeville Circuit (BVC), with his brother, Tom Bailey (Scott 2023:146). One of the Baileys' clients under the BVC was the Douglass Theatre (Abbott and Seroff 2017:301; Johnson n.d.).

Josephine and William J. Stiles, Savannah



Façade of the Pekin Theatre in Savannah, 1911
(Source: *The Freeman*, November 11, 1911)

One of few Black women known to have owned a theater on the TOBA circuit was based in Georgia. Josephine Stine owned Savannah's Pekin Theatre, which likely took its name from Chicago's successful Black-owned Pekin. Before opening Savannah's Pekin Theatre in 1909, Stiles operated the Grand Palace Theatre in the city, which was one of the earliest-known Black-owned theaters in Georgia, opening in 1902. Stiles operated other businesses in Savannah, including a confectionery and grocery store, and owned real estate, all of which helped her to become one of the state's wealthiest Black citizens (Newsom 2023:31–32). The Pekin Theatre initially presented a mixture of vaudeville and films, but by the time TOBA was organized, it had converted to a full-time vaudeville theater (Newsom 2023:46). It was the second theater in Georgia to join TOBA (Scott 2023:71). Though Stiles is remembered as having played an essential role in the operation of TOBA, her alliances with booking agencies shifted occasionally, similar to other theater owners, and in 1922, she joined Bailey and Cummings' MPCC (*The Billboard* 1922; *The Chicago Defender* 1940).

MA RAINEY
(APRIL 26, 1886 - DECEMBER 22, 1939)

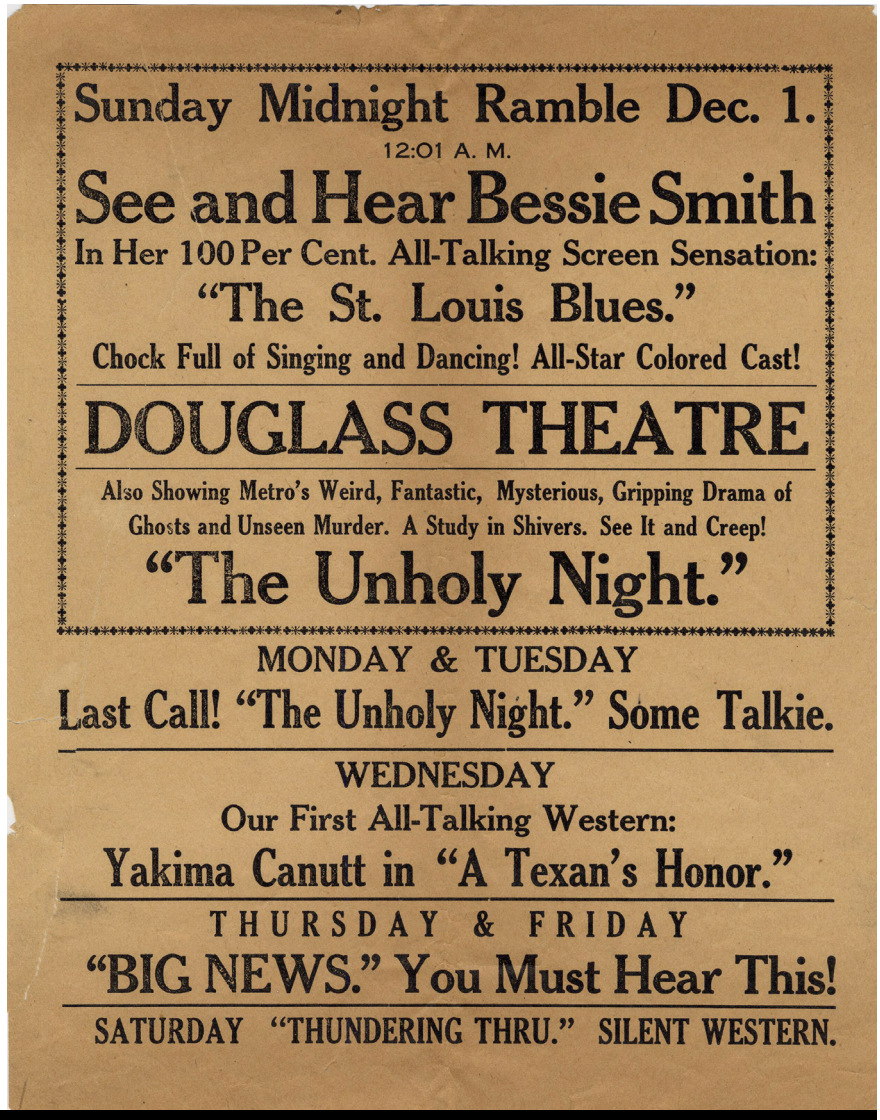
(Above) Circa 1925 Photograph of Ma Rainey and Her Band (Source: *Rollingstone Magazine)*

(Top) 1994 Ma Rainey Stamp (Source: National Postal Museum)

Gertrude Pridgett was born in Columbus, Georgia in 1886. Both of her parents were singers and from a young age, she wanted to sing too. Around the age of 14, she performed in a talent show at the Springer Opera House in Columbus. Soon after, she toured with various minstrel and vaudeville shows. At the age of 18, she met and married one of her vaudeville show managers, William "Pa" Rainey. Thus the stage name Ma Rainey was created (Columbus Parks and Recreation Department 2025). Ma Rainey is noted as one of the first women to integrate blues into vaudeville and minstrel shows. Throughout the TOBA circuit, she and her group were known to be a reliable act.

The Paramount Recording Company offered Ma Rainey a five-year recording deal in 1923. Through this partnership, Rainey became one of the first women to professionally record blues songs and she recorded more than 100 songs. However, in the late 1920s, musical tastes evolved and moved away from the blues that Ma Rainey was known for. Paramount released her from her contract stating that "her down home material has gone out of style." The great Depression brought a second decline in her audiences. Rainey retired in her hometown of Columbus in 1933 and died of heart disease in 1939. She is buried in the Porterdale Cemetery in Columbus, Georgia (Orr 2024).

William J. Stiles, Josephine's son, helped operate the Theatre in Savannah, as well as other Stiles-owned Pekin Theaters in Athens and Brunswick (Wid's Films and Film Folk, Inc. 1920:195). At the beginning of the twentieth century, before the creation of TOBA, William owned a vaudeville company, the Crackerjack Minstrels, and managed Savannah's outdoor vaudeville venue, Lincoln Park (*The Augusta Herald* 1907; *The Billboard* 1912). By the time the Pekin Theatre joined TOBA in early 1921, William had established W.J. Stiles Enterprises, a company for his entertainment ventures (*The Billboard* 1921). Though William often served as the Pekin Theater's representative in advertising and daily operations, Josephine still maintained a central role in the management of the theater (Newsom 2023:49). When Josephine died in 1940, she was remembered in her obituary as having been "often called in to settle some dispute between [TOBA-affiliated] owners and bookies that threatened destructions [sic.] of one or both" (*The Chicago Defender* 1940). Like Douglass, Josephine sold her theater in 1927 as the vaudeville scene deteriorated. The theater's TOBA-booked performances likely ended at this time, as the Pekin's buyer, Standard Oil, demolished the building two years later for a gas station (Newsom 2023:51).



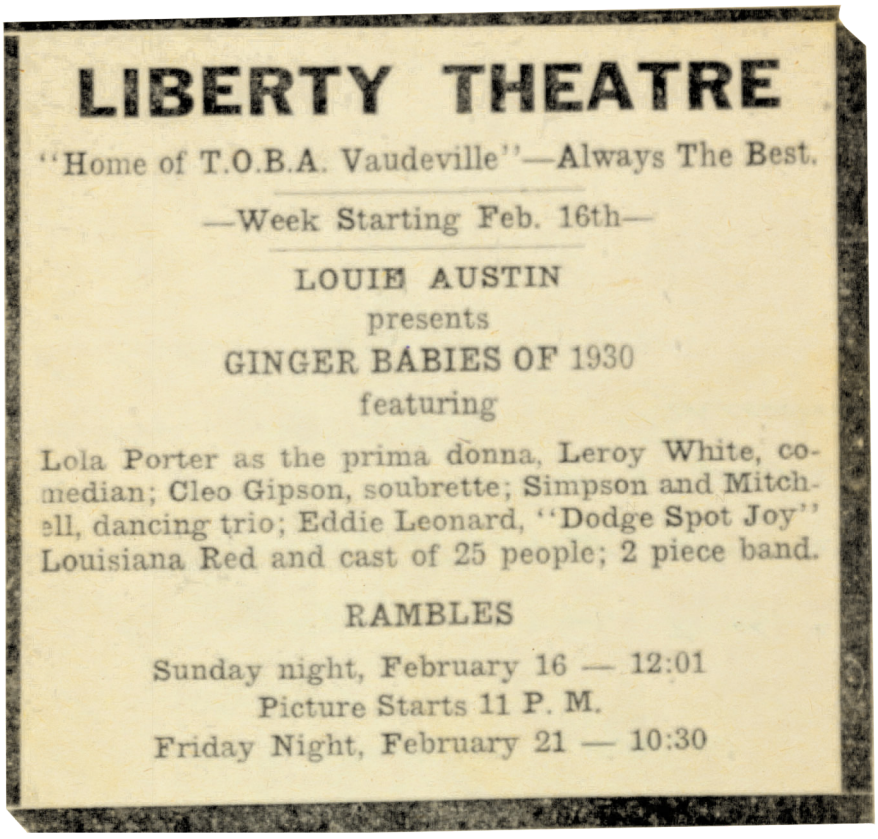
Douglass Theatre handbill for the film "The St. Louis Blues" featuring vaudevillian and blues singer Bessie Smith. This handbill represents two of the major changes in Black entertainment that impacted TOBA – the increase in the popularity of film and the practice of hosting "midnight ramble" events in Black venues. (Courtesy of the: Middle Georgia Archives, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, GA)

The Great Depression and the End of TOBA

TOBA's centralization of the many Black entertainment circuits provided a period of relative stability for Black performers, Black-serving theater owners, and booking agents for much of the 1920s, but a combination of factors at the end of the decade led to the unraveling of the organization (Scott 2023:140, 162–164). The common theme of disagreement and dissolving partnerships in the world of vaudeville circuits carried over into the TOBA era, as evidenced by the actions of Georgians Charles Bailey, Charles Douglass, and even Josephine Stiles, the last of whom briefly left TOBA in 1922 (Scott 2023:144–147). By 1927, all three of these leading Georgian theater owners had stepped away from

TOBA, and two of them released control over their most prominent venues, reflecting larger changes within the entertainment industry. TOBA's troubles were not limited to internal strife at the leadership and membership level but also extended to the audiences the organization served. A few TOBA-affiliated theater owners, including TOBA president Milton Starr, began to undercut the importance of their businesses as segregated spaces that centered the experiences of Black audiences. These theater owners began offering late-night shows, known as "midnight rambles," to white patrons interested in seeing popular Black artists, resulting in a feeling of betrayal among many Black communities as white patrons occupied their spaces. At the same time, as the economy worsened in the late 1920s, Black patrons began attending interracial theaters with segregated facilities, where ticket prices were generally lower (Scott 2023:153–156). The rising popularity of sound films in the late 1920s also negatively impacted TOBA. It was cheaper for theater owners and managers to show films than to host large casts of vaudeville performers, and as audiences shifted toward the consumption of film, it became more difficult to pay performers for poorly attended live shows (Scott 2023:149–153). By the start of the 1930s, vaudeville had lost the spotlight to film, and as a vaudeville booking agency, TOBA was nearing obsolescence.

Advertisement in the *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer* for the Liberty Theatre. Liberty Theatre was a TOBA member in the last years of the circuit, after initially being rejected by Reevin in 1925.
(Source: *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer*, February 16, 1930)



LIBERTY THEATRE

"Home of T.O.B.A. Vaudeville"—Always The Best.

—Week Starting Feb. 16th—

LOUIE AUSTIN
presents
GINGER BABIES OF 1930
featuring

Lola Porter as the prima donna, Leroy White, comedian; Cleo Gipson, soubrette; Simpson and Mitchell, dancing trio; Eddie Leonard, "Dodge Spot Joy" Louisiana Red and cast of 25 people; 2 piece band.

RAMBLES

Sunday night, February 16 — 12:01
Picture Starts 11 P. M.
Friday Night, February 21 — 10:30

Amid all these issues, the country began to slip into the Great Depression. Many Southern Black communities felt the effects of the economic downturn as early as 1928, a year before the stock market crash, largely due to low crop yields in agricultural areas. Tighter budgets for Black consumers meant that entertainment became a luxury expense, and with low ticket sales, TOBA could no longer afford to book top-tier Black talent to support a robust network of theaters (Scott 2023:157–158). On paper, approximately 40 theaters remained part of TOBA through 1931, but by the end of the year, the organization had ceased operations (Scott 2023:159–161). The theatrical elements of vaudeville found on the Black entertainment circuit rapidly decreased in popularity in the early 1930s, but the performers that traveled the circuits of the preceding two decades found work in local clubs or on self-promoted tours (Scott 2023:164–166). The independent work of musicians, many of whom previously worked in vaudeville, gave rise to the next generation of Black entertainment circuits in the United States.

The Post-TOBA Chitlin' Circuit

Picking Up the Pieces of Black Vaudeville and Music

TOBA's disintegration in the early 1930s left the Black entertainment circuit fractured, forcing vaudeville troupes to disband throughout the Eastern United States. A select few vaudevillians transformed their stage talents into film careers or maintained a presence on smaller theater tours throughout the decade, but the majority were lesser-known entertainers that went on to find work in local night clubs, performing in certain cities or small regional areas (*Atlanta Daily World* 1935a; Scott 2023:164). As the theatrical elements of vaudeville were replaced by "talkies," or sound films, live music remained an essential part of Black entertainment during this period. The

> **"If the syncopated patterns move the listeners to rhythmic feelings, then it's swing"**
>
> —Fletcher Henderson (*Atlanta Daily World 1936b). Atlanta Daily World, December 17, 1936.*

Looking Southwest Down Broadway in Macon, circa 1925. The Douglass Theatre is visible on the right side of the image. (Courtesy of the: Middle Georgia Archives, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, GA)

Advertisement for James Neal Montgomery's territory band in *The Valley Daily Times-News*. Based in Atlanta, Montgomery played into Alabama during the period of traveling bands. (Source: *The Valley Daily Times-News*, May 10, 1933)

oOo

Colored Band Coming To Lanett Theatre

Neal-Montgomery's colored band of 12 pieces will be at the Lanett Theatre Friday and Saturday on the stage. This is said to be the best band of it's kind in the south and L. J. Duncan, the theatre manager, is pleased to afford his patrons the opportunity of hearing these famous musicians.

They are said to compare favorable with the well known Cab Calloway orchestra of radio fame.

oOo

unemployment, low wages, and technological advancements that quickened vaudeville's decline created the perfect conditions to take another form of Black artistry on the road.

In the 1920s, local jazz bands formed in towns across the country, providing music for dance halls and clubs at a local level. Like vaudevillians, many of these live musicians were also negatively affected by declining attendance at shows at the onset of the Great Depression and the contemporary rise of new technology. These conditions had the opposite effect on live music though, encouraging many local bands to travel in the early 1930s to play for new audiences in cities within their region and embrace the new technology of radio broadcasts to advertise their talents on the airwaves (Gioia 2011:127–128; Lauterbach 2011:35). Known as territory bands, these ensembles consisted of fewer instruments, or pieces, allowing them to travel lighter and requiring fewer members than vaudeville troupes or bands of the 1920s. With smaller bands, club owners could lower the cost of admission to their venues, making entertainment accessible for Depression-era Black audiences. At the same time, the creation of paved state and federal highway systems in the 1920s and early 1930s made transportation quicker and easier for these bands, especially compared to segregated rail travel, facilitating the connections between clubs and other smaller venues across regions (Gioia 2011:148; Lauterbach 2011:40). Territory bands that hailed from Georgia included J. Neal Montgomery & His Orchestra, Arthur Lee Simpkins' Augusta Nighthawks, and Clint Brantley's multiple orchestras: Brantley's Central City Orchestra, the Brantley-Williams Colored Orchestra, and the Black Diamond Orchestra (Jones, Jr. 1932; Miller 1996:333; *The Hendersonville Times-News* 1933; *The Macon News* 1928; *The Macon Telegraph* 1927, 1934; *The Valley Daily Times-News* 1933). J. Neal Montgomery and Clint Brantley were also prominent club owners/managers and promoters in Georgia and are discussed in depth later in this chapter.

Stitching the Regional Circuits Together

Back up North, a performer and Black newspaper contributor noticed the conditions unfolding in the South. In "Hittlin' High Notes," an entertainment column in *the Chicago Defender*, fellow Black musician Walter Barnes reported on the talents and locations of stranded vaudevillians during the early 1930s, as well as the movement of territory bands (Barnes, Jr. 1932; Lauterbach 2011:39–40). His column was mutually beneficial, advertising for the regional performers and the venue owners while also supplying Barnes with a list of regionally-linked venues and the names of local promoters and facilities that served Black patrons. Using this information, Barnes created a new circuit of his own. Touring with his band in 1932, Barnes hopped from one city to the next across these largely disconnected performance territories, setting the stage for the first multi-regional post-TOBA Black entertainment circuit (Lauterbach 2011:40–42). Barnes lacked connections to a booking agency, the role TOBA played for vaudeville acts in the 1920s, which meant his band had to negotiate their pay with venue owners

Advertisement in *The Freeman* for Reid House in downtown Atlanta, an example of lodging for traveling Black performers in the vaudeville era. (Source: *The Freeman*, November 16, 1912)

ALL ABOARD! THE NIGHT TRAIN!

LIFE ON THE CIRCUIT

Throughout the early-to-mid-twentieth century, life for artists traveling on the Black entertainment circuits was tough. Racial segregation in the South made every aspect of touring more complicated – from transportation to the places available to sleep between gigs. The places that accepted Black patrons could be few and far between depending on the area an artist was traveling through, and encounters with the police or unfriendly white passers-by could be dangerous. For the average entertainer, formal accommodations and restaurants were often inaccessible due to low wages. Vaudeville circuit companies, and later, managers and booking agents, occasionally helped artists secure these necessities, but the options made available were rarely luxurious. In the vaudeville era, Black entertainers usually traveled by train, with the circuit management or theater owners either covering or fronting the cost of the tickets. Popular acts, like Ma Rainey, could afford their own private train cars, but most Black entertainers were forced to face the segregated conditions on regular passenger cars (Scott 2023:130–131). In the post-TOBA period, transportation shifted to private vehicles, acquired by a manager or the artist themselves. In these cars and buses, artists drove long hours from one gig to the next and had to be prepared to repair their transportation on their own in many areas of the Jim Crow South (Brantley 1978; Brown and Bruce 1997:76, 114–15; Murray 2000:157–159).

In the early twentieth century, as urban centers developed Black business districts with vaudeville venues, Black-owned hotels and boarding houses opened nearby. One example of a vaudeville-era Black hotel that supported traveling entertainers was the Colonial Hotel in Macon, adjacent to the Douglass Theatre (Scott 2023:131–132). Beginning in the 1930s, when Black entertainment circuits transitioned to music-oriented acts playing smaller clubs and juke joints, venues became more distant from those earlier lodging options, and artists were often forced to sleep in their cars or outdoors (Brantley 1978; Murray 2000:159; White 1994:22). More established musicians could sometimes afford roadside motorists camps and motels, on the rare occasions that Black-owned establishments were present along their route (Murray 2000:160–161). Access to food followed a similar pattern, with Black-owned restaurants often operating near theaters in the vaudeville era but being fewer in number on the roads of the post-TOBA circuits (Scott 2023:132). Between the 1930s and the early 1960s, the low pay of the Chitlin' Circuit and the lack of Black-welcoming restaurants in the more rural areas regularly forced entertainers to rely on venue owners to provide food, visit charity kitchens, and search for sympathetic chefs willing to hand food out the back door of a commercial kitchen (Brantley 1978; Brown and Bruce 1997:76; White 1994:22).

directly. Unlike the artists represented by booking agencies such as the Music Corporation of America, Barnes and other similarly unrepresented artists were usually paid from a venue's entrance fee, rather than having a set price for performances regardless of turnout (Lauterbach 2011:35–36, 43). Even with the financial risk, Barnes and other Black musicians, including bandleader Jimmie Lunceford, successfully traveled independently across this newly defined circuit through the 1930s (Lauterbach 2011:44–48).

During his travels along the newly forming circuit, Barnes covered the details of his experiences in his *Chicago Defender* column, describing the Black business districts (referred to by Barnes as "the stroll") and featuring leading Black citizens of the towns and cities his circuit touched (Lauterbach 2011:48–51). Atlanta served as one of the stops on his 1932 tour, and he revisited the city to perform in 1935 (*Atlanta Daily World* 1935b; Barnes, Jr. 1932). One of Barnes' most extensive tours of the decade was in 1937, when he visited several places in Georgia, including Atlanta, Augusta, Columbus, Cordele, Macon, Savannah, and Waycross. His articles captured fleeting spaces on the circuit, as well as several significant sites that were still in their infancy.

The cabins and main building of the Coconut Grove tourist camp in Savannah that Barnes described on his 1937 tour across the South. (Source: *The Macon Telegraph*, April 22, 1936)

Barnes noted that Auburn Avenue, West Hunter Street, and Decatur Street were the main Black business districts during his multiple stops in Atlanta. He called out several key circuit businesses in the city, including: Club Royale on the roof of the Odd Fellows Building, owned by Alfred Angel; the Bailey Theater chain; and the Top Hat (later known as the Royal Peacock), which was under construction at the time, and according to Barnes, would "surpass all clubs in the state for swank" (Barnes, Jr. 1937e). In Athens, he described Washington Street as "the stroll" and mentioned the Buffalo Club and the Morton Theatre, the latter owned by Charlie Morton and managed by D.P. Nesbitt. Barnes highlighted the Crim Hotel, Augusta Sea Beach, and Lenox Theatre in Augusta. In Columbus, Barnes visited Black troops at Fort Benning and noted the Rex Club, owned by Sid Porter, as a local venue. Barnes described West Broad Street as "the stroll" in Savannah, and listed several venues there, including Coconut Grove (a tourist camp with seven cabins and a club); the Little Savoy Night Club; the Cotton Club; the Tremont Park Night Club; the Hollywood Casino; and the Wondering Dream Club, where Barnes and his orchestra performed. His descriptions of Albany, Cordele, and Waycross were brief, but he noted that he performed at the Albany Alcazar while passing through that city (Barnes, Jr. 1937a, 1937b, 1937c, 1937d, 1937e, 1937f). By providing names and descriptions of

Black-serving venues and other facilities in Georgia and other Southern states, Barnes was publishing something akin to *The Negro Motorist Green Book* in his *Chicago Defender* column - but for the Black music industry. This information formed the foundation of the post-TOBA Chitlin' Circuit.

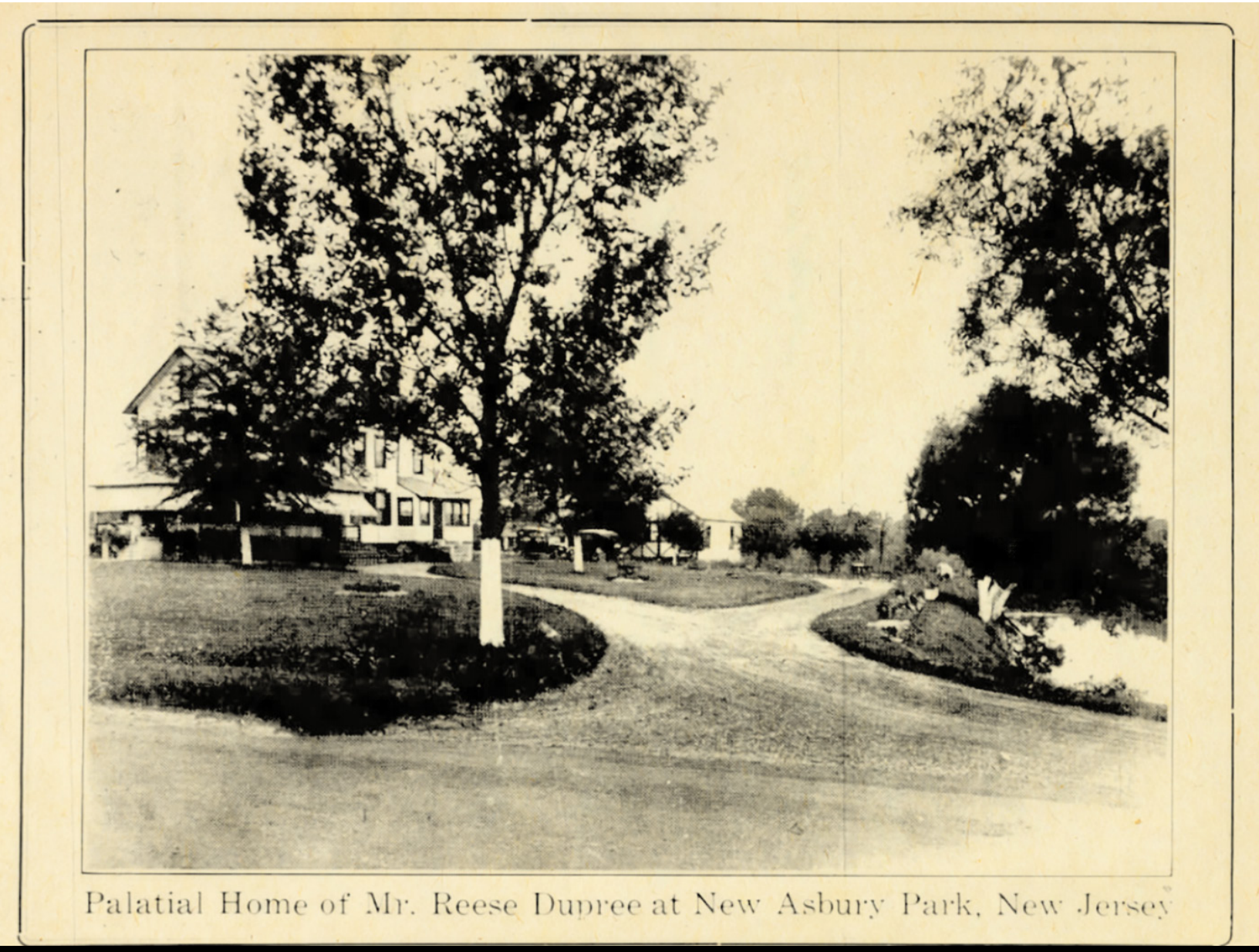
Black Music Within White-Owned Booking Agencies

By the mid-1930s, the white-owned booking companies that contracted with well-known Black musicians had noticed the success of unrepresented Black orchestras touring the South and began booking their acts there as well, at both large auditoriums and smaller Black-owned venues (Lauterbach 2011:51; Snelson 1935). Alongside their acknowledgment of the South as a proven territory, contemporary reports of the increase in Southern tours among high-profile Black bands cite the Depression economy of the early 1930s as a motivating factor in the expansion of tours into the South (Frank 1937). Between the 1930s and 1940s, major Black talent often traveled through Georgia on tours organized by a Black booking agent, Reese DuPree, who worked for white-owned booking companies. Though white agents also booked famous Black musicians in the state, DuPree connected with regional Black promoters to ensure local Black communities had access to quality entertainment.

Reese LaMarr DuPree was born in 1883 on a cotton plantation in Swift Creek, a few miles south of Macon. A noted twentieth-century musician who is credited with composing the song "Shortnin' Bread" and teaching a chicken to sing, DuPree's first introduction to music came from his childhood church where he sang spirituals. Around the age of 17, he moved to New York City to pursue a singing career. After winning several amateur singing competitions, DuPree was booked as the main attraction at Bryant's Hall, a New York nightclub (Singleton 1941). As his name gained more recognition, he began to earn between $1,000 and $1,400 a night for private performances. Recognizing the profitability of controlling performances, DuPree established his own club and hired other artists to perform (Horner 2021). DuPree often cited the turn of the twentieth century as the start of his career as a promoter, suggesting he may have started advertising or hosting dances shortly after he began his singing career in New York.

In 1918, DuPree moved to Asbury Park, New Jersey, where he opened his own club, the Roseland Cabaret, in 1923 (*Atlantic City Gazette Revie*w 1923). As owner of the club, he started dabbling in artist promotion and continued to travel and perform around the country (Caution 1924). He was also signed to the OKeh recording company in 1923 and became the first Black man to record a blues song for that label (Abbott and Seroff 2017). Throughout the decade, DuPree toured regionally in the Northeast and sang in concerts broadcast on local radio stations. In 1928, he traveled to California performing with pianist Melrose Slaughter in different cities across that state (*California Eagle* 1928). It appears he was promoting his own tours and bringing different orchestras and singers on the road with him, occasionally booking the other performers as the headliners. When DuPree visited Macon on tour in 1933, the Henderson Orchestra and the Three Blue Harmony Boys from Alabama served as the main attraction, while DuPree sang during the intermission. Following his Southern tour, DuPree booked the Henderson Orchestra for performances in Philadelphia (*Macon News* 1933).

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, DuPree faced financial troubles that resulted in losing his home in Asbury Park (Haines 1934). Around the same time, he relocated to Philadelphia and began booking Southern tours for Black musicians, including the Henderson Orchestra, mentioned above. Though DuPree had lived in the Northeast for most of the twentieth century, he maintained a strong association with Middle Georgia, and many of his tours included stops in Macon. DuPree began working with principal Black musicians in the early 1930s, touring the South with Fletcher Henderson in 1932. Though it is unclear if DuPree was operating as the tour's booking

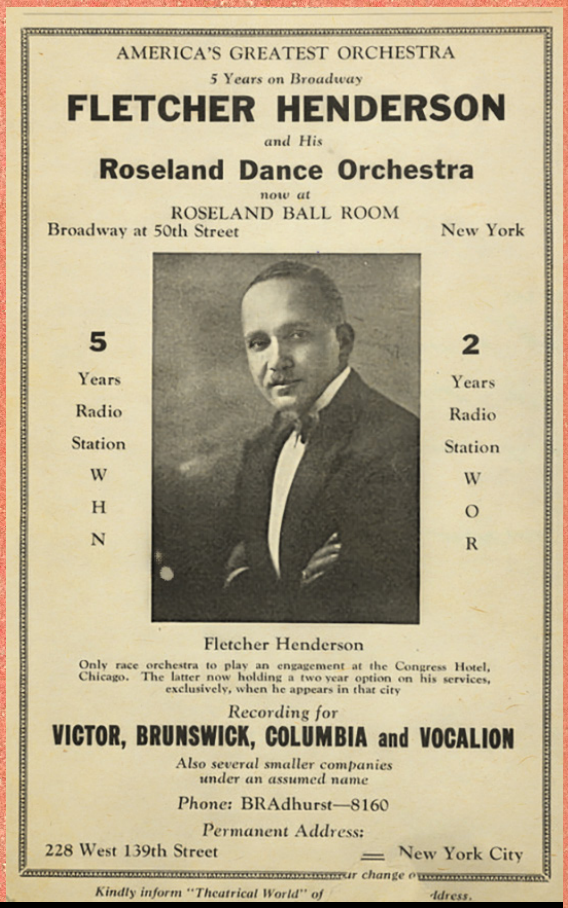


1927 Images of Reese Dupree's House in New Jersey
(Source: 1927 *California Eagle*)

agent, Henderson was performing for shows beyond the control of his white-owned management company. This led to a double-booking incident discussed in a callout on page 32. By the end of the decade, DuPree was working as a Race Executive Officer for the Music Corporation of America (MCA) and Consolidated Radio Artists, booking artists such as Erskine Hawkins, Andy Kirk and the Clouds of Joy, and Count Basie at Georgia venues (Lightfoot 1938). Through these connections, DuPree brought nationally-recognized Black musicians represented by white-owned talent agencies to Southern Black communities. During an interview in 1938 at the Georgia Baptist College, DuPree noted "he [had] seen how the white people [had] exploited the Negroes' talent, got rich, and never gave any Negroes any credit," influencing him to develop his own promotion and booking business to "ensure that the Negroes [were] given a fair compensation for their service[s]."

As a booking agent, DuPree used connections with white-owned talent companies and major Black artists to bring entertainment to large venues in the South. In Georgia, he worked with regional promoters, who handled the

FLETCHER HENDERSON
(DECEMBER 18, 1897 - DECEMBER 29, 1952)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Fletcher Henderson Advertisement
(Source: New York Library Digital Collections)

Fletcher Henderson was born in Cuthbert, Georgia in 1897. He is best known for influencing the big band swing movement of the Harlem Renaissance. Henderson started playing piano at the age of 6. Around the age of 20, he moved to get his master's degree at Columbia University but soon abandoned that to pursue music. Black Swan recording company discovered him and had him playing backup music for singer Ethel Waters. Soon after, he met his musical partner Don Redmon and together, they created a more dynamic sound with more instruments in the orchestra. Some of the well-known musicians that got their start with Fletcher Henderson's orchestra are Louis Armstrong, Roy Eldridge, and Coleman Hawkins. Fletcher Henderson's orchestra toured the country and even played in Georgia several times in the 1930s. In 1932, Fletcher Henderson and his orchestra were scheduled to play at the Atlanta Municipal Auditorium; however, his booking agent also booked him to play in Philadelphia on the same night. To remedy the situation, he had his wife lead his orchestra in Atlanta and he went to Philadelphia to play with a different band (Jones 1932b). As World War II raged on in the 1940s, there were less gigs for him and his band dissolved. In 1955, he passed away from a stroke at the age of 53 (Hill 2018).

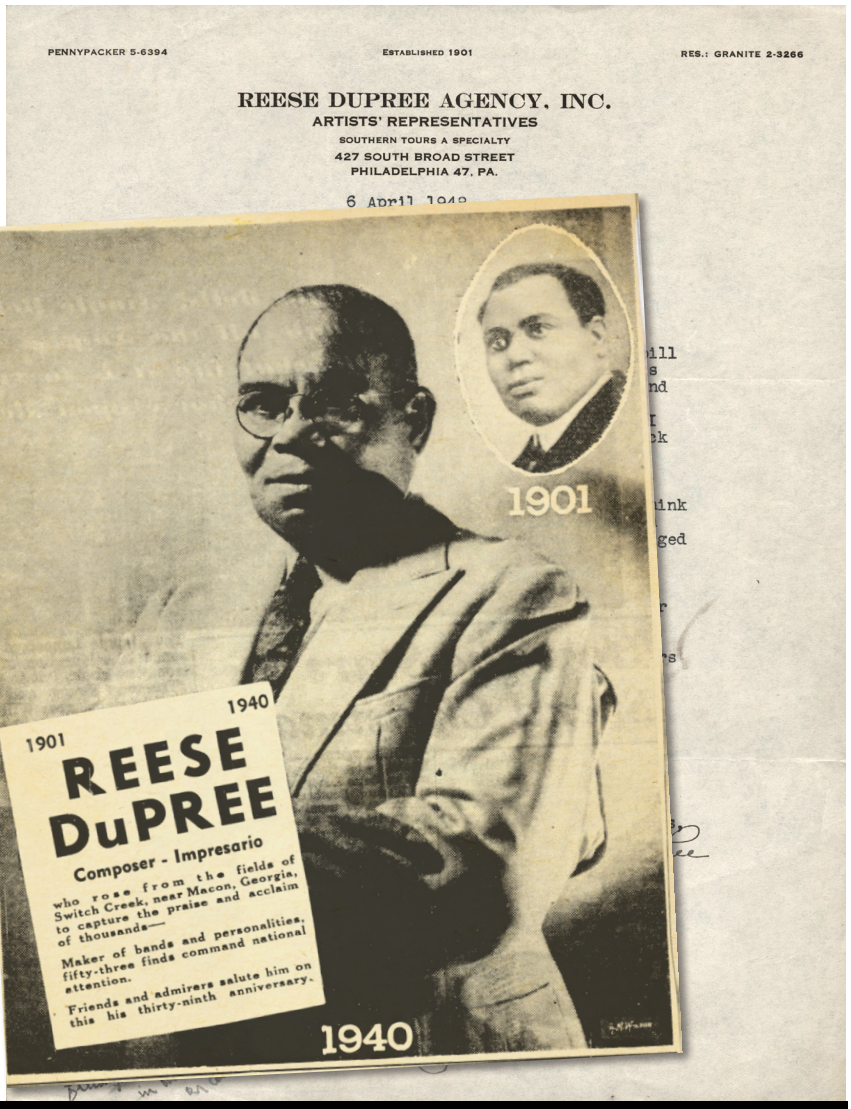
(Left) Fletcher Henderson and Orchestra (Source: *The Syncopated Times*)
(Below) Fletcher Henderson Childhood Home (Source: Vanishing Georgia)

ticket sales, booking of local venues, and advertising. His primary contact in Macon was W.F. "Fat Jack" Howard, a Black venue manager and the owner of Fat Jack's Subway Newsstand. Howard promoted most of DuPree's events in Macon, and tickets were typically sold through his newsstand. All the identified concerts backed by DuPree in the city were held at the Macon City Auditorium. Macon performances booked by DuPree and promoted by Howard featured artists like Jimmie Lunceford, Earl "Father" Hines, Billy Eckstein, Madline Greene, Count Basie, and Cab Calloway. Even though DuPree's activities in Georgia were mostly concentrated in Macon and the middle of the state, he also communicated with Atlanta-based regional promoter and venue owner J. Neal Montgomery. According to the *Macon Telegraph* in 1942, national press recognized DuPree as "America's number one artist promoter," suggesting that his work extended beyond Georgia and the South (*Macon Telegraph* 1942).

On top of being a singer, composer, promoter, booking agent, club owner, apartment complex owner, hotel owner, and liaison for white-owned record labels, he also viewed himself as an advocate for the "Negro race." Reflecting his commitment to uplifting Black communities, he donated a percent of the proceeds from a 1941 Fats Waller performance in Macon to the Georgia Baptist College to fund the construction of a new administrative building (*Macon News* 1941a). As noted earlier, DuPree stated in an interview that he became a promoter to make sure Black artists received fair compensation from record labels and booking agencies. He reiterated this by helping to establish the Colored National Promoters Association in March of 1946. The Colored National Promoters Association was a collection of Black promoters and booking agents from around the country that united to "wrest the power from white promoters who control[ed] the promotion field and have realized profits of more than $500,000 off headline Negro Attractions in the past two years." DuPree said that "it had gotten so that Negro promoters were only permitted to promote dances in small towns where they couldn't make any money… our aim is to protect the social welfare of Negro promoters and to have protective band buying [power] (Saunders 1946)." DuPree served as the association's first president, and his Atlanta associate, James Neal Mongomery, was its first vice president. 'Fat Jack' Howard also joined as a member at large. There were members across the nation, from Chicago to Louisiana to Florida (Saunders 1946).

Not only were promoters and booking agents a part of this effort, but some representatives encouraged their artists to get involved as well. For instance, musicians Joe Liggins and the Honeydrippers refused to do a show in 1946 in Atlanta for white booking agent and promoter Ralph Weinberg of the William Morris Agency unless he gave the promotion to a Black regional promoter. The artists' demands were met, and Montgomery got the job (Saunders 1946). Further information on the longevity of the Colored National Promoters Association is not readily available. However, there were several attempts to form all Black promoter organizations. Although associations were short-lived, the idea and movement continued for years. In 1968, a new organization, the National Alliance of Producers and Promoters (NAPP), was formed, including over 300 Black promoters nationwide. Their first meeting was held in Atlanta, and they decided that the goal of this organization was to "promote Negro causes through economic pressure." Like the Colored National Promoters Association, over 20 years prior, they enlisted artists to cancel shows unless presented by Black promoters. This time, James Brown was the artist canceling his gig, which was scheduled for the Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium (Hurt 1968).

DuPree serves as an early example of a Black entrepreneur on the Chitlin' Circuit who transitioned from the role of a promoter to that of a booking agent. His work predates the booking efforts of the person largely credited with creating the circuit itself, Denver Ferguson, who is discussed in the following section. By the mid-1940s, DuPree had created his own booking agency, Reese DuPree Agency, Inc., but much of his work in the 1930s



Reese DuPree Agency, Inc. Letterhead, and the Image of DuPree (Inset) Included in a Newspaper Article Celebrating His Thirty-Ninth Year in Business (Source: South Carolina University Libraries, Digital Collections, South Caroliniana Library, John Henry McCray Papers; *The Afro-American*, December 28, 1940)

appears to be connected to white-owned booking agencies through his position as a Race Executive Officer for the Music Corporation of America and Consolidated Radio Artists. Still, DuPree was recognized in national and local publications through the 1940s as "the oldest dance promoter in the country" and "the first in the country to promote the one-night dance stands" (*The Billboard* 1943, 1949). While DuPree partnered with at least two major white-owned booking agencies, these companies, and their white-owned competitors, also booked Black talent at Southern venues without the aid of a Black liaison. The participation of white-owned booking agencies in the Chitlin' Circuit was well established by the mid-1940s (Lauterbach 2011:117). White-owned agencies that booked Black artists in Georgia included the General Amusement Corporation, the General Artists Corporation, the National Concert and Artists Corporation, the William Morris Agency, Universal Attractions, and the Associated Booking Corporation, though the latter was partially Black founded – having been established by Louis Armstrong and white promoter Joe Glaser (Auburn Avenue Research Library n.d.; Bart 1945; Brown 1947a; Lauterbach 2011:109–110; Sinnott 1944).

Centering the Black Entertainment Experience Again

Though the combination of unrepresented, independently-produced tours and booking agency-backed appearances laid the foundation for a new circuit in the 1930s, there were still no large-scale Black-owned or co-owned booking agencies pushing Black artists through the South specifically for Black patrons, the way Dudley and TOBA had for vaudeville in the 1910s and 1920s. A key element of tour promotion by the 1930s and 1940s was the distribution of an artist's records in the areas they planned to visit, which worked to draw potential patrons to their performances while also increasing record sales through live promotion. Unfortunately for potential Black booking agents, the white-owned, and mostly white-managed, booking agencies that worked with top-selling

Black artists had already established relationships with most of the major recording companies by the late 1930s, allowing them to maintain control over this essential part of tour development across the country (Lauterbach 2011:79).

The solidification of a new, music-oriented Black entertainment circuit came in the early 1940s, when Indianapolis-based club owner, promoter, and businessman Denver Ferguson identified a gap in the white-controlled booking agency-record company ecosystem of music promotion. Though the larger companies controlled a large portion of the market, they did not regularly work with blues musicians, since the genre was not as popular among their mostly white audiences. Ferguson owned a Black newspaper, the *Indianapolis Recorder*, and a Black club, the Sunset Terrace, which exposed him to the business of touring musicians. In early 1941, Ferguson began promoting acts signed with the Chicago-based Bluebird Records, which mostly worked with blues artists. Ferguson made his booking and promoting business official in December 1941, creating the Ferguson Brothers Agency, Inc. to oversee his work as a "booking agent, promoter, sponsor and artists' representative for bands, orchestras, shows, reviews, sporting, theatrical and athletic acts, concerts, games, contests, dances, shows and all other kinds of amusements" (Lauterbach 2011:79). This legal description for his business provided him with a wide range of activities to promote, but music held the spotlight. By the mid-1940s, the agency had been renamed the General Artist Agency, but remained at its original office on Indianapolis' Senate Avenue (Kibbler 1946).

Denver Ferguson, 1953
(Source: Indiana Historical Society)

Using his relationship with Bluebird Records, Ferguson recruited a growing roster of Black musicians to book and record, including bands previously represented by white-owned booking agencies, such as Tiny Bradshaw and the Bama State Collegians, as well as unrepresented territory bands like the Carolina Cotton Pickers, King Kolax, Snookum Russell, and the International Sweethearts of Rhythm (Lauterbach 2011:79–85). As a newspaper and club owner in Indianapolis' Black business district, Ferguson knew the South was filled with "strolls," as Barnes had previously called them, that contained segregated Black venues where he could book the Ferguson Brothers Agency's acts. He also knew that Black entertainment across the South was controlled by regional promoters, who created jobs for themselves in the 1930s by promoting both national and local-level acts across multi-city regions (Lauterbach 2011:87–88). Ferguson established relationships with these regional promoters across the South, linking them to his new Black-owned, Black-centered circuit, which stretched across the region from the top of Virginia to the west side of Texas, and from the southern tip of Florida to Memphis, Tennessee (Lauterbach 2011:88–89). To grab the

attention of promoters and potential concert attendees across the country, Ferguson used his connections to the Black press through his *Indianapolis Recorder* and the Associated Negro Press wire, which sent stories to other Black newspapers, to publish sensationalized stories about the artists he represented (Lauterbach 2011:85–86). Combining all these elements, Ferguson's network gave rise to the fully-formed, post-TOBA Chitlin' Circuit in the early 1940s, centering the Black entertainment experience in relatively smaller segregated spaces across the South where the careers of many of the architects of rhythm and blues, rock n' roll, and soul began (Lauterbach 2011:87).

In the early 1940s, as Ferguson established his agency, white-owned booking agencies continued sending Black talent to Southern cities too, mostly performing at large auditoriums and theatres but occasionally appearing at smaller venues on the circuit as well (Lauterbach 2011:103–104; *Macon Telegraph* 1948b, 1949c; *Valdosta Daily Times* 1943). Though it was typically the independent or Black-booked acts on the Chitlin' Circuit who experimented with new musical forms, drawing the attention of white agencies and recording companies who signed them and increased their exposure nationally, white-booked Black musicians also influenced the styles of music heard in the smaller venues on the circuit. Ferguson initially had an edge as an agent with his focus on blues musicians, but white-owned booking agencies quickly expanded out from jazz performers to include other genres

Auburn Avenue in Atlanta, 1950s. Home to the Royal Peacock, Auburn Avenue was one of the many "strolls" found across Georgia in the Chitlin' Circuit era (Source: Wheat Street Towers)

popular among Black consumers too (Lauterbach 2011:103, 109–111). Louis Jordan is an early example of a white-booked Black entertainer who performed outside of the jazz orchestra model in venues across the South and caught the attention of lesser-known Black artists performing in smaller venues. His performance style, playing a combination of swing and upbeat blues with a band of approximately five members, reflected the type of sound typical of independent or Black-booked artists. Still, the make-up of his band was uncommon on Black stages at the time. The format of his band represented a new, cheaper model for creating acts, where a small number of backing musicians supported a central vocalist. A combination of Jordan's success at the national level and the slowing post-war-time economy of the mid-1940s encouraged Black booking agents and talent representatives to copy this pared down model of the traveling Black band, which can be seen in the careers of artists like Big Joe Turner, Wynonie Harris, and T-Bone Walker (Lauterbach 2011:101–103, 114–116). This rock star or frontman format that highlighted a single member of a small band continued through the life of the circuit.

Between the mid-1940s and the mid-1960s, the Chitlin' Circuit operated under the system developed by Barnes, DuPree, Ferguson, and a few white-owned booking agencies in the 1930s and early 1940s. A combination of Black agents, who mostly got their start as promoters and venue owners, and the larger white-owned booking agencies worked to send Black musicians across the segregated South, mainly to benefit Black audiences. Though Ferguson took the lead in establishing this network, his operations did not create a centralized circuit like the TOBA circuit of the 1920s. Instead, the loose nature of the post-TOBA Chitlin' Circuit allowed influence to be consolidated in many different locales, creating powerful regional promoters in many corners of the circuit. Georgia was home to several of these promoters, and the details of their careers provide a more state-specific look into Georgia's Chitlin' Circuit history.

Georgia's Regional Promoters on the Chitlin' Circuit

Regional promoters, or "shadow promoters" as Ferguson called them, were savvy entrepreneurs that used their connections to local venues and national booking agencies to bring popular artists to their local Black communities. Many of the most well-known Georgian promoters got their start in the music industry as musicians or venue owners. Most also held other jobs, including teaching in schools and operating barbershops. Their experiences in the music industry before promotion provided them with the connections they needed, introducing them to venue owners in their areas and booking agents across the country. The promoters typically made their money from ticket sales, and the distribution of tickets and marketing for the event were their responsibilities. They often acted as hosts to traveling musicians, lining up transportation and ensuring the act had a positive experience while visiting their regions of influence. In Georgia, these regions were centered around major cities, with Atlanta and Macon playing the most well-known and documented roles in the state's operation of the Chitlin' Circuit. From these urban centers, promoters established and maintained relationships with venue owners across the state, and in some cases, into neighboring states and other regions of the country. The following descriptions of the most well-known promoters in Georgia should not be interpreted as a complete list – these promoters are only known because they left physical evidence of their activities that is currently available in archival collections. More work needs to be completed, particularly involving oral history interviews, to uncover the work of lesser-known promoters who helped stitch together the state's Chitlin' Circuit network – in both urban and rural areas.

DEFINING & FINDING JUKE JOINTS

HIDE AND SEEK

During the era of segregated Black circuits, juke joints were a type of venue that provided an intimate entertainment experience in comparison to larger and more publicly visible clubs, theatres, and auditoriums. The term "juke joint" has historically been applied liberally, occasionally even including white spaces, but historians typically view juke joints mostly as spaces for Black leisure, while similar businesses patronized by white communities are known as "honky-tonks." Juke joints were found in both rural and urban areas and began operating across the South during the Reconstruction era (Nardone 2017; Otto and Burns 2011).

Architecturally, there are no unifying elements of juke joints, as these businesses occupied many types of buildings, most of which were previously built for some other purpose. Juke joints were found in homes, abandoned shacks or industrial buildings, open spaces, restaurants, groceries, and many other types of places. Within the juke joint, there were several typical elements though, including a bar or alcohol storage, a stage and/or a jukebox, seating areas, dancing space, and occasionally pool tables. Juke joints often maintained varying hours of operation and relied largely on word of mouth for advertising rather than posters or newspaper coverage. These businesses also served smaller communities than the other venue types found on the Chitlin' Circuit. The focus on smaller customer bases meant that most patrons often knew one another, unlike in larger venue types, but juke joints still operated as public spaces open to most people who wanted to attend. Though owners charged entry fees and sold food and alcohol, juke joints rarely brought in large amounts of money, resulting in low pay for both the owners and the artists booked to perform in these spaces. Even with the limited income provided by juke joints, these venues were a significant part of the Chitlin' Circuit for traveling musicians. The typically smaller crowd size allowed for a more communal entertainment experience, where the patrons were able to interact directly with the artists and their music (Nardone 2003, 2017).

These community-centered venues can be difficult to locate in the historic record due to the lack of physical advertising. As this project largely relied on archival collections and historic newspaper research, only a few juke joints were identified. Future research on juke joints in Georgia will likely need to rely heavily on oral history and community outreach to identify these spaces, but liquor license applications and reports of policing at juke joints may also be helpful.

House of Blue Lights in Athens, circa 1993. This is one of the only extant juke joints identified in Georgia as part of this project. (Source: Jim Linderman, Dull Tool Dim Bulb Blog)

Business cards collected by James Neal Montgomery. These cards reflect a few of the types of businesses promoters worked with to sponsor Black entertainment in their areas, including newspapers, artist managers, booking agents, and radio stations. Montgomery's cards are also included, which he likely used in developing these business relationships. *(Source: Ephemera, 1940-1950, James Neal Montgomery collection, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System)*

J. Neal Montgomery

James Neal Montgomery was born in 1903 in Atlanta, Georgia. At 22, he graduated from Clark Atlanta with a degree in education and in 1925, he became a music teacher in the Atlanta Public School System (Biographical Scope Note James Neal Montgomery 1997). His love for music evolved into another career. By 1926, Montgomery had established his own territory band, the J. Neal Montgomery Syncopators. In the mid-1920s, the Syncopators regularly performed concerts for local radio stations (*Atlanta Journal* 1926).

According to a Vine City historical marker, the Sunset Casino was founded in 1926 and started hosting musical acts in the 1930s (Platlanta 2024). The Sunset Casino was established as the entertainment venue for Sunset Park, a middle class African American district in Vine City. Early on, the Sunset Casino hosted artists like Claude Hopkins, Earl "Father" Hines, Tiny Bradshaw, and Ella Fitzgerald (Jones 1934). In addition to these well-known acts at the Sunset Casino, J. Neal Montgomery also performed there with his orchestra (Jones 1932a). In a 1935 article in the *Atlanta Daily World*, Montgomery's orchestra and the Hyphen-actics, an actors guild, were performing as an exclusive joint attraction at the Sunset Casino. Another article in the *Atlanta Daily World* highlights a jazz battle

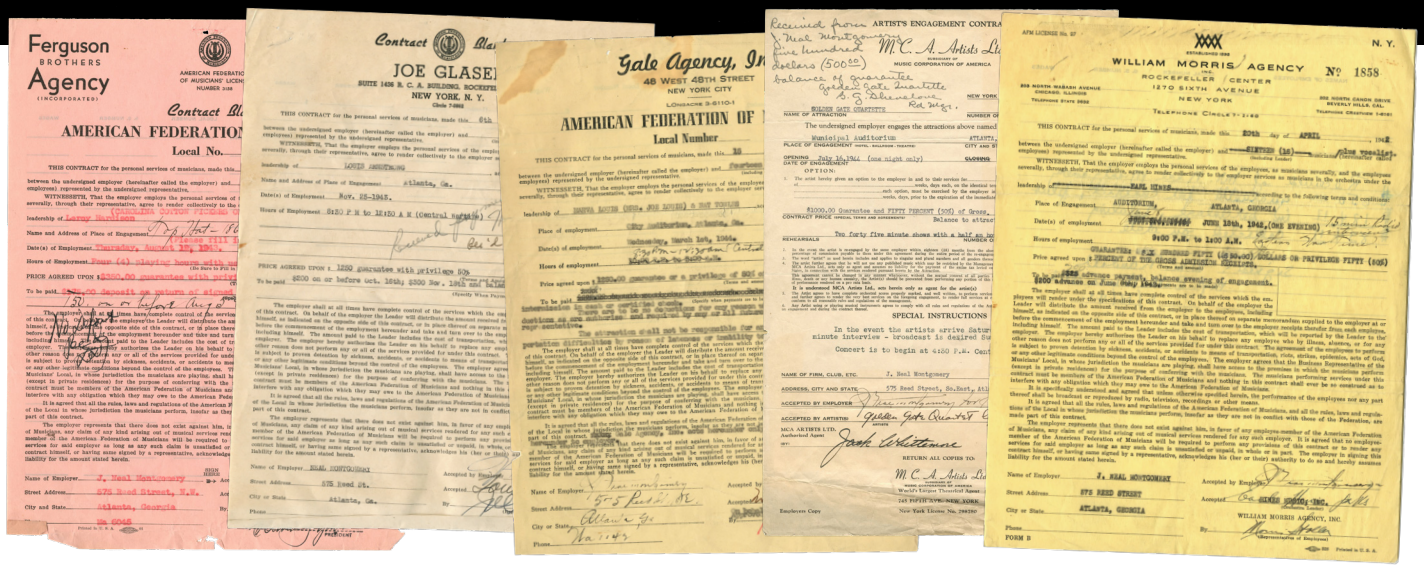
between Montgomery's orchestra and the Troubadors at the venue (*Atlanta Daily World* 1935). While most of their performances took place at the Sunset Casino, Montgomery and his orchestra also performed at Club Royale in Atlanta, as well as in venues across the region (*Atlanta Daily World* 1936a).

The Southeastern Artists Bureau was an Atlanta-based musical artist promotion company that served as the promoter for various Black acts at the Sunset Casino and Atlanta Municipal Auditorium. Though Montgomery was eventually associated with the Southeastern Artists Bureau, it is unclear whether he was connected with the company in the 1930s. The overlap

James Neal Montgomery (Source: J. Neal Montgomery with Unidentified Persons, 1940-1950, James Neal Montgomery collection, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System)

(Above) 1935 James Neal Montgomery Orchestra Advertisement Source: 1935 *Atlanta Daily World*

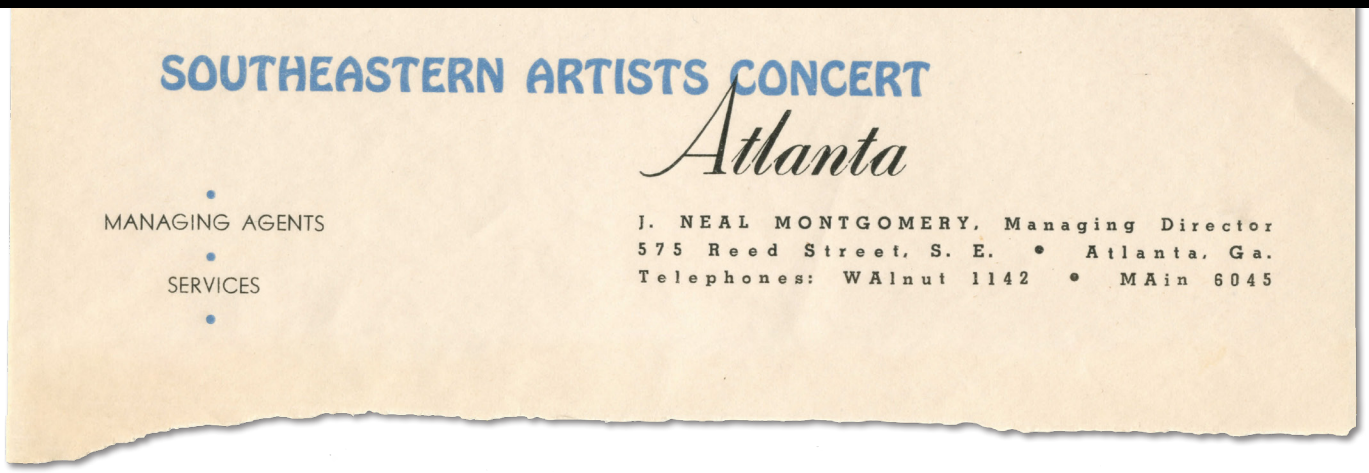
(Below) Performance Contracts between James Neal Montgomery and Major Booking Agencies, Including the Black-Owned Ferguson Brothers Agency (Source: Contracts, 1940-1950, James Neal Montgomery collection, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System)

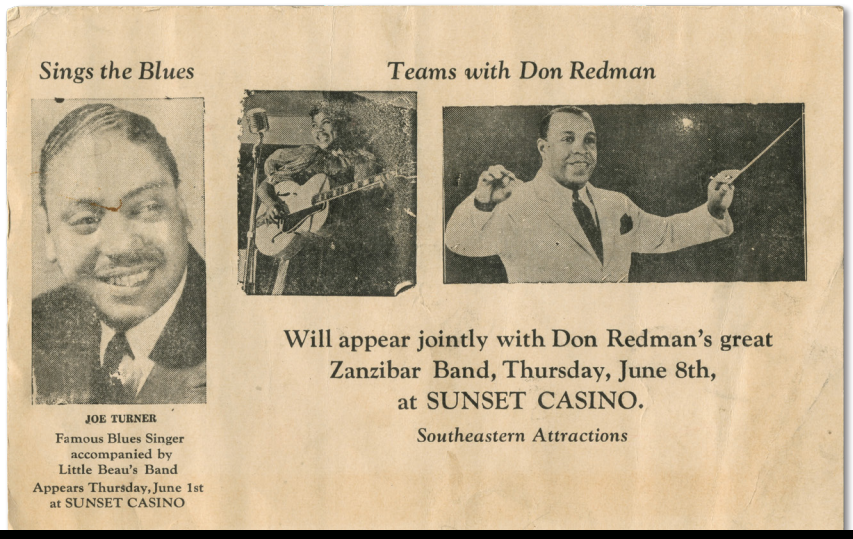


of his gigs and the Southeastern Artists Bureau events at the Sunset during this period suggests he knew the company at this time. Regardless, Montgomery began promoting events under his own name with no company affiliation in Macon in 1939. One act he promoted there was Ella Fitzgerald at the Macon City Auditorium (*Macon Telegraph* 1939). While Montgomery promoted events in Macon, he partnered with W.F. 'Fat Jack' Howard, a Macon-area regional promoter who sold tickets at his newsstand. By July 1940, Montgomery ceased promoting events in Macon and shifted to hosting events in his home city of Atlanta. The earliest known event he promoted in the city was hosted at the Atlanta Municipal Auditorium and featured Duke Ellington and Eddie "Fats" Smith. An article covering the event suggested that it packed the auditorium, resulting in people at the door name-dropping Montgomery in an effort to get admitted. Montgomery still sponsored this event under his own name, not associated with a promotion company.

By November 1940, Montgomery had joined Southeastern Artists Bureau as one of its lead promoters, alongside another Atlanta-area regional promoter, E.H. Hodges. Tickets for company-promoted events were often sold at Hodges Service Station and Hodges Grill. Under Montgomery and Hodges' leadership, the Southeastern Artists

Southeastern Artists Letterhead (Source: Southeastern Artists Concerts, 1940-1950, James Neal Montgomery collection, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System)





Bureau purchased the Sunset Casino in September 1943 and announced they were renovating the building. Events scheduled for that September, including performances by King Kolax, "Cootie" Williams, and Levi Mann and his Troubadours, went on as scheduled, but after that time, all Southeastern Artists Bureau events were held at the auditorium (Fryer 1943). Once the venue reopened in 1945, it was advertised as "the new Sunset Casino."

Sunset Casino Advertisement (Source: Ephemera, 1940-1950, James Neal Montgomery collection, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System)

While Montgomery and the Southeastern Artists Bureau were deep in promoting artists and purchasing a venue, Montgomery took up a second job and returned to teaching. This time he was a science teacher at Booker T. Washington High School (Booker T. Washington High school Yearbook 1943). In 1944, Montgomery is listed as the director of the Southeastern Artists Bureau, which had an office at 575 Reed Street SE. In an advertisement for the International Sweethearts of Rhythm Orchestra at the Atlanta Municipal Auditorium, Montgomery mentions having streetcar transportation available following the show. As a promoter, having a working relationship with the owner of the city's streetcar system, the Georgia Power Company, allowed Montgomery to make the shows he sponsored attractive to audiences by proving safe, reliable, and convenient transportation (*Atlanta Daily World* 1944).

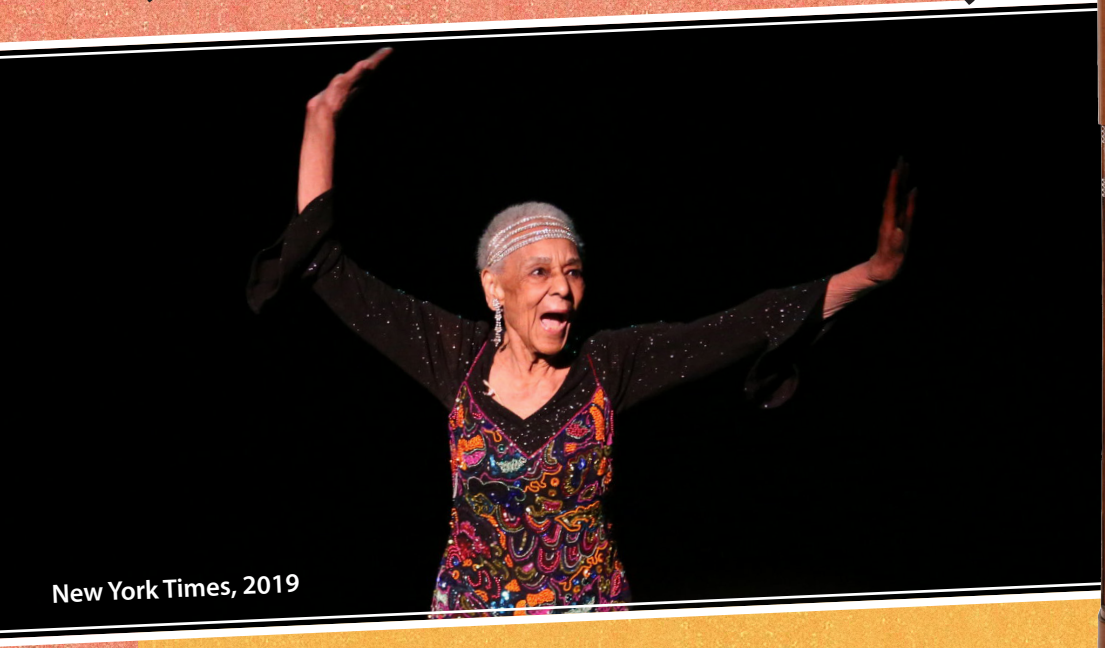
In 1944, another organization also began promoting events in Atlanta under the name Southeastern Artists. Their advertisements were noticeably different because they mention "Colored dances," which was not the practice of the Southeastern Artists Bureau. Noticing these similarly named advertisements, the Southeastern Artists Bureau warned patrons not to be fooled or support those events as they were organized by an imposter white-owned organization (Southeastern Artists Bureau 1944). The suspected culprit was Ralph Weinberg of the William Morris Agency from New York (Brown 1947b). Reese DuPree accused Weinberg of attempting a similar operation in areas where he booked events (DuPree 1946). In 1946, Montgomery was invited to join Promoters Alliance Inc., and offering a level of security for regional promoters, the invitation warned that outsiders could be infiltrating Black promotional territories. The application to join this organization stated that members of Promoters Alliance Inc. would gain insurance against a loss of an act up to 60 percent, the organization would cover all deposits, and it would help eliminate percentage options and stop monopolies (Auderreu 1946). Though it is unknown whether Montgomery joined the organization, the invitation's warning would have been familiar to Montgomery based on his experience with the imposter Southeastern Artists Bureau two years prior.

Promotion proved a multi-faceted task. Montgomery was connected to recording labels, talent agencies, and booking agents all over the country. Montgomery fostered relationships with local print shops for ordering flyers to post around town and hosted talent searches at the Sunset Casino to find new artists, suggesting he served as a booking agent as well (Murray 1947). He worked with talent and artist agencies to schedule acts for different weeks and had to agree on contracted costs for each show (Kibbler 1946). In addition to certified letters, the formal mode of communication, Western Union telegraphs and phone calls were the means for quick communication (Shaw 1948). Sometimes Montgomery had to make a tough decision as to whether or not he could accommodate artists on short notice (Bart 1945).

Money was always being exchanged and expected on the side of the promoter, the booking agents, and the venues. When deposits were not paid, shows were canceled. Around 1947, Montgomery started having financial issues. One of his concerts at the Atlanta Municipal Auditorium was canceled due to a lack of deposit (Wellborn 1947). Additionally, several artists such as Jimmie Lunceford, Earl Hines, Duke Ellington, and Count Basie, signed with the William Morris Agency of New York, were not permitted to perform through Montgomery due to unpaid deposits and balances (Brown 1947a). The financial issues continued into the following year when a notice was placed in the *Atlanta Journal* about him losing his house on Reed Street due to unpaid taxes (*Atlanta Journal* 1948). Despite the financial hardships, Montgomery remained one of the city's most significant entertainment entrepreneurs.

In 1951, Montgomery promoted a concert featuring Duke Ellington, Nat King Cole, and Sara Vaughan at the Atlanta Municipal Auditorium. The day of the show, the auditorium's management decided to change the point of entry for Black patrons to the side entrance. Though Montgomery attempted to persuade the management to

MABLE LEE
(AUGUST 2, 1921 - FEBRUARY 7, 2019)



New York Times, 2019

(Top) "Half Past Jump Time," 1954. (Bottom) Soundie Jukebox (Source: Morphy Auctions, 2020)

Famous for singing and tap dancing in soundies, Mable Lee was born in Atlanta in 1921. By the age of 15, Lee was performing at the Top Hat Club and 81 Theatre in Atlanta. In 1940, Lee and her mother moved to New York City where she performed in six shows a day with the West End Theater chorus and the Apollo Theatre (Seibert 2019). Very soon, Mable Lee's talent was noticed, and she was commissioned to record soundies, an approximately three-minute-long video where artists sang and danced to promote their records. Soundies were the precursor to modern-day music videos and fans could watch them on a video jukebox (Ebony Magazine 2019). Some of her videos like "But the Cat Can't Dance," and "Chicken Shack Shuffle" are available on YouTube. Between 1942 and 1946, she recorded over 100 soundies earning her the title "Queen of the Soundies."

Lee graced the first full color cover of Ebony Magazine in 1947 (Hinckley 2019). In 1952, the musical "Shuffle Along" was brought back to life and Lee made sure to perform in it. Even with the success of "Shuffle Along," Lee saw that the hype over singing and tap dancing, especially in musicals, was declining (Seibert 2019). Although she never stopped performing for long periods of time, work slowed until a resurgence of tap dancing occurred in the 1980s (Hinckley 2019). In 2008, Lee was inducted into the Tap Dance Hall of Fame (Ebony Magazine 2019). Lee occasionally performed into her 90s and passed away at the age of 97 in 2019 (Hinckley 2019).

1947 Ebony Magazine (Source: *Ebony Magazine*)

Royal Peacock, circa 1980 (Source: HABS Survey on Library of Congress)

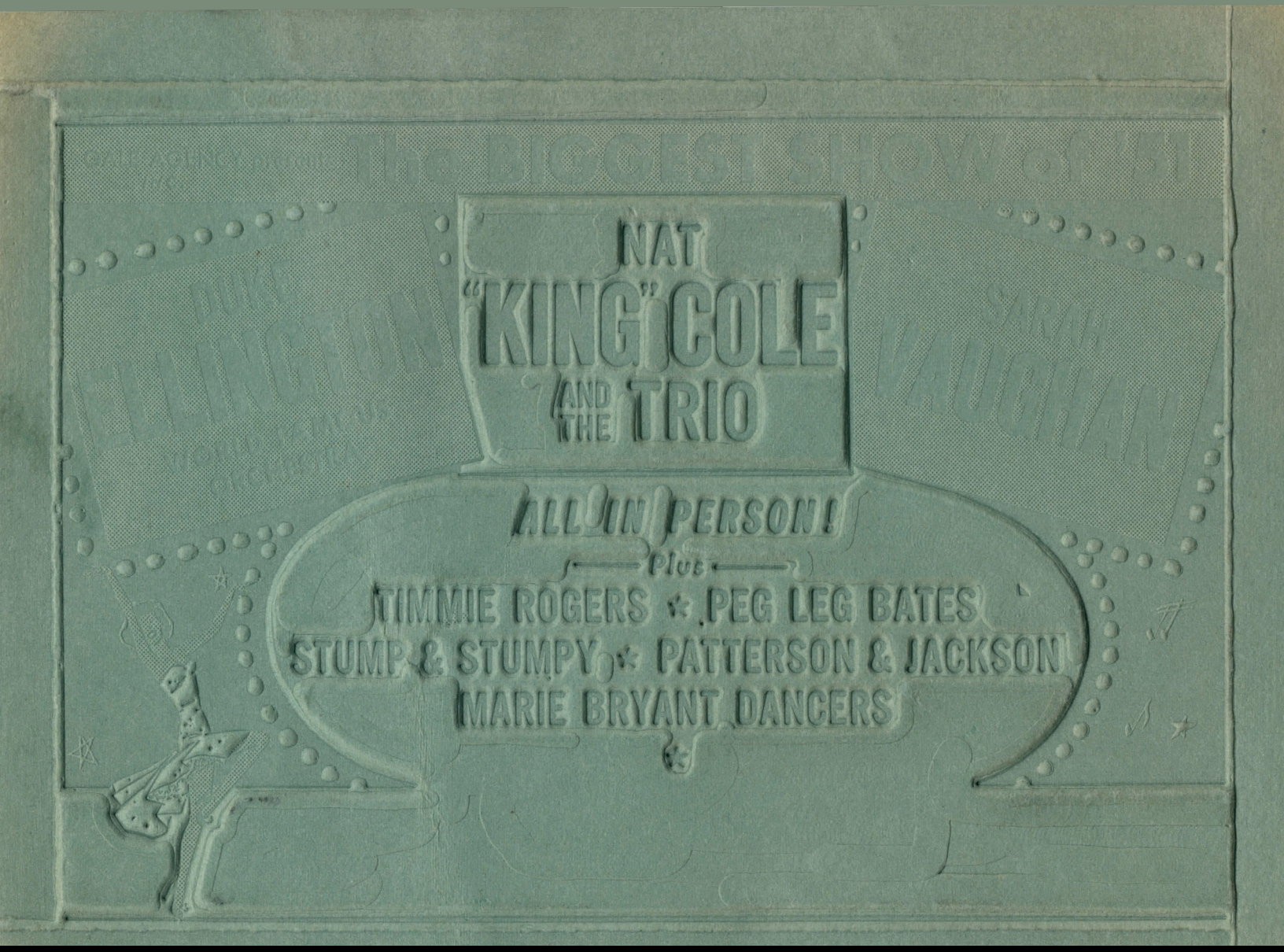
THE ROYAL PEACOCK & CARRIE CUNNINGHAM

(*NOVEMBER 29, 1890 - AUGUST 24, 1973*)

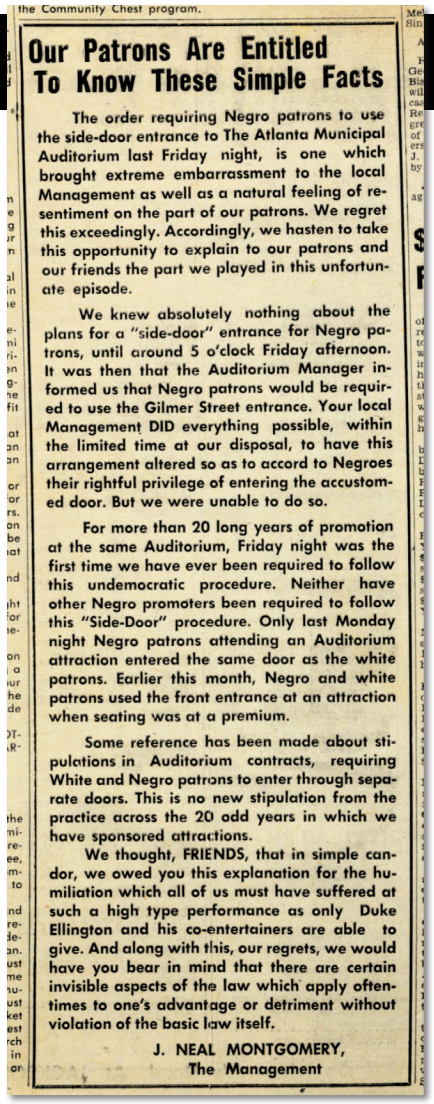
Carrie Cunningham was born in Fitzgerald, Georgia, and had a talent for horseback riding. She left her hometown to join the traveling Silas Green Circus as a horse rider. After a few years on the road, she left the circus and moved to Atlanta. By the 1930s, she married James Cunningham and was listed as the proprietress of the McAllister Hotel at 214 Auburn Avenue NE (Foley 1939). On January 1, 1941, she re-opened the McAllister as the Hotel Royal (Cunningham 1940). Cunningham was well known and well connected in Black Atlanta. When the Top Hat Club went out of business in 1949, Cunningham purchased the club for $31,000 and re-opened it as the Royal Peacock. She decorated the interior with peacock motifs after her favorite bird (Mason 2022). It is stated that the Royal Peacock was permitted to hold 350 patrons, however many more would enter just to get a glimpse of the performers (Sweet Auburn Works 2024).

Regional promoters like B.B. Beamon, James Neal Montgomery, and Henry Wynn, commissioned talent to play at the Royal Peacock. Artists such as Aretha Franklin, Jackie Wilson, Patti Labelle and the Bluebelles, Gladys Knight and the Pips, Ray Charles, Ike and Tina Turner, and more graced the Royal Peacock stage (Mason 2022). The Royal Peacock lasted into the 1970s, but with integration business waned and the Royal Peacock eventually closed. Carrie Cunningham passed away in 1973 (Mason 2022). The building is still standing and currently is used as a reggae club.

(Left)1966 Aretha Franklin Poster for the Royal Peacock (Source: Atlanta History Center) **(Top)Photograph of Carrie Cunningham** (Source: Sweet Auburn Works)



This paper flong, or temporary mold of a stereotype used to make copies in printing, is a physical remnant of the necessary connection that existed between regional promoters, booking agents, and newspapers. James Neal Montgomery kept many of the flongs created for advertisements of his shows in Atlanta. It is possible booking agents created these items to make advertising consistent, sending them to promoters to use in advertising locally. The *Atlanta Daily World* used one similar to this for the promotion of the 1951 performance of Duke Ellington, Nat King Cole, and Sara Vaughan at the Atlanta Municipal Auditorium. The adjacent newspaper advertisement from the *Atlanta Daily World* shows a print that is similar to this flong, with several small changes. (Source: Matted Prints – Identified Musicians (Individuals and Groups), (1940-1950, James Neal Montgomery collection, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System; *Atlanta Daily World*, October 26, 1951)



the Community Chest program.

Our Patrons Are Entitled To Know These Simple Facts

The order requiring Negro patrons to use the side-door entrance to The Atlanta Municipal Auditorium last Friday night, is one which brought extreme embarrassment to the local Management as well as a natural feeling of resentiment on the part of our patrons. We regret this exceedingly. Accordingly, we hasten to take this opportunity to explain to our patrons and our friends the part we played in this unfortunate episode.

We knew absolutely nothing about the plans for a "side-door" entrance for Negro patrons, until around 5 o'clock Friday afternoon. It was then that the Auditorium Manager informed us that Negro patrons would be required to use the Gilmer Street entrance. Your local Management DID everything possible, within the limited time at our disposal, to have this arrangement altered so as to accord to Negroes their rightful privilege of entering the accustomed door. But we were unable to do so.

For more than 20 long years of promotion at the same Auditorium, Friday night was the first time we have ever been required to follow this undemocratic procedure. Neither have other Negro promoters been required to follow this "Side-Door" procedure. Only last Monday night Negro patrons attending an Auditorium attraction entered the same door as the white patrons. Earlier this month, Negro and white patrons used the front entrance at an attraction when seating was at a premium.

Some reference has been made about stipulations in Auditorium contracts, requiring White and Negro patrons to enter through separate doors. This is no new stipulation from the practice across the 20 odd years in which we have sponsored attractions.

We thought, FRIENDS, that in simple candor, we owed you this explanation for the humiliation which all of us must have suffered at such a high type performance as only Duke Ellington and his co-entertainers are able to give. And along with this, our regrets, we would have you bear in mind that there are certain invisible aspects of the law which apply oftentimes to one's advantage or detriment without violation of the basic law itself.

J. NEAL MONTGOMERY,
The Management

1951 James Neal Montgomery Apology Letter
(Source: 1951 *Atlanta Daily World*

allow Black spectators to enter through the front doors, at show time, they were still required to enter through the side of the building. This incident upset the concert's Black patrons, and as the promoter, Montgomery was forced to address the issue publicly. On October 28, 1951, Montgomery wrote an apology letter in the *Atlanta Daily World* to the Black concert goers stating that, "for more than 20 long years of promotion at the [Atlanta Municipal Auditorium], Friday night was the first time we have ever been required to follow this undemocratic procedure." He went on to say that as soon as he found out the point of entry was changing, he did all he could to reverse the decision (Montgomery 1951). This situation led to a call to action from the Executive Committee of the Atlanta Negro Voters League, resulting in a response from Mayor William B. Hartsfield, who promised Black Atlantans they would not be subjected to discriminatory door policies at the auditorium again (*Atlanta Daily World* 1951c).

It is unclear when Montgomery stopped promoting local events, but he never lost his love for music. There are articles between 1951 and 1962 showing the Neal Montgomery Band performing at various locations (*Atlanta Daily World*). In true Montgomery fashion, playing music was not his only job during this period. He also wrote the "Weekly Roundup of Negro Community" in the *Atlanta Journal* from 1954 to 1961. Though his death date is unknown, the *Atlanta Voice* published a remembrance article entitled "Because of J. Neal Mongomery" that was dedicated to him in 1969 (McIver 1969).

W.F. "Fat Jack" Howard

W.F. "Fat Jack" Howard was a major promoter in Macon during the early years of the post-TOBA Chitlin' Circuit. He started his career as a social club manager for the Lion Tamers Social Club in 1928 (Saxon 1928). The Lion Tamers Social Club hosted dances at various locations across the city, including Sulphur Springs Park and Piedmont Park/Club. He was also a manager for the Night Hawks Social Club (Singleton 1939). Howard's work with these two social clubs laid the foundation for his ability to work with different venues and artists and generate public excitement about upcoming events. Howard operated Fat Jack's Subway Newsstand as early as 1939 at 363 ½ Broadway in Macon (Howard 1939). This newsstand served as one of the locations that Black people could buy concert tickets in Macon. Around the same time, he transitioned into the role of regional promoter. As a

W. F. HOWARD

Photograph of W.F. 'Fat Jack' Howard
(Source: 1941 *Macon Telegraph*)

promoter, Howard worked with nationally recognized booking agents to get musical talent to come to Macon. One of his strongest working relationships was with fellow Maconite Reese DuPree. Whenever DuPree, a Philadelphia-based booking agent, brought an artist to town, he always advertised tickets on sale at Howard's newsstand. Some of the artists that Howard promoted events for included Jimmie Lunceford, Earl Van Dyke, the Carolina Cotton Pickers, Louis Jordan, and W. B. Dixon.

Howard mainly promoted at three locations in Macon – the Macon City Auditorium, the Rainbow Garden, and

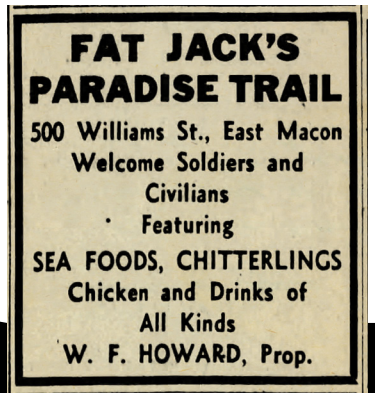
GEORGIA WHITE

(MARCH 9, 1903 - CIRCA 1980)

GEORGIA WHITE

Georgia White was born in Sandersville, Georgia in 1903. Listeners describe her as a slightly risqué jazzy blues singer and powerful piano player. Georgia's career took root in the late 1920s in Chicago in various clubs. She recorded her first song in 1930 with Jimmie Noone's Orchestra. After that she signed with Decca Records and recorded over 100 songs between 1935 and 1941 (Boppinbob 2019). In 1940, she created an all-female band. Following her recording success, she did a southern tour that included a stop in Macon in 1941. Newspapers wrote of her "Home-coming" for days before and after her performances. Clint Brantley placed a welcome ad in the newspaper for her and there was a welcome reception for her at the Tip Top Inn (*Macon Telegraph* 1941b). Tickets for her concert were sold at W.F. 'Fat Jack' Howard's newsstand (*Macon Telegraph* 1941a). She continued playing piano and singing until around 1960 (Boppinbob 2019).

1941 Advertisement for Georgia White
(Source: *Macon Telegraph* April 6, 1941)



Paradise Trail. The Macon City Auditorium hosted larger concerts for major artists like Billy Eckstein and his Band, while the Rainbow Garden and Paradise Trail served as venues for lesser-known artists. Howard owned Paradise Trail, which was located on Williams Street in East Macon and accessible to Macon residents on the west side of the Ocmulgee River via the Fort Hill bus line. Paradise Trail was a club and restaurant that served chitterlings, fried chicken,

1945 Fat Jack's Paradise Trail (Source: 1945 *Macon Telegraph*)

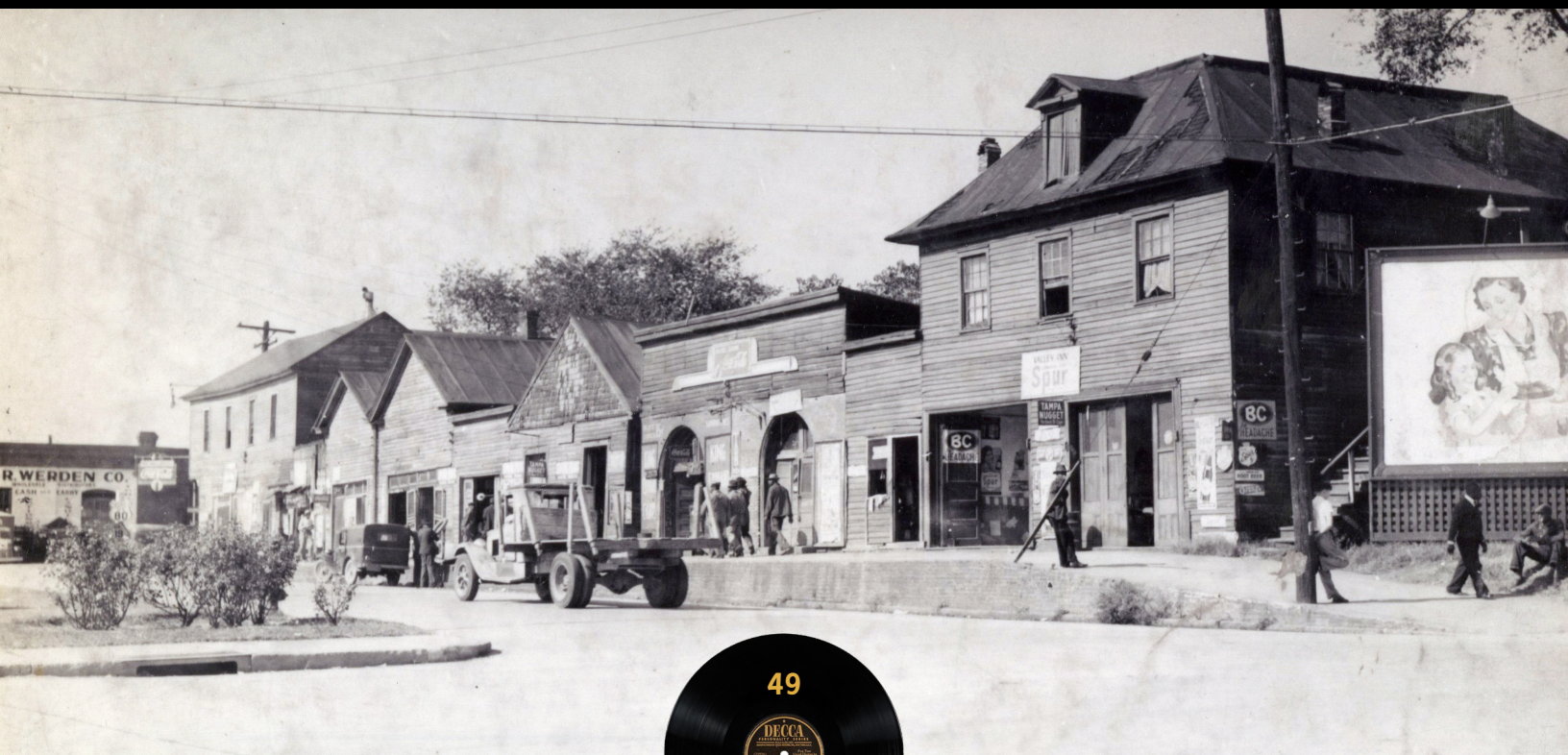
BBQ, and drinks (Howard 1942). It featured private rooms, servers, and had an outdoor garden. Though it was less common for mainstream recording artists to entertain patrons at smaller venues, Louis Jordan performed at Paradise Trail at the behest of Reese DuPree (Minnie Singleton 1945). Howard's career was central to the early years of the Chitlin' Circuit in Middle Georgia, but unfortunately, he passed away in 1948 from a brief illness (Singleton 1948).

Clint Brantley

Clinton "Clint" Eugene Brantley was the other major Chitlin' Circuit-era promoter based in Macon, and his range for booking talent extended throughout Middle Georgia, into other regions of the state, and well beyond its borders. Born in Sandersville, Georgia in 1902, Brantley began performing at a young age, playing in local bands for school dances and other social events. Brantley, a drummer and occasional singer, relocated to Macon in 1922 after living in Florida for a brief period, where he also performed in a band (Brantley 1978). Brantley continued performing after returning to Georgia, but for his day job, he operated a barber shop at 410 Poplar Street in Macon (*Macon Telegraph* 1926). Like many Black musicians across the country during the 1920s and 1930s, Brantley played in a territory band, serving as the bandleader for Brantley's Central City Orchestra, the Brantley-Williams Colored Orchestra, and the Black Diamond Orchestra. His bands performed for radio broadcasts on WMAZ, the station operating from Macon's Mercer University, and traveled to play at both white and Black social events across the region (Brantley 1978; *Macon News* 1928a; *The Macon News* 1928; *The Macon Telegraph* 1927, 1934).

By the mid-1930s, Brantley was promoting Black entertainment in Macon, likely using the experience and connections he gained from leading a traveling band to make arrangements for visiting artists. According to an article in the *Macon Telegraph* by Minnie D. Singleton, the editor for the Black section of the paper, Brantley began promoting events in Macon in 1929 (Minnie D. Singleton 1945). In 1943, Brantley billed himself as

Fifth Street in Macon, circa 1940. Fifth Street and Broadway both served as Black business districts in Macon. Clint Brantley operated both a barbershop and a bar on this block. The bar, the Two Spot, is the building at center with the two arched entrances
(Courtesy of the: Middle Georgia Archives, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, GA)



"Middle Georgia's foremost sponsor of amusements, dating back over a period of 20 years," suggesting he began promoting shortly after arriving in Macon (*Macon News* 1943c). The earliest known evidence of his work as a promoter is from June 1935, when he booked jazz musician Fats Waller at the Macon City Auditorium, the city's premier event venue. Representative of the Chitlin' Circuit's centering of the Black experience, the lower level of the auditorium, closest to the stage, was reserved for Black attendees. The event was interracial though, reflecting the venue's status as a municipal auditorium rather than a smaller club. Segregated seating was reserved for white patrons in the auditorium's balcony (*Macon News* 1935a, 1935b; *Macon Telegraph* 1935a). Brantley acted as promoter for another event later that year in October when Ruth Ellington, sister of Duke Ellington, performed with her 16-piece orchestra at the Macon City Auditorium. The announcements in the *Macon Telegraph* do not reference segregated seating for white attendees, suggesting the performance may have been reserved only for Black patrons. Brantley also booked and advertised Ellington's performance at the Rainbow Garden, a Black venue six miles east of Macon on Jeffersonville Road (*Macon News* 1928b, 1928c, 1935c; *Macon Telegraph* 1935b, 1935c, 1936a, 1939b). Brantley promoted at least one other event in Macon in the 1930s, a Black beauty pageant at the Rainbow Garden in 1936, but no other references to his work as a promoter were identified in the *Macon Telegraph* before 1940 (*Macon Telegraph* 1936b). It is possible that he was responsible for promoting any number of concerts held for Black audiences in the area during this period but did not list his name in the articles or advertisements (Brantley 1978; *Macon Telegraph* 1933).

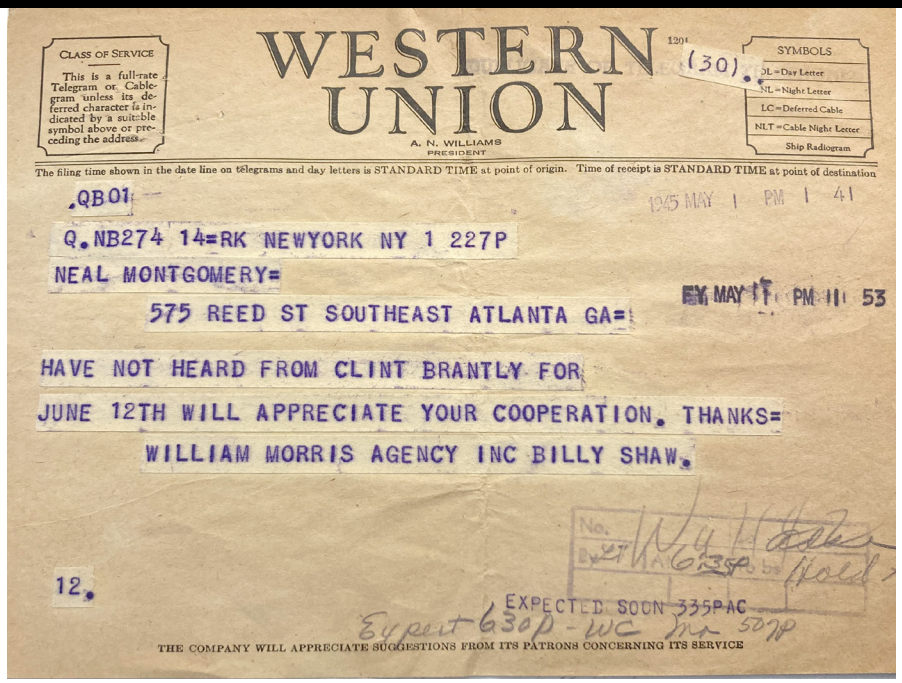
Clint Brantley, 1977 (Source: *The Macon News*, May 17, 1977)

While he was operating within the limits of Jim Crow to provide segregated Black entertainment that centered Black experiences in Macon and Middle Georgia, the state's racist laws and their enforcers ensnared Brantley in 1938. That autumn, Brantley was charged with "improper relations with a young white woman," which were likely consensual and age-appropriate given that "the young white woman [Eleanor Smith] pleaded guilty to companion charges." She was sentenced to 12 months at Georgia's prison farm in Milledgeville (*Macon News* 1938). Brantley was sentenced to the same punishment in November and sent to the Bibb County work camp, "the maximum public works sentence for a misdemeanor," according to newspaper coverage of the case (*Macon News* 1938). In January 1939, Governor Eurith D. Rivers pardoned Smith, but it is unknown whether Brantley received a pardon, though his lawyers were petitioning for one (*Macon Telegraph* 1939a). Brantley's victimization by the state's racist anti-miscegenation law appears to have impacted his early attempts with promotion activities, as there was no mention of his name in local papers through the rest of 1939, suggesting he was forced to serve out the 12-month sentence. No other references to this dark episode in Brantley's life were uncovered in available documentation, and he returned to promoting by March 1940 with a concert at the Rainbow Garden (*Macon Telegraph* 1940a). With this concert, Brantley kicked off a two-decade-long continuous career embedded in the Chitlin' Circuit, making him one of the state's most significant figures in the entertainment industry.

Brantley's Two Spot at 221 Fifth Street, 1975. By the mid-twentieth century, his barbershop shared this address. (Courtesy of the: Middle Georgia Archives, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, GA)

In the early 1940s, as Brantley truly took shape as "Georgia's foremost promoter," he continued leading a local orchestra, often billed as his Villa Grill Sultans, performing for servicemen from Camp Wheeler many times throughout World War II, as well as at local Black venues the Cotton Club, the Savoy Ballroom, and Moon Over Harlem (*Macon News* 1941b, 1945; *Macon Telegraph* 1941c, 1941d, 1943b, 1943c, 1944c). He also partnered with fellow promoter W.F. "Fat Jack" Howard on several occasions during this period, organizing Macon's nation-wide homecoming celebration in 1940 and an "auto excursion" to Shady Rest, a Milledgeville Chitlin' Circuit venue that same year (*Macon Telegraph* 1940b, 1940c). Like many Black entrepreneurs in towns and cities across the country with defense industries or nearby military installations, Brantley capitalized on the wartime cash flow and established a bar and restaurant, the Two Spot, at 221 Fifth Street in Macon in 1942 (Lauterbach 2011:114; *Macon Telegraph* 1943a; *The Macon Telegraph* 1942a). After setting a "box office record" in ticket sales at the Macon City Auditorium with a concert featuring the Ink Spots, Ella Fitzgerald, and Cootie Williams in May 1943, Brantley decided to open a music venue of his own in Macon (*Macon News* 1943c, 1944; *Macon Telegraph* 1944b). In July, he opened Southside Beach, which consisted of a dance pavilion, bar and restaurant, and outdoor space. The venue was short-lived, shuttering by November, but Brantley was able to use the space to promote local and lesser-known acts during its five months in operation, including Gladys Williams, Miss Rosa Kinsey, Eddie Robinson, and his own orchestra, the Sultans (*Macon News* 1943b; *Macon Telegraph* 1943d, 1943e, 1943f, 1943g). Tickets for Brantley-promoted events, whether at the Auditorium or smaller Black venues, were often available either directly through the Macon City Auditorium box office or at socially-oriented local Black businesses, including Brantley's Two Spot and barbershop, as well as other barbershops, newsstands, and restaurants (*Macon News* 1943a).

Promoters and booking agents corresponded using both letters and Western Union telegrams, with the latter allowing for faster communication. This was useful when changes or issues related to a performance arose. In this telegram, Billy Shaw of the William Morris Agency is contacting James Neal Montgomery to get help with contacting Clint Brantley. Though the two promoters operated out of separate cities, the language suggests they may have known each other well. (Source: Entertainment Industry, 1940-1950, James Neal Montgomery collection, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System)



CLASS OF SERVICE
This is a full-rate Telegram or Cable-gram unless its de-ferred character is in-dicated by a suit-ble symbol above or pre-ceding the address.

WESTERN UNION

A. N. WILLIAMS
PRESIDENT

SYMBOLS
DL = Day Letter
NL = Night Letter
LC = Deferred Cable
NLT = Cable Night Letter
Ship Radiogram

The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination

.QB01

1945 MAY 1 PM 1 41

Q.NB274 14=RK NEWYORK NY 1 227P
NEAL MONTGOMERY=
575 REED ST SOUTHEAST ATLANTA GA=

EX MAY 1 PM 11 53

HAVE NOT HEARD FROM CLINT BRANTLY FOR
JUNE 12TH WILL APPRECIATE YOUR COOPERATION. THANKS=
WILLIAM MORRIS AGENCY INC BILLY SHAW.

12.

EXPECTED SOON 335PAC

THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

The 1940s and 1950s were the height of Brantley's promoting business in Macon and Middle Georgia, and during this time, he regularly sponsored visiting Black stars in the city. The nationally recognized Black acts hosted by Brantley in Macon featured a range of musical genres and talents, including jazz, blues, gospel, and a variety of early rock n' roll sounds, as well as a few athletes. The following list is a sampling of the many acts that Brantley brought to Middle Georgia, demonstrating the variety of talent imported to Georgia's stages by regional promoters: BB King, Big Joe Turner, Big Maybelle, Bill Doggett, Clarence Gatemouth Brown, The Clovers, The Dominoes, The Drifters, Erskine Hawkins, Esther Phillips, Fats Domino, Faye Adams, The Harlem Globetrotters, Irvin C. Miller's Brownskin Models, Jackie Robinson of the Brooklyn Dodgers, John Lee Hooker, Little Walker, Louis Jordan, Lowell Fulson, Lucky Millinder, Mahalia Jackson, The Midnighters, Nat King Cole, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Snookum Russell, Sugar Chile Robinson, Tab Smith, and Wynonie Harris (*Macon News* 1947, 1952, 1956; *Macon Telegraph* 1944a, 1945a, 1945b, 1946, 1947, 1948a, 1949a, 1949b, 1950a, 1950b, 1950c, 1953a, 1953b, 1953c, 1954, 1955a, 1955c; Murray 2000:157). Though most of his bookings were at the Macon City Auditorium, Brantley also promoted shows at Club 15, the Manhattan Club, and other small Black venues in the city and surrounding area (*Macon Telegraph* 1955b, 1956). Brantley slowly expanded his entertainment business beyond promotion and club ownership, accepting budding local artists as clients who he represented all over the South, a topic covered in depth in the next section.

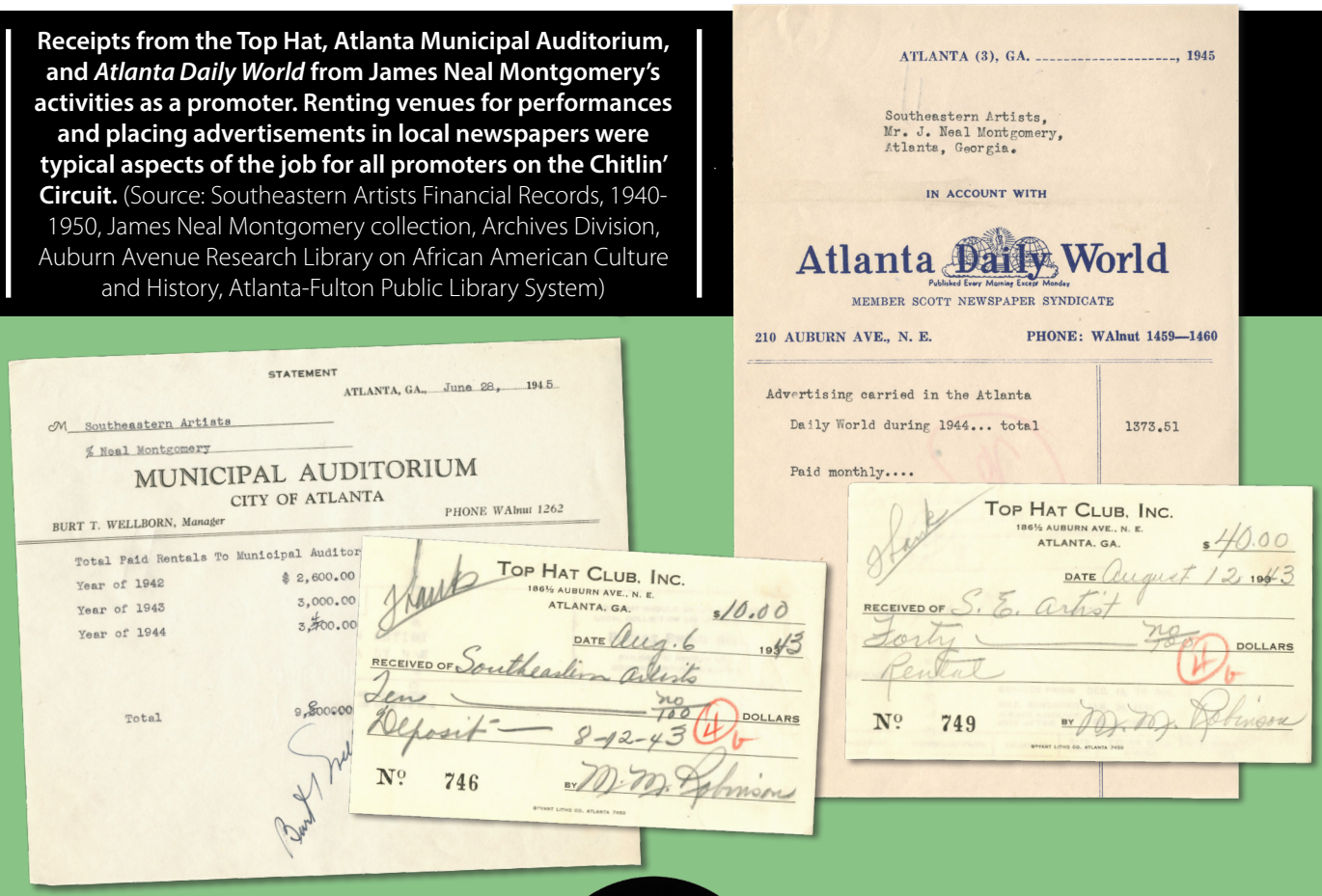
The Macon City Auditorium, where Brantley promoted events featuring many of the most popular Black acts of the early-to-mid twentieth century. These segregated performances gave the Black communities of Middle Georgia front-row access to Black entertainment in the Jim Crow era. (Source: Macondude)

Though integration led to the obsolescence of the Chitlin' Circuit in the 1960s, and new promoters and booking agents moved into the Macon scene, including Phil Walden of Otis Redding and the Allman Brothers Band fame, Brantley maintained his position as the leading Rhythm and Blues promoter following the integration of events at the Macon City Auditorium. Regarding the transition, he said, "it was so smooth nobody even noticed it" (Oppy 1977). By the middle of the decade, though, Brantley was selling tickets for Walden-promoted events at the Auditorium (*Macon Telegraph* 1965). Brantley continued operating the Two Spot and his barbershop at 221 Fifth Street through the 1950s (*Macon Telegraph* 1957, 1958). In the early 1960s, Brantley rebranded the Two Spot, first as the Professional Men's Club, and then again in 1962 as the P.M. (Professional Men's) Key Club. Live music remained part of the club's offerings through these name changes (Jordan 1973; *Macon Telegraph* 1961a, 1961b, 1962, 1967). Around this same time, advertisements and mentions in local papers of his barbershop ceased, suggesting he shifted solely to club ownership. The Key Club, as the venue was also known, remained open under Brantley's ownership until he sold it in March 1977. By the decade's end, he had relocated to Augusta, where James Brown provided him with housing. Brantley died in Augusta in 1980 (Lauterbach 2011:293; Oppy 1977).

B.B. Beamon

Benjamin Burdell Beamon moved to Atlanta in the 1930s and began working for a mattress company. He hosted monthly parties for the company, quickly gaining a positive reputation. Word spread to the owners of the Top Hat, a Black club on Auburn Avenue, and they asked him to host parties for their venue around 1935. Planning and hosting parties sparked his interest in promotion. Local entertainment work in Atlanta slowed during the last years of the Great Depression, and Beamon took a job as a pullman porter waiter on the railroad. During train layovers in New York, he made connections with booking agents in the city. Back in Atlanta, he began promoting local bands at

Receipts from the Top Hat, Atlanta Municipal Auditorium, and *Atlanta Daily World* from James Neal Montgomery's activities as a promoter. Renting venues for performances and placing advertisements in local newspapers were typical aspects of the job for all promoters on the Chitlin' Circuit. (Source: Southeastern Artists Financial Records, 1940-1950, James Neal Montgomery collection, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System)



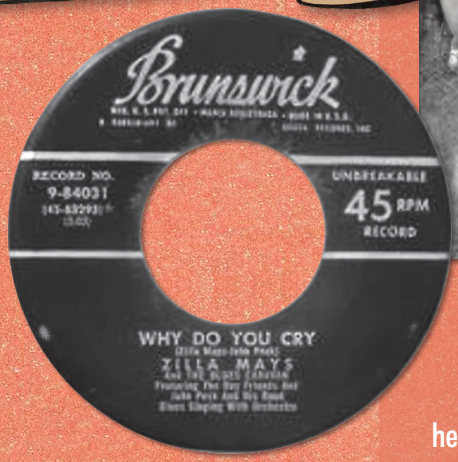
the Top Hat. Using the business connections he developed in New York, Beamon delivered his first big promotional gig in 1945, when he brought Louis Armstrong to the city. Nat King Cole, Dinah Washington, and Duke Ellington are some of the other major artists he worked with through the late 1940s and early 1950s (Anthony 2021).

The Top Hat switched names and ownership by 1949 and became the Royal Peacock. For a period of time, Beamon managed the Royal Peacock (Beamon 1994). Beamon hosted the Orioles, Jimmy Smith, and Hal Singer and his Band at the Royal Peacock in October 1949 (Fryer 1949). In addition to promoting acts at the Royal Peacock, Beamon hosted musical performances at the A.F. Herndon Memorial Stadium and the Atlanta City Auditorium (*Atlanta Daily World* 1953). According to a 1954 article in the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, "promoter B.B. Beamon of Atlanta is known never to have failed to produce a promised attraction." As part of his role as promoter, he traveled with acts on smaller tours like one from Chattanooga, Tennessee to Montgomery, Alabama, and then on to Atlanta to guarantee acts showed up for their performances (Beamon 1954a).

B.B. Beamon purchased the Sunset Casino from J. Neal Montgomery in 1947. He renamed it the Magnolia Ballroom (Seo 2020). However, there are not many advertisements for B.B. Beamon productions at Magnolia Ballroom until the 1950s. In 1954, Beamon brought Charlie Barnet, a white saxophonist, and his orchestra to play at the Magnolia Ballroom along with Amos Wilburn, a Black Pianist (Beamon 1954b). Sam Cooke included the Magnolia Ballroom as a stop on his 1958 Southern tour. Beamon was the exclusive promoter for Black-only and mixed shows at the Atlanta Municipal Auditorium between the 1950s, following the retirement of J. Neal Montgomery from promoting, and 1964 (Anthony 2021). He also established B.B. Beamon's Restaurant at the Savoy Hotel in the Herndon Building at 233-235 Auburn Avenue in 1961.

ZILLA MAYS

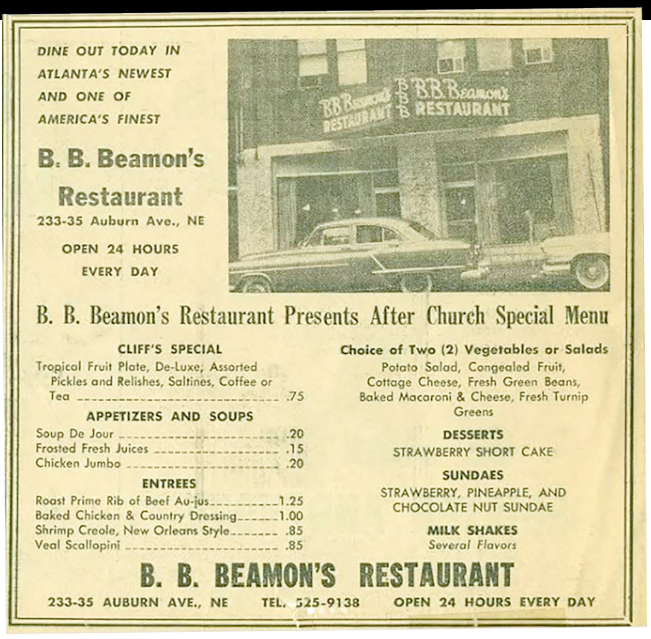
(SEPTEMBER 1, 1931 - SEPTEMBER 19, 1995)



1953 Image of Zilla Mays and Her Single Why Do You Cry (Source: YouTube)

Zilla Florine Mays was an Atlanta native. She first discovered her voice while singing in church. In 1950, she sang in her brother's band, Roy Mays and the All Stars. Eventually she sought a solo career. From 1951 to 1961 she was signed to at least six record labels. Although she recorded music with each label, not all of them released her music (Marion 2016). Between labels, she worked at the Atlanta WAOK radio station as a DJ. For many years her radio personality was called Mystery Lady and later Dream Girl. In the 1960s, she interviewed local and recording artists on air to highlight their music. Zilla Mays was the first Black female radio announcer in Georgia, and she held this job for 37 years before passing away (Howle 1995).

(Above) B.B. Beamon with James "Alley Pat" Patrick and Jackie Wilson (left to right). (Source: B.B. Beamon Collection, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System)
(Below)B.B. Beamon's Restaurant (Source: https://atlanta.eater.com/2022/3/17/22980855/atlanta-restaurateur-bb-beamon-food-service-black-culture-music-civil-rights)



DINE OUT TODAY IN ATLANTA'S NEWEST AND ONE OF AMERICA'S FINEST

B. B. Beamon's Restaurant

233-35 Auburn Ave., NE

OPEN 24 HOURS EVERY DAY

B. B. Beamon's Restaurant Presents After Church Special Menu

CLIFF'S SPECIAL
Tropical Fruit Plate, De-Luxe, Assorted Pickles and Relishes, Saltines, Coffee or Tea ..... .75

APPETIZERS AND SOUPS
Soup De Jour ..... .20
Frosted Fresh Juices ..... .15
Chicken Jumbo ..... .20

ENTREES
Roast Prime Rib of Beef Au-jus 1.25
Baked Chicken & Country Dressing 1.00
Shrimp Creole, New Orleans Style ..... .85
Veal Scallopini ..... .85

Choice of Two (2) Vegetables or Salads
Potato Salad, Congealed Fruit, Cottage Cheese, Fresh Green Beans, Baked Macaroni & Cheese, Fresh Turnip Greens

DESSERTS
STRAWBERRY SHORT CAKE

SUNDAES
STRAWBERRY, PINEAPPLE, AND CHOCOLATE NUT SUNDAE

MILK SHAKES
Several Flavors

B. B. BEAMON'S RESTAURANT

233-35 AUBURN AVE., NE TEL. 525-9138 OPEN 24 HOURS EVERY DAY

Beamon was an activist for racial equality. In 1949, he hosted a concert at the Atlanta Municipal Auditorium and offered to give a $1.00 donation (presumably for each ticket sold) to the Negro Cultural Training Center (Beamon 1949). Beamon participated in the Civil Rights Movement by opening his restaurant to members of the Student Non-Violent Coordination Committee (SNCC), who drafted the organization's bylaws there. He also allowed Elijah Muhammed, Louis Farrakhan, and Malcom X (leaders of the Nation of Islam) to speak at the Magnolia Ballroom during their only visit to Atlanta, providing them with a venue when the Municipal Auditorium and large Black churches refused to open up their spaces (Anthony 2021). Though his name is not explicitly listed, Beamon likely was one of 31 "Negro show promoters" that joined the National Alliance of Producers and Promoters in 1968 (see Reese DuPree section).

BILLY WRIGHT

(1918/ 1932- OCTOBER 28, 1991)

Billy Wright publicity headshot for Peacock Records, 1950s (Source: University of Houston, Texas Music Collection)

Billy Wright was a regionally-popular jump blues and rhythm and blues singer who is largely remembered for his impact on the style and sound of another famous Georgian - Little Richard. Born in Atlanta sometime between 1918 and 1932, Wright grew up singing at Mount Vernon Baptist Church, but he was also influenced by performers at the 81 Theatre, where he attended shows regularly after school. Teaching himself the dances he witnessed at the 81 Theater, Wright secured a job dancing in the theater's stock vaudeville show, produced by performer "Little" Sammy Green. Wright danced and likely performed as a female impersonator as part of this show, which took him on summer tours across the South and through the Midwest. Eventually, the directors noticed Wright's singing ability and tasked him with singing covers of popular rhythm and blues songs in the show (Wright 1980). In the second half of the 1940s, Wright left the show and began performing solo, singing and dancing under both his own name and that of his drag persona, Madame LaZonga (Atlanta Daily World 1945, 1947). By the late 1940s, Wright had also taken on the title of "Prince of The Blues" (Atlanta Daily World 1948).

Wright performed in a series of shows at the Atlanta City Auditorium in 1949 that introduced him to blues musician Charles Brown and saxophonist Paul Williams, both of whom encouraged him to record for Savoy Records. With Williams' help, Wright signed a contract with Savoy in August 1949 and recorded his first hit, "Blues for My Baby," which was released in October of that year (Wright 1980). Between 1949 and 1951, Wright had four songs in the top 10 of the Billboard Magazine Rhythm and Blues charts (Bennett 1991). With the success of his hit records, Wright performed at many of the Atlanta venues, including his old home, the 81 Theatre, as well as other cities throughout Georgia and all the way to the Apollo Theatre in New York (Wright 1980). It was during this period that Wright met Little Richard, who was inspired by Wright's appearance and performance style. Through Wright, Little Richard picked up the pompadour hairstyle, began applying the Pan-Cake makeup he regularly wore on stage, and secured his first recording contract – after connecting with Wright's friend, Atlanta-based radio disc jockey Zenas Sears of WGST. Sears helped Little Richard sign with RCA and cut his first single, "Every Hour" (White 1994:25–27, 39). Wright remained active in the Atlanta music and entertainment scene until shortly before his death in 1991.

(Top Record) Blues for My Baby by Billy Wright. (Source: eBay, Invest In Vinyl) **(Bottom Record) Keep Your Hands on Your Heart by Billy Wright** (Source: eBay, Craig Moerer Records By Mail) **(Bottom)Billy Wright performing at the Apollo Theatre in New York in 1952.** (Source: *The Prince of The Blues – Stacked Deck* by Billy Wright)

Luke "Fats" Gonder, a Macon-Based Musician, Performing with His Band (Courtesy of the: Middle Georgia Archives, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, GA)

Representing Black Talent in Georgia

The Chitlin' Circuit often brought Black talent from all over the country to Georgia, but many nights local artists graced the stages of the state's circuit venues. Roles on the circuit were fluid, and regional promoters occasionally used their business connections to represent and book local Black talent. Promoters hired local talent to perform throughout their network of venues and serve as openers for the performances of visiting musicians, increasing the local acts' exposure. They also helped their clients get record deals and sign to larger white-owned booking agencies from the North, which typically had connections to larger venues across a wider geographic range. Clint Brantley is the most well-known of Georgia's Chitlin' Circuit booking agents, due to his connection to the early careers of Little Richard (Penniman) and James Brown. Though there is no concrete evidence for the date he began representing local artists, Brantley was promoting newly established performers from the Macon area at his venues in the early 1940s. In the later part of the decade, he began hosting talent contests for those who could "sing, play, and dance" at Macon's Cotton Club, which he may have used to scout talent he could represent (Lauterbach 2011:220; *Macon News* 1943c). By the early 1950s, Brantley was working as both a promoter and a booking agent for Black entertainment in Middle Georgia.

Brantley hit the height of his booking career in the early-to-mid-1950s, and during this time, his booking network covered Georgia and reached into other Southern states, as well as major Black locations in the Midwest. In the first half of the 1950s, Brantley managed bookings for Little Richard, who had previously worked as a "bottle boy" for Brantley in the 1940s, selling soft drinks to patrons of performances at the Macon City Auditorium (Montgomery 1942; White 1994:17). Brantley first noticed Little Richard's talent in 1947, when Sister Rosetta Tharpe allowed the young singer to open for her Brantley-sponsored performance at the Auditorium (Brantley 1978). In the late 1940s and first years of the 1950s, Little Richard traveled and performed with different groups in Georgia and throughout the South, meeting musicians that inspired his sound, appearance, and stage presence. Little Richard also recorded his first songs through RCA during this period, but these were not commercially successful, and he returned to Macon to perform closer to home.

Brantley began handling Little Richard's gigs in early 1952, sending him on tours across the South where he traveled and performed alongside fellow Maconites, Fats Gonder and Percy Welch (Lauterbach 2011:215–221;

Staffing Plan for a James Neal Montgomery-Promoted Performance at the Atlanta Municipal Auditorium. The document shows a list of "bottle boys," a position Little Richard held when he worked Brantley-promoted shows at the Macon City Auditorium. (Source: Southeastern Artists Financial Records, 1940-1950, James Neal Montgomery collection, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System)

SOUTHEASTERN ARTIST PRESENTATION

JIMMIE LUNCEFORD

CITY AUDITORIUM 3/18/42

All staff members are requested to report to the auditorium at 7:15 o'clock, in appropriate attire. Please read and indicate whether or not you can serve.

NAME	POST	SALARY
Bell	Main Door	
Hill	Main Door	
Taylor	First Floor	
Brown	Dress Circle	
Gaither	Dress Circle	
Nelson	Third Floor	
Crawl	Third Floor	
Washburn	Edgewood Door	
Baugh	Gilmer St. Door	
McFrye	Back Stage	
Gibson	First Floor	
Powell	First Floor	
DANIELS	First floor	

BOTTLE BOYS

All bottle boys will wear dark suits and report for instructions at 7:30 o'clock with baskets.

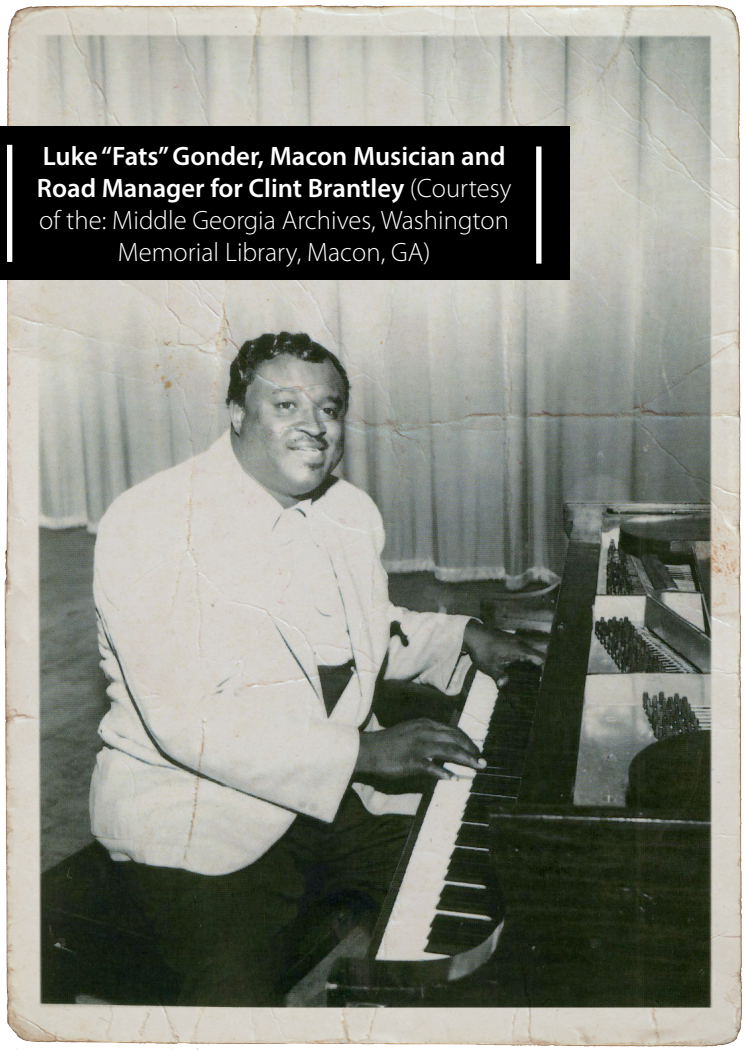
NAME	POST	SALARY
Virgil Bradley	First Floor	
Henry Howard	Dress Circle	
~~Walter Jefferies~~	~~Third Floor~~	
Henry White	Third Floor	
Charles Watts	Dress Circle	
~~Joe William Roberts~~	~~First Floor~~	
~~H. Goggle~~	First Floor	
THOMAS DAVIS		
ROSS		

Cashier - $4.50

White 1994:31). Little Richard briefly left Brantley in 1953 for Don Robey, a Houston-based Chitlin' Circuit promoter and booking agent who operated the Buffalo Booking Agency. Though it appears Little Richard likely met Robey while touring through Texas with the Tempo Toppers, a group he formed and abandoned Brantley for while in Nashville on a Brantley-booked gig, Brantley also sent Richard to Houston to record at some point in the early 1950s, possibly at Robey's Duke or Peacock Records. Regardless, Little Richard returned to Macon in late 1953 and started working under Brantley again (Lauterbach 2011:227–234; Oppy 1977; White 1994:35–38). Through 1954 and 1955, Brantley booked Little Richard, now joined by his backing band, the Upsetters, on tours stretching from Florida to Kentucky and southern Illinois, and across the South from Mississippi to South Carolina. Towns the band played during this period included Fort Lauderdale, Jacksonville, and Tallahassee, Florida; Nashville and Knoxville, Tennessee; and Atlanta, Columbus, Fitzgerald, Milledgeville, Sparta, and, of course, Macon, Georgia (White 1994:39–40, 46, 55–56).

Little Richard and the Upsetters performing at Ann's Tic Toc in Macon, Georgia, 1954. Though this venue was not part of the segregated Black entertainment circuit, the photograph is one of the earliest known of Little Richard performing in Georgia.
(Courtesy of the: Middle Georgia Archives, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, GA)

The Upsetters, 1956 (Courtesy of the: Middle Georgia Archives, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, GA)



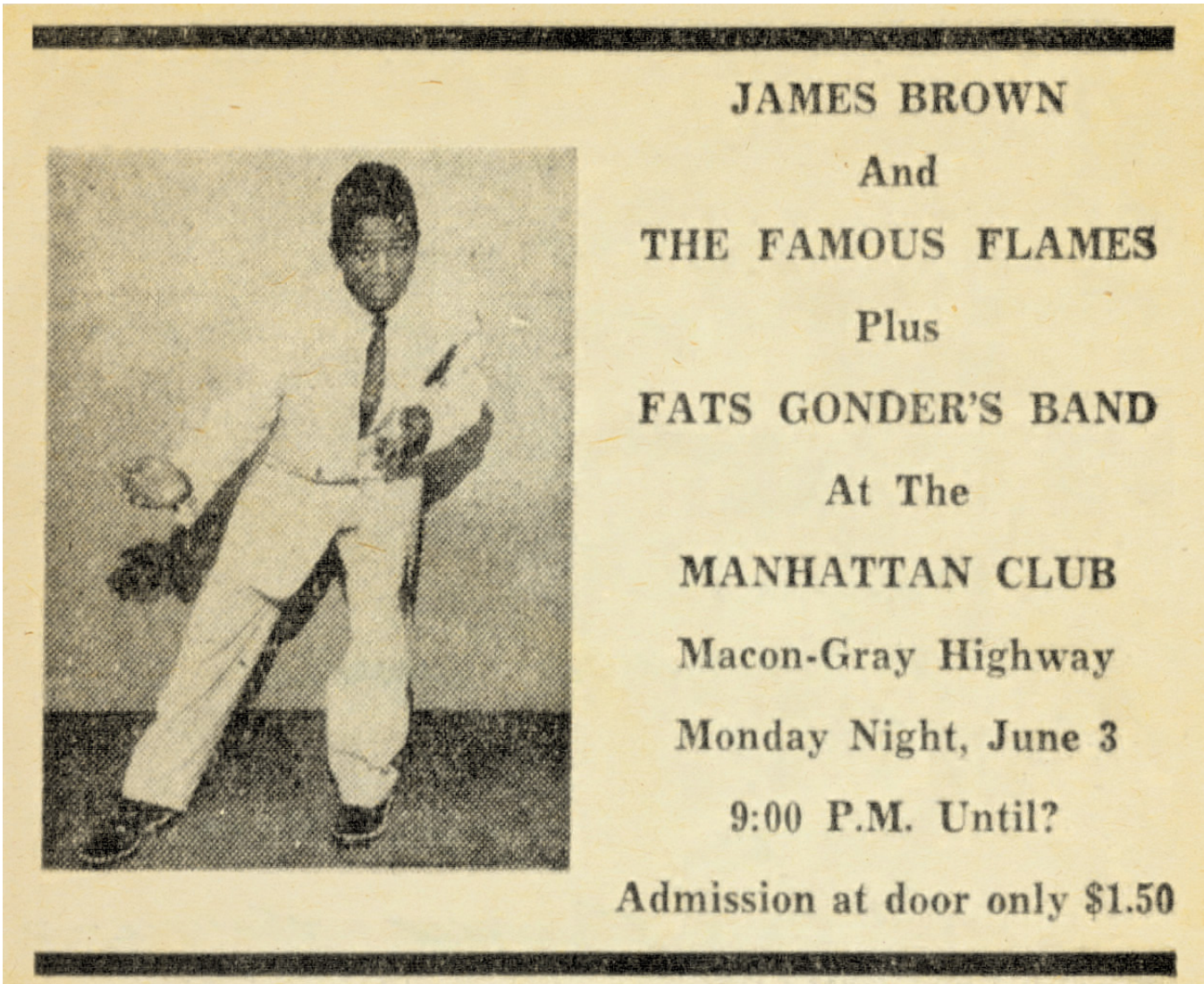
Luke "Fats" Gonder, Macon Musician and Road Manager for Clint Brantley (Courtesy of the: Middle Georgia Archives, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, GA)

One of these Brantley-booked gigs carried Little Richard to Toccoa, Georgia, in the northeast corner of the state. There, in August 1955, he and the Upsetters performed at Bill's Rendezvous, a juke joint near Whitman High School on the southwest side of town (Smith 2012:61). Though Little Richard left Georgia for California only a few months later, abandoning Brantley for a final time and signing with the management company Herald Attractions in Los Angeles as he quickly rose to national fame with his hit "Tutti Fruitti," the Toccoa performance proved to be significant in terms of Brantley's booking business (Little Richard 1955). During the show's intermission, a local group known as the Flames took the stage, led by James Brown, who was at that time a juvenile offender on parole from the Boys Industrial Training Institute in Toccoa. Though Little Richard did not approve of the Flames' well-received performance, his road manager, Fats Gonder, was impressed and told them to contact Brantley in Macon (Guralnick 1986:223–225; Lauterbach 2011:245–247; Smith 2012:47–61). The Flames auditioned for Brantley at the Two Spot on a Sunday morning shortly after the Toccoa show, singing the spiritual "Looking for My Mother" and "look[ing] for [her], too. All under the tables, all under the … seats, everywhere" (Brantley 1978). Their voices and theatrics – the former being a hint at the feature that would soon set them apart from other performers – shocked Brantley, and he agreed to manage them.

The Famous Flames, 1956 (Source: Courtesy of the: Middle Georgia Archives, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, GA)

The Flames relocated to Macon, and by September 1955, Brantley was booking the band at local venues, adding the word "Famous" to the front of their name and suggesting they were from Washington, D.C., to build local interest in the group (Brown and Bruce 1997:70). With Little Richard's departure, Brown also began filling-in for him at previously-booked gigs on Brantley's network throughout the fall. Brown remained part of the Flames though, and in November, Brantley used his connection with local radio station WIBB to get the band in their studio. There, they recorded the first version of "Please, Please, Please," which Brantley sent to record companies across the country – even visiting Robey of Duke and Peacock Records in Houston in person to sell the song. More than one record company was interested in signing the band, with Leonard Chess of Chess Records in Chicago, Illinois, making an offer and booking a flight to Georgia to close the deal. Winter weather blew across the country that night in January 1956, grounding Chess' scheduled flight – leaving an opening for Ralph Bass of King Records in Cincinnati, Ohio, who was also interested and already visiting Atlanta at the time. Rushing down to Macon that night, Bass met with Brantley and signed the band (Guralnick 1986:225–226; Lauterbach 2011:251–255). The following month, the Famous Flames drove to King Records' headquarters in Cincinnati, Ohio, to cut an official version of "Please, Please, Please," which was released on the King Records subsidiary Federal in March 1956 (Brown and Bruce 1997:76–79).

Though the song did not immediately perform as well as King Records would have liked, Brantley continued booking James Brown and the Famous Flames across the South to maintain their regional popularity. While performing with Hank Ballard and the Midnighters between late 1957 and early 1958, Ballard introduced Brown to his manager, Ben Bart of Universal Attractions in New York (Brown and Bruce 1997:84–85; Leeds and George 2008:xiv). Shortly after the introduction, Brantley called Bart to discuss the future of the Flames' management, resulting in the decision that Universal Attractions would oversee booking while Brantley stayed on as the band's manager (Brown and Bruce 1997:85). Brantley remained a key figure in the oversight of the band into the early 1960s. When King Records lost faith in the commercial success of the Famous Flames, Brantley helped Brown record a demo of the song "Try Me," which was used to garner popularity for the song on radio stations across the South and convince the record label to rerecord and release it (Guralnick 1986:229). The Two Spot, Brantley's club, continued to serve as a homebase for the band during this period, where they would learn about tour scheduling and receive nourishment – through both professional guidance and food (Brown and Bruce 1997:97, 105; Oppy 1977). Even after Brown asked Bart to take over both booking and management for the band in 1962, Brantley remained important to him. In the late 1970s, after learning that Brantley was sick and in need of care, Brown paid for him to live in a nursing home in Augusta until he died (Brown and Bruce 1997:244–245).



Advertisement for a James Brown and the Famous Flames Performance at the Manhattan Club on Gray Highway, Just outside of Macon (Source: *The Macon News*, June 2, 1957)

Though Little Richard and James Brown are most closely associated with Brantley's booking career, he also managed performances for several other artists in the mid-1950s, including his friend and fellow Maconite Percy Welch, blues musician John Lee Hooker, and a local group known as the Dominions – several members of which later became part of Brown's Famous Flames (Brown and Bruce 1997:69–70, 90; Lauterbach 2011:242; Murray 2000:157; White 1994:55). Brantley likely continued managing and booking local acts in the Macon area after Brown re-signed with Universal Attractions, but evidence of his booking activities declined alongside the Chitlin' Circuit in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Within a span of approximately five years in the mid-1950s, Brantley signed and nurtured the early careers of two of the most important musicians of the twentieth century, a feat that sets him apart from all other Chitlin' Circuit promoters and booking agents (Lauterbach 2011:242–243). There were likely other Black promoter-turned-booking agents in Georgia during the life of the Chitlin' Circuit, but their stories have not been recorded. Brantley's connections to high-profile artists helped to preserve the memory of his booking work, and future research into this topic will likely require community outreach and oral history interviews to uncover the work of other booking agents in the state.

The End of Segregated Black Entertainment

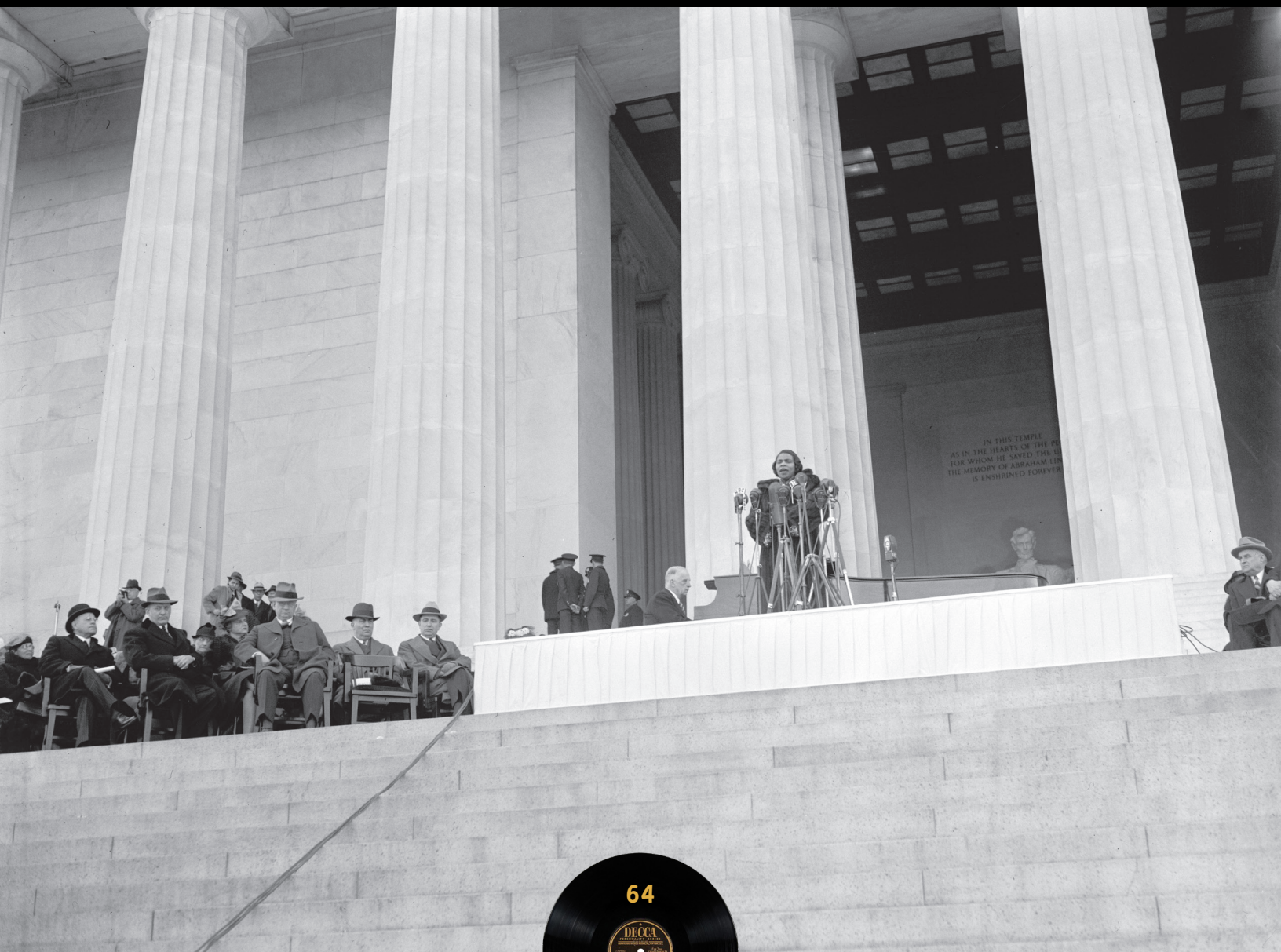
Desegregation and the Decline of the Chitlin' Circuit

A mixture of social changes in the late 1950s and 1960s led to the end of the Chitlin' Circuit, including the increasing mainstream popularity of Black entertainers and the alteration of Black neighborhoods through urban renewal projects and highway development. Though these factors fractured the Black communities that patronized circuit venues and shifted the ways in which music was consumed and promoted, nothing impacted the circuit as much as the successes of the Civil Rights Movement in the push for racial equality. As large venues began allowing integrated audiences and local restaurants and roadside motels began accepting Black customers, the need for segregated Black-serving clubs and other businesses declined. By the end of the 1960s, the Chitlin' Circuit had been replaced by the "Soul Circuit," a similar network of venues for Black artists, but with several major changes (Newt Collier, personal communication). The differences included better accommodations, improved transportation, relatively higher paying gigs, and – most importantly – integrated audiences. The new version of the circuit

The Black business district of Broadway in Macon in 1973, well after the Chitlin' Circuit had given way to later entertainment circuits, including the Soul Circuit. (Source: *The Macon News*, September 30, 1973)

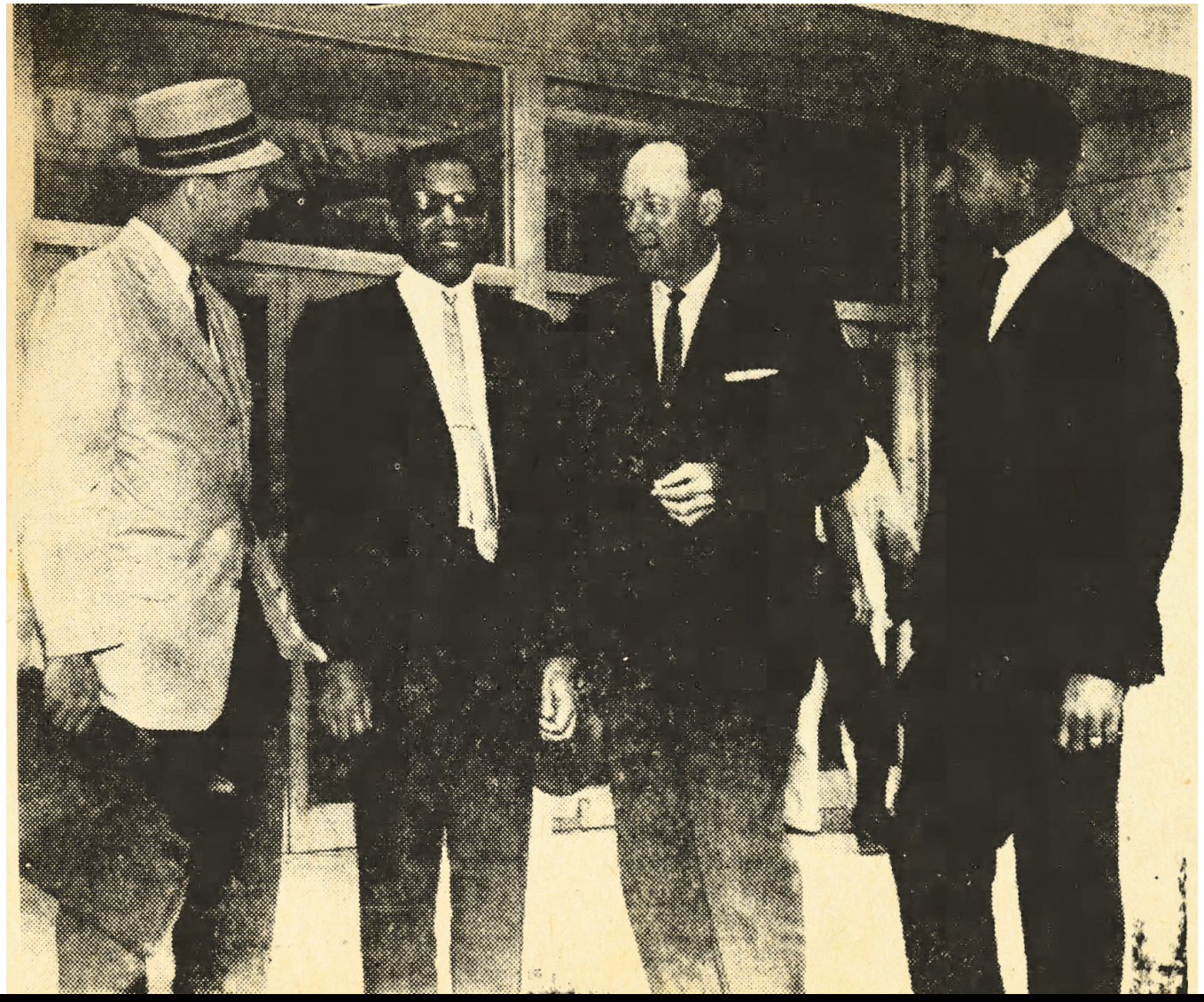
took its name from soul – a genre of music, rising in popularity in the 1960s, that combined the sounds of gospel and rhythm and blues. Though the fight for desegregated entertainment had increased visibility by the late 1950s, the push against segregation in concert venues started much earlier. One of the earliest high-profile incidents surrounding segregated venues occurred just as the post-TOBA Chitlin' Circuit began taking shape. In 1939, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) denied Marian Anderson, a Black opera singer, permission to perform at Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C., because of her race. Through the work of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Secretary of the Interior, Anderson's concert was moved to the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, where it was attended by an integrated crowd (Craig 1939; Lapin 1939). Four years later, in 1943, the DAR invited Anderson to perform at Constitution Hall, and she accepted – if the DAR allowed the audience to be integrated (U.S. National Park Service 2024). A contemporary report of the event noted that, "it was difficult to tell whether the colored or the whites had the greater representation," and that, "the peasant and the noble, irregardless of color, sat where [they] chose" (Echo 1943). The Marian Anderson incident remained present in the minds of Black reporters in the 1950s and 1960s, as they covered stories of Black artists who refused to perform for segregated audiences during the mid-twentieth century, as well as other events of the Civil Rights Movement (*Associated Negro Press* 1955; *Evening Sun* 1963; Wade 1956).

Marian Anderson Performing on the Steps of the Lincoln Memorial, April 9, 1939 (Source: Library of Congress)



By the 1950s, several other mainstream Black artists were actively refusing to perform before segregated audiences, including Josephine Baker, Sammy Davis Jr., Lena Horne, and Hazel Scott (Afro-American 1948; *Charlotte Observer* 1950; *Columbus Ledger* 1951; *Macon Telegraph* 1951; McKenzie 1951). Here, the terms "segregated audiences" and "segregated venues" refer to all-white audiences or interracial audiences separated by race; performances in Black venues were not typically part of this boycott. In April 1956, the debate over segregated performances was amplified after six white men attacked Nat King Cole on stage in Birmingham, Alabama during a performance before an all-white audience (*Atlanta Journal* 1956; Jackson 1956). Following the attack, Black musicians, publications, and Civil Rights groups across the country advocated against segregated performances, and throughout the rest of the decade, high-profile entertainers announced their refusal to book gigs at segregated venues (Afro-American 1957b; Bowser 1956; Henry 1956; New York Age Defender 1956; Pitts 1957). Articles appeared in newspapers both praising artists, such as Erskine Hawkins, for altering their stances and refusing to book segregated performances, and chastising entertainers who continued the practice, such as Louis Armstrong (*Afro-American* 1957a; *Tampa Bay Times* 1958). The boycott of segregated venues by high-profile Black artists continued into the early 1960s. Ray Charles canceled an appearance at the William B. Bell Memorial Auditorium in Augusta in 1961 after learning the show would be segregated, with white patrons given access to the dancefloor and Black patrons forced to watch from a segregated balcony section (*Atlanta Constitution* 1962; *Atlanta Daily World* 1961a). In recounting the experience later in life, Charles expressed an opinion often seen in contemporary reports about boycotting segregated venues, stating, "You cannot tell me if I play my music for you, I got to make my people sit in the back" (Guralnick 1986:65).

Postcard showing William B. Bell Memorial Auditorium in Augusta, Georgia, where Ray Charles refused to perform before a segregated audience.
(Source: Digital Commonwealth, Massachusetts Collections Online)



Ray Charles and his manager (far right) standing with the lawyers that represented him after he was sued by the Augusta promoter who booked his canceled performance at the William B. Bell Memorial Auditorium. (Source: *Atlanta Daily World*, June 15, 1962)

While major Black musicians protesting segregationist policies at venues brought attention to the issue, the pressure that led most major venues to desegregate came from the audience – through the protests of Black patrons. As early as 1951, Atlantans were actively protesting segregation at the Atlanta Municipal Auditorium. In October of that year, the Auditorium's management decided that, in a reversal of typical procedure, Black patrons had to enter through the side entrance on Gilmer Street for a J. Neal Montgomery-booked performance by Duke Ellington, Nat King Cole, and Sarah Vaughn (Montgomery 1951). Almost 400 of the Black patrons planning to attend the event decided to boycott the show rather than "voluntarily submit to such a humiliation" (*Atlanta Daily World* 1951a). The Atlanta Negro Voters League (ANVL) successfully petitioned Atlanta Mayor William B. Hartsfield to intervene, resulting in the removal of the "offensive sign at [the side entrance]" and the assurance that the use of segregated entrances would not happen again (*Atlanta Daily World* 1951b, 1951c). The event also influenced the ANVL to start a discrimination elimination campaign targeted toward desegregating public spaces. As with most, if not all, major venues in the state of Georgia though, the Municipal Auditorium maintained segregated seating throughout the 1950s, even if Black and white patrons were permitted to use the same entrance.

Participants of the sit-in at the performance of *My Fair Lady* walking in front of the Atlanta Municipal Auditorium on March 10, 1960. (Source: *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* Photographic Archives. Special Collections and Archives, University of Georgia Library. Educational Use)

Desegregation of entertainment venues was achieved across Georgia in the early 1960s through the work of participants in the Civil Rights Movement, many of whom were young Black college students. Though many places in Georgia experienced desegregation of public spaces between 1960 and 1964, change often occurred on the local level prior to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, meaning some areas desegregated facilities earlier than others. Desegregation of auditoriums typically occurred alongside other municipally-controlled spaces, such as parks, pools, and libraries, while theaters and other privately-owned venues were desegregated on an individual basis or, more commonly, following the enforcement of the federal legislation mentioned above. In Atlanta, Atlanta University Center (AUC) students staged a sit-in at the Municipal Auditorium on March 10, 1960 (King 2013). The protest was held one day after the student-led Committee on the Appeal for Human Rights (COAHR) published "An Appeal for Human Rights," which directly mentioned the segregation of the auditorium and other entertainment venues (Pope et al. 1960). Though the group told reporters that their seating choice was not connected to the appeal, the timing suggests that it was part of the COAHR's larger civil disobedience efforts across the downtown area (*United Press Internationa*l 1960).

Similar to the well-known sit-ins held at downtown restaurants in the city, five students and a professor from Clark College and Spelman College staged a sit-in of a performance of *My Fair Lady* at the auditorium by pre-purchasing tickets in a white-only section through the mail. After arriving at the auditorium, the group sat in their reserved seats, which led management to change the six seats occupied by the Black students and their professor to a "Negro section" of the auditorium. This alteration of the seating pattern was permitted by Section 56.16 of the city ordinances, which required segregated seating in public gathering spaces within the city (*Atlanta Constitution* 1960; Kneece 1960). Just over a year later, in May 1961, four students from the COAHR filed a suit in federal court to desegregate all city-owned facilities in Atlanta, including the auditorium (*Atlanta Daily World* 1961b; Britton 1961). In August 1962, the court ruled in their favor, declaring the city's segregationist ordinances – including 56.16 – unconstitutional, though Atlanta had already desegregated all public facilities except swimming pools by that time (Britton 1962; Galphin 1962). Even as public spaces desegregated across Atlanta, many privately-owned venues and other businesses remained segregated in the city until the passage of the Civil Rights Act (Hatfield 2020).

> When I had played [Janning Stadium in Augusta] a few years before, the audience had been segregated, as usual, but during the show the white kids started coming down toward the stage. Before long there were white and Black kids crowding around the stage, dancing and hollering and having a good time. They had **integrated themselves**."
>
> *- James Brown*
> *(Brown and Bruce 1997:146)*

Over the first half of the decade, student groups and other Black Civil Rights organizations, including the NAACP and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, staged similar protests at theaters and other venues across the state and beyond (*Atlanta Constitution* 1963; *Atlanta Daily World* 1964; *Constitution State News Service* 1963). The 1961 case involving Ray Charles in Augusta also involved audience protests, with students from Paine College picketing the event and successfully persuading Charles to cancel his appearance (*Atlanta Daily World* 1961a, 1961a). By 1963, the public auditoriums in Augusta, Savannah, and Macon had all desegregated, though there was an incident in the latter city that year (Marshall 1963; *United Press International* 1963a). Like the 1961 Atlanta Municipal Auditorium case, 13 Black patrons purchased tickets for an ice-skating performance in the white section of the Macon City Auditorium. The management for the auditorium turned them away, even though Macon had no ordinances requiring segregation of public facilities (Doss 1963; *Macon Telegrap*h 1963a). Shortly after the event, Black citizens began integrating other public facilities in Macon, and there was no further mention of issues at the auditorium, suggesting it was quietly integrated (*Macon News* 1963; *Macon Telegraph* 1963b). Though many private venues remained segregated, several public venues for live music performances were integrated in Georgia before the federal government required it by law in 1964.

By 1963, the protests of segregated spaces across the South had caught the attention of the federal government, and that summer, both Attorney General Robert Kennedy and President John F. Kennedy met with theater owners (though primarily from movie house chains) and other business leaders to encourage them to voluntarily integrate their facilities (*Associated Press* 1963; Bridge 1963; National Park Service 2025). A year later, they were all forced to desegregate their businesses. With the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, federal law required all live music venues admit and freely seat all patrons regardless of race (National Archives and Records Administration 2022). This empowered Black citizens to attend any performance by their favorite artists at municipal or previously white-only private venues and sit in more desirable sections closer to the stage. With this access finally attained, the necessity of segregated Black venues and Black-promoted shows that gave Black patrons priority seating at mainstream venues was diminished. Though a decentralized network of regional promoters and majority-Black-serving venues continued operating beyond the period of desegregation, the number of advertisements for Black-promoted shows in Georgia decreased throughout the 1960s

The eradication of segregationist seating policies at major venues was not the only change weakening the foundation of the Chitlin' Circuit. The protests that helped to desegregate auditoriums and theaters also targeted restaurants and hotels – essential aspects of long-distance touring (*Atlanta Daily World* 1963; King 2013; *Macon Telegraph* 1963c; *The Macon News* 1963; *United Press*

International 1963b). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 forced all businesses, including restaurants and hotels, to desegregate and provide equal services to everyone regardless of race (National Archives and Records Administration 2022). After the Civil Rights Act was passed, the owner of the Heart of Atlanta Motel in downtown Atlanta challenged Title II, the accommodations section of the law, through a suit in federal court, but the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the law, reaffirming that Black citizens had equal access to hotels and motels across the country (Lippman 1964). This allowed Black musicians, who were previously forced to sleep in either their vehicles or the limited number of Black-owned motels and rented rooms, to book rooms through national hotel chains or white-owned local hotels. As they set out on the road, they could also legally stop to eat at any restaurant, rather than having to rely only on Black-owned or serving restaurants on "the stroll." Together, the increased access to originally white-only facilities that supported live music, for both performers and patrons, led to the disintegration of the essential connections that maintained the Chitlin' Circuit. Black-owned and majority-Black-serving venues, hotels, and restaurants continued supporting Black musicians who played for Black audiences into the late twentieth century, but as Black consumers increasingly patronized integrated venues in the late 1960s and 1970s, the segregated network of the Chitlin' Circuit, as it was developed in the 1930s and 1940s, ceased to exist.

Highway Development, Urban Renewal, and the Destruction of "the Stroll"

As the efforts of Black activists began chipping away at segregationist policies across the South in the early 1960s, two types of urban development, often working together, dramatically altered the physical landscape of Black communities in the United States. The first of these, the construction of the interstate highway system, started at least half a decade before the Civil Rights demonstrations of the early 1960s. Largely funded through the Highway Act of 1956, it involved the creation of wide, multi-lane interstates that bisected communities, often directly and purposefully impacting the Black business districts in urban areas (Mohl 2002:1–2). The Black neighborhoods on the southeast side of Atlanta felt the effects of this beginning in the early 1950s, but most urban areas in Georgia were impacted beginning in the late 1950s and 1960s (GDOT 2007:6, 12–15; Stone 1989:32). Alongside highway development, local governments took advantage of funding provided by the Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954 to demolish Black neighborhoods and commercial areas for public and private development projects. Known as urban renewal, these projects were conceptualized on the federal level to provide modern housing for low-income citizens while also allowing municipalities to redevelop urban areas. In practice, local governments utilized the legislation to label majority-Black and other minority urban areas as "blighted" and receive federal funds to demolish thriving, yet often impoverished, neighborhoods and districts. The redevelopment that followed "slum clearance" typically included large public facilities, private office towers, sports arenas, and highways, rather than sufficient numbers of modern housing units for the previous residents (Handley 2024:2; Newman 2000:16–17; Stone 1989:38–42). Together, these two federally-funded programs further reduced the Chitlin' Circuit's network by destroying or isolating Black venues and support facilities and forcibly relocating the Black communities that supported them.

In Georgia, interstate development started before the creation of the federal Highway Act of 1956. Atlanta issued a transportation plan in 1946, known as the Lochner Report, that outlined the creation of limited-access expressway system for the city and surrounding suburbs. As part of the plan, a major artery of the highway, known as the "Downtown Connector," was placed on the east side of downtown, separating the Black residential districts to the south and east from Atlanta's central business district. The Downtown Connector design was incorporated

into the interstate system after the passage of the Highway Act of 1956 (Tyson et al. 2018). After it was completed in the mid-1960s, the connector disconnected Black communities from the Decatur Street "stroll" and split the major Black business district of Auburn Avenue in two (Newman 2000:16). The highway development, along with changes in land use in the area initiated by urban renewal, forced promoter and businessman B.B. Beamon to close both his restaurant and the Savoy Hotel on Auburn Avenue in 1971 (McConnell). Throughout Georgia, the interstate development of the 1960s negatively impacted Black neighborhoods and commercial corridors as state highway engineers designed routes that passed through minority communities (Corley 2023). Interstate 75 divided

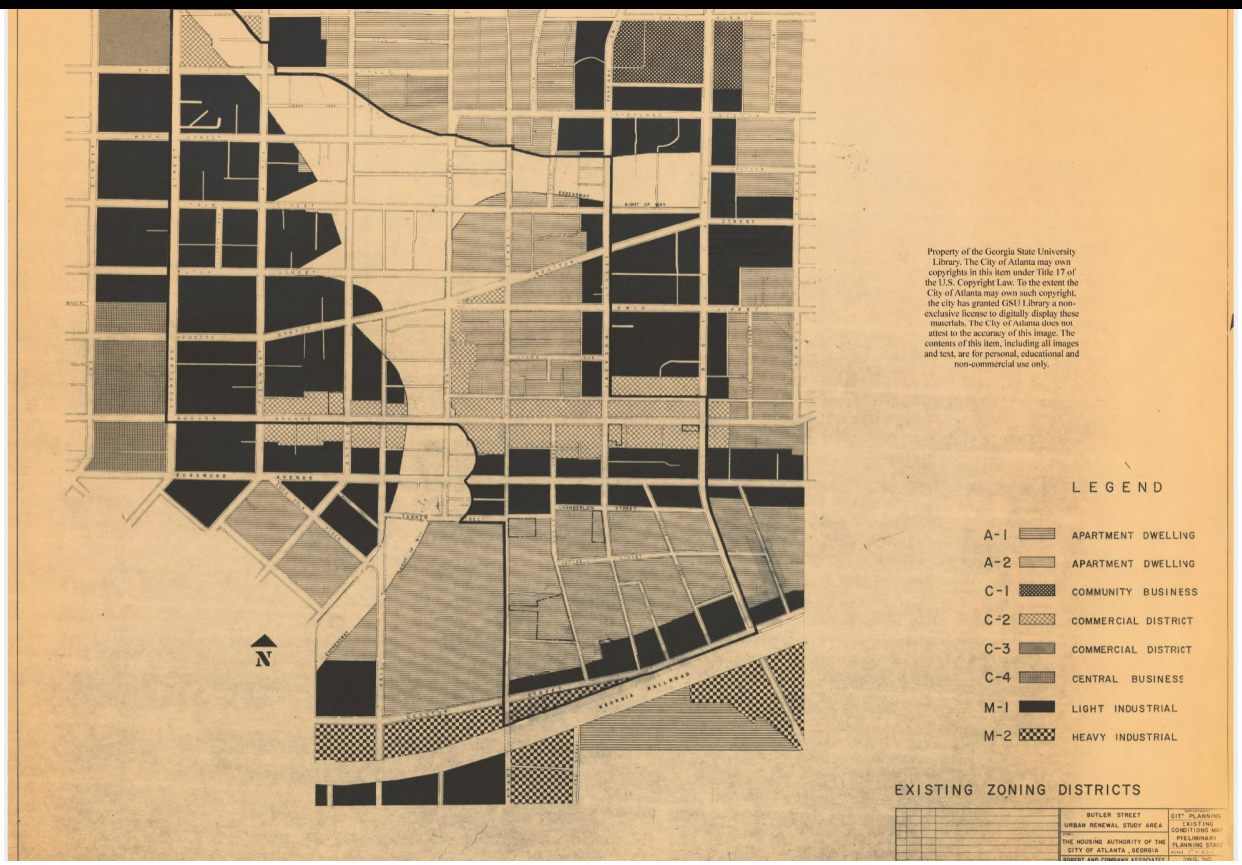
Plan for the intersection of Interstate 75 and Interstate 16 in Macon with the segment that bisected the Black neighborhood of Pleasant Hill, where Clint Brantley and Little Richard lived, highlighted. (Source: *The Macon Telegraph*, March 2, 1961)

This photograph shows Little Richard's childhood home at 1540 Fifth Avenue in 1987, with the highway visible in the background to the right of the house. (Source: Courtesy of the: Middle Georgia Archives, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, GA)

the Pleasant Hill neighborhood in Macon and cut much of its majority-Black population off from the Black business district along Broadway on the east side of the city. In Savannah, Interstate 16 pierced West Broad Street, the city's Black business district, placing the on and off ramps for the highway in the heart of the area (Payne 2024). These alterations to Black urban landscapes in Georgia caused venues to close and residents to relocate, weakening the hubs of Black entertainment that had supported the Chitlin' Circuit through the first half of the twentieth century.

As the state highway department cleared sections of Black and other

Urban renewal planning document for the Butler Street Urban Renewal Area centered on Auburn Avenue in Atlanta. This planning sheet depicts the existing zoning within the area. The footprint of the Downtown Connector is reflected by the unmarked area extending through the middle of the map. (Source: Planning Atlanta City Planning Maps Collection, Georgia State University Library. Educational Use)



minority neighborhoods for the interstates, other urban renewal projects targeted low-income communities for the development of public housing, universities, convention centers, high-rise buildings, and sports facilities. The Housing Act of 1949 provided funding to local governments to acquire "slum" areas through eminent domain (Newman 2000:16). Though providing "decent" and "suitable" housing for the residents of the inner-city slums was highlighted in the legislation, new housing projects for displaced residents were regularly an afterthought for city planners (Madgwick 1971; Weiss 1985). When new housing was included in urban renewal project areas, the residences often only provided space for a fraction of the area's previous population. More commonly, residents were relocated to other parts of a city through the construction of low-rent housing in more distant neighborhoods (Holliman 2010; Stone 1989:38–42, 60–67). One of the many examples of urban renewal in Georgia is the Decatur Street project in what became known as the Georgia State Urban Redevelopment area. Through this project, Atlanta's government proposed and approved the demolition of the historic business and entertainment district surrounding Decatur Street in the 1960s, replacing it with facilities for Georgia State College

Performance at the Roxy Theatre in Macon, 1958. (Source: Courtesy of the: Middle Georgia Archives, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, GA)

(now University). This area is where many of the earliest segregated Black entertainment venues were found in Atlanta – including the 81 Theatre (Newman 2000:16–18). The federally-funded urban renewal program of the 1950s and 1960s resulted in the demolition of Black businesses and the removal of the communities that supported the Black commercial districts of Georgia's cities. Similar to the contemporary interstate development, these projects severed the networks that made up the Chitlin' Circuit (Lauterbach 2011:267–268).

Through a combination of the effects of desegregation, highway development, urban renewal, and other, smaller cultural changes, the Chitlin' Circuit – meaning the segregated, Black entertainment network of the Jim Crow era – ceased to exist. Many of the significant Black venues of the Chitlin' Circuit were impacted by redevelopment projects of the mid-twentieth century, pushing Black entertainment toward previously white-only venues (Mason, Jr. 2022). These changes also diminished the importance of Black promoters as Black communities gained access to desegregated performances held at venues outside of Black neighborhoods, which could be hosted by promoters of any race. Though Black promoters maintained their connections with the majority-Black venues that survived the changes of the 1960s, the role of those venues in the careers of Black musicians was reduced over time too. The number of Black artists crossing over into the mainstream increased in the 1950s and 1960s as younger white audiences developed interest in rhythm and blues, rock 'n' roll, and soul music. With increasing popularity, many Black artists could book performances beyond the majority-Black venues of the Chitlin' Circuit (Guralnick 1986:34, 64–66; White 1994:66–70). As the legal and cultural limitations placed on Black artists and patrons decreased in the 1950s and 1960s, the segregated Black entertainment network that had thrived for half a century slowly became obsolete.

Legacy of the Chitlin' Circuit

Black entertainment circuits carried on in modified forms after desegregation, urban renewal, and highway development destroyed both the Chitlin' Circuit's consumer base and the physical spaces it occupied. As mentioned earlier, artists carried on working on the Soul Circuit, performing for integrated audiences, and Black artists also continued playing for majority Black audiences at small clubs on Black entertainment circuits in the 1970s and 1980s. This included a mixture of new talent and older artists who had waned in mainstream popularity but maintained small but dedicated fan bases. These post-Chitlin' Circuit networks largely supplemented mainstream Black entertainment though, since Black patrons could attend desegregated performances by their favorite Black musicians at any venue that booked the artist. Even though the term "Chitlin' Circuit" was occasionally applied to these later networks, they operated on smaller scales and under different conditions.

The Chitlin' Circuit, including the earlier vaudeville circuits and the pre-1940 territory band networks, centered Black entertainment at a time when access to the stages and seats of mainstream venues were segregated and restricted. These networks supported a Black entertainment economy that thrived for a half-century, providing jobs for Black artists and bringing business to Black-owned theaters, clubs, bars, hotels, and restaurants, as well as individual Black promoters. Largely operating beyond the influence of the mainstream music industry, the Chitlin' Circuit permitted Black entertainers to experiment with their artforms, producing new sounds and performance styles. Many of the entertainment innovators who worked the circuit eventually crossed over into the mainstream, spreading their creativity and influencing the sound of music across the nation and the globe. Whether in the spotlight or on the dance floor, the Chitlin' Circuit provided space for Black art and entertainment to flourish in the Jim Crow United States.

CHAPTER FOUR | CASE STUDIES FROM GEORGIA

From theaters, clubs, juke joints, and other locations common to the Chitlin' Circuit, Georgia has a fascinating story to tell about the history of the circuit through its venues. This section provides additional information pertaining to a selection of both extant and non-extant venues for most regions of the state. Although several venues have been located for most regions, one to two were selected from each region as good examples to represent the different venue types that may aid in the development of the Chitlin' Circuit Heritage Trail. For Region 2, the name of one location was found, but there was not enough supplementary information to explore the history of this location. No venues were found in Regions 4 and 9. Therefore, Regions 2, 4, and 9 will need further research. For a full list of all locations discovered during research for this project, see Appendix 1.

GEORGIA'S REGIONAL COMMISSIONS SHOWING VENUE DISTRIBUTION

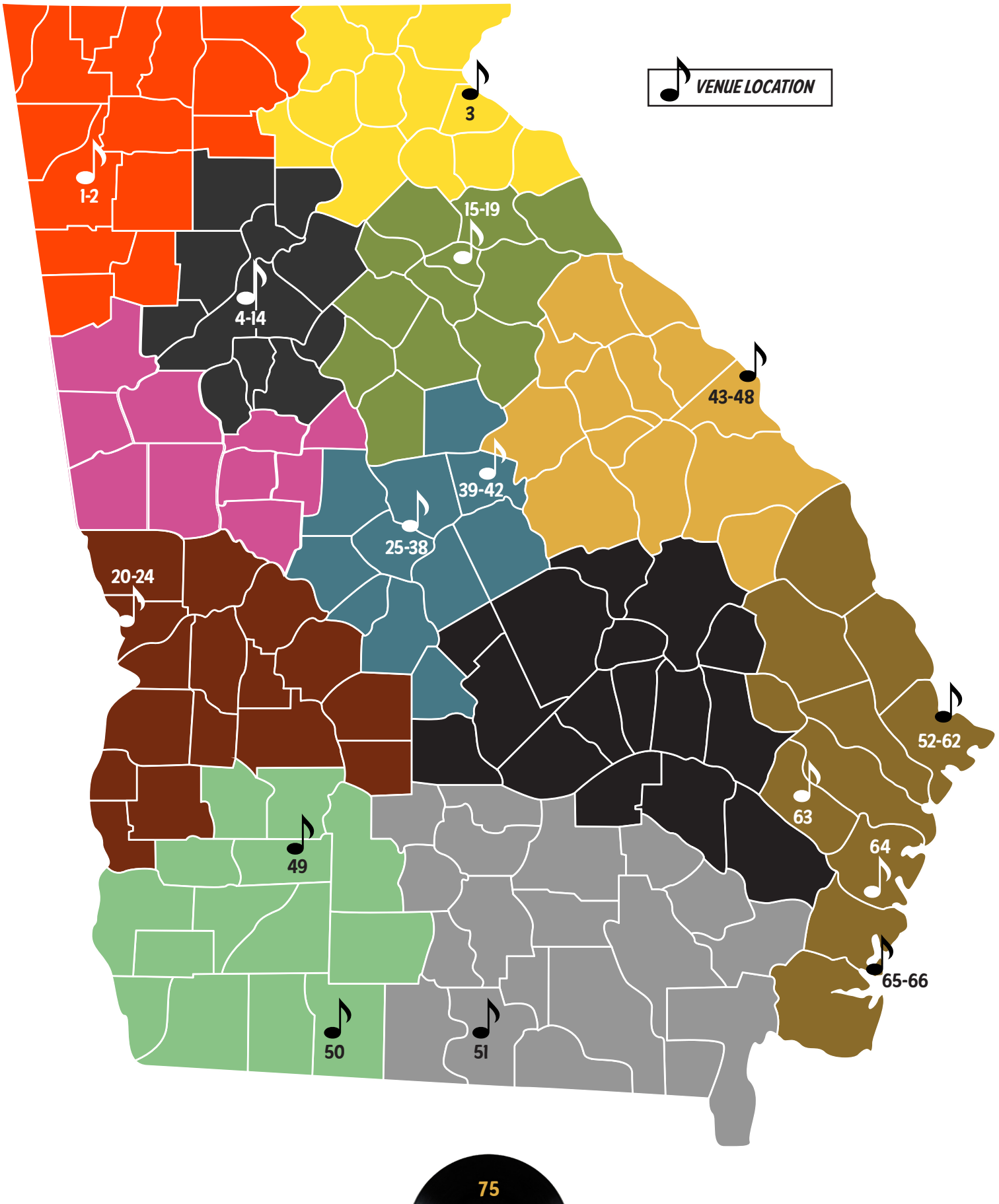
REGIONS

- REGION 1: NORTHWEST GEORGIA
- REGION 2: GEORGIA MOUNTAINS
- REGION 3: ATLANTA REGIONAL COMMISSION
- REGION 4: THREE RIVERS
- REGION 5: NORTHEAST GEORGIA
- REGION 6: MIDDLE GEORGIA
- REGION 7: CENTRAL SAVANNAH RIVER AREA
- REGION 8: RIVER VALLEY
- REGION 9: HEART OF GEORGIA ALTAMAHA
- REGION 10: SOUTHWEST GEORGIA
- REGION 11: SOUTHERN GEORGIA
- REGION 12: COASTAL

VENUES WITH KNOWN LOCATIONAL INFORMATION

1. MIX MASTERS CLUB
2. IDLE HOUR CLUB *
3. BILL RENDEZVOUS
4. WALUHAJE
5. SUNSET CASINO/ MAGNOLIA BALLROOM
6. HERNDON STADIUM
7. ATLANTA VENDOME
8. ARCADE THEATRE/ 81 THEATRE *
9. DIXIE THEATRE
10. CITY AUDITORIUM *
11. POINCIANA
12. ROYAL PEACOCK *
13. ODD FELLOWS BUILDING
14. CLUB ROYAL
15. MADDOX CENTER (VFW)
16. VFW POST 3910
17. MORTON THEATRE *
18. PASTIME THEATRE
19. HOUSE OF BLUE LIGHTS *
20. DUNBAR THEATRE
21. GOLDEN REST
22. REX CLUB
23. MA RAINEY'S HOUSE
24. LIBERTY THEATER
25. SAVOY BALLROOM/ SOUTHSIDE BEACH
26. OCMULGEE PARK PAVILION
27. ADAM'S LOUNGE
28. PARADISE TRIAL
29. MOON OVER HARLEM
30. TIP TOP INN
31. DUKE'S CLUB
32. DOUGLASS THEATRE *
33. THE TWO SPOT
34. THE COTTON CLUB
35. ROXY THEATRE
36. RAINBOW GARDEN
37. CLUB 15 *
38. THE MANHATTAN CLUB
39. SHADY REST
40. BLUE NOTE
41. DO-DROP IN
42. EBONY LOUNGE
43. NEW GLOBE THEATRE
44. STAR THEATRE
45. IMPERIAL THEATER
46. PALACE THEATRE
47. THE LENOX THEATER *
48. AUGUSTA SEA BEACH
49. ALBANY THEATER
50. RITZ THEATRE *
51. LIBERTY THEATER *
52. HOLLYWOOD CASINO
53. GRAND PALACE/ NEW PALACE THEATRE
54. THE FLAMINGO *
55. ARCADIA THEATRE
56. DUNBAR THEATRE
57. STAR THEATRE
58. JOE'S BLUE ROOM AND COCKTAIL LOUNGE
59. MELODY THEATRE
60. NEPTUNE CAFE
61. PEKIN THEATRE
62. EASTSIDE THEATRE
63. PINEY PIG JUKE JOINT
64. JAKE'S PLACE
65. THE DOLPHIN CLUB
66. COCOANUT GROVE *

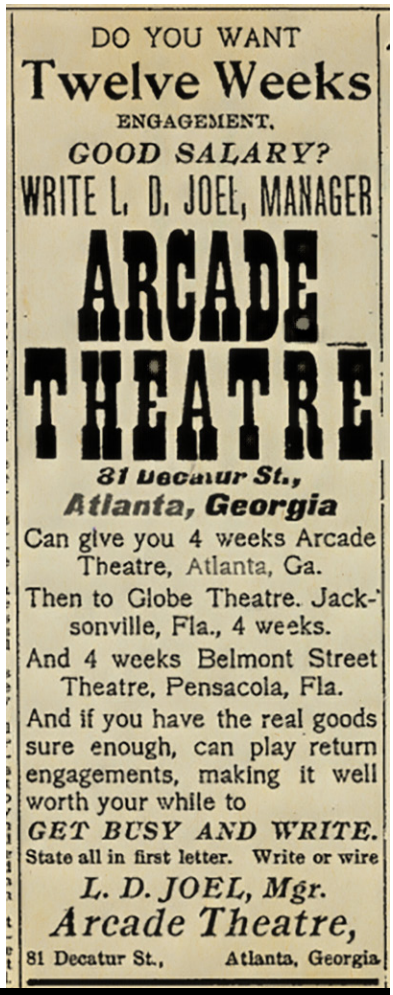
* *CASE STUDIES*


VENUE LOCATION
3
1-2
15-19
4-14
43-48
39-42
25-38
20-24
52-62
63
64
49
65-66
50
51
75

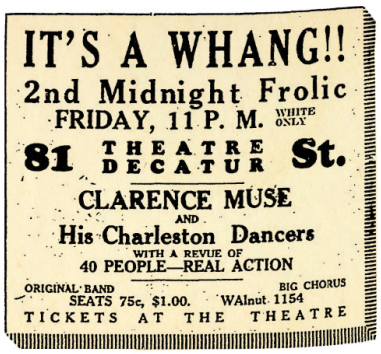
#8

Arcade Theatre/81 Theatre

Region 3



Talent Search Advertisement for the Arcade Theatre (Source: *Indianapolis Freeman*, 1910)



Advertisement for White Only Dance at 81 Theatre (Source: *Atlanta Journal*, 1927)

Location: 81 Decatur Street SE in Atlanta

Dates of Operation: 1902- c.1919 as the Arcade Theatre, c. 1920- c. 1930s as Bailey's 81 Theatre

Owner/managers: Charles Bailey, Owner; Tom Bailey, Owner; L.D. Joel, Manager of Arcade

History: The Arcade Theatre/Bailey's 81 Theatre was a white-owned theater meant for Black patrons. The Arcade Theatre was part of the Theater Owners Booking Association (TOBA). Originally, vaudeville shows and acts were performed and eventually movies and live musical performances were hosted here. Although the theater owner, Charles Bailey, was notoriously difficult to work with, he is an important piece of the TOBA puzzle. The acts/artists that were booked at this location such as Professor Eddie Bunner and Ethel Waters were under a contract in which they could not perform anywhere else without the permission of Charles Bailey for fear of retribution or even incarceration (Peterson 1997). Perry Bradford, a comedian and songwriter stated in 1914 that Charles Bailey "hit Wayne Burton in the face with a revolver for asking him [for extra money] (Seroff and Abbott 1992)." According to the *Indianapolis Freeman,* the Arcade was remodeled in 1909 and contained 500 seats. Each day there were five vaudeville shows (two matinee and three evening shows) with standing room only (*Indianapolis Freeman* 1909b). However, the theater renovation cost $5,000 and only had "350 plush opera chairs." Supposedly the renovation made the Arcade Theatre the "prettiest colored vaudeville house in the south (*Indianapolis Freeman* 1909a)."

Circa 1919, the Arcade Theatre became 81 Theatre (Gue 1996). It was still owned by Mr. Bailey, but had transitioned from vaudeville acts to live musical acts. Although the patronage for the theater was primarily African American, Bailey scheduled white only nights called "Midnight Frolics." Bessie Smith was the main attraction at the first Midnight Frolic at 81 Theatre in 1923 and the newspaper listed her performance and the show in general as a success (Talking Machine World 1923). The second Midnight Frolic took place December 16, 1927, and featured Clarence Muse and His Charleston Dancers (*Atlanta Journal* 1927). Charles Bailey passed away in either 1927 or 1928 and the theater went to his brother Tom Bailey.

During the mid-1930s, 81 Theatre was said to be one of the first places where Black people could go to a theater through the front door and have a box seat or not be relegated to Jim Crow balcony seats (Gue 1996). As the Great Depression continued, 81 Theatre management evolved its show types to keep

audiences coming including, Black movies, stage shows like the Brown Skin Models, and bigger musical acts like Duke Ellington and Bill "Bojangles" Robinson (Gue 1996). The 81 Theatre was closed and demolished as part of urban renewal in the Decatur Street area in the mid-1960s. Between 1964 and 1968 this building was razed, and a Georgia State University building was erected in its place by 1968.

Importance to the Chitlin' Circuit: The Arcade Theatre/Bailey's 81 Theatre played a major role in the origin of the Chitlin' Circuit in Georgia. The owners, the Bailey brothers, were major players in TOBA and owned an Atlanta-area chain of theaters that mostly served Black patrons. This venue and their other locations evolved with the times to meet the demands of the audiences. From vaudeville shows to movies to live musical performances this location hosted many important facets of African American entertainment. Many famous performers, shows, and acts were contracted here including Nat King Cole, Bessie Smith and Wayne Burton, Duke Ellington, and many more. Additionally, this is one of the earliest theaters in Atlanta where Black patrons could walk through the front door as patrons instead of separate side and rear entries in most segregated theaters of the time.

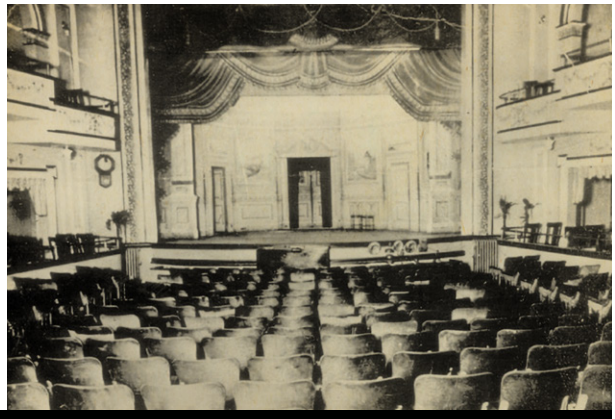
Historic Exterior of the 81 Theatre (Source: DeKalb History Center)

#32

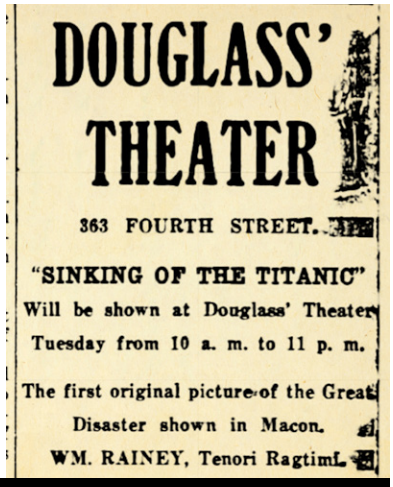
Douglass Theaters

Region 6

1915 Image of Original Douglass Theatre with The Colonial Hotel (Source: Digital Library of Georgia)



Historic Interior of the Douglass Source: Cinematreasures.com)



DOUGLASS' THEATER

363 FOURTH STREET.

"SINKING OF THE TITANIC"

Will be shown at Douglass' Theater Tuesday from 10 a. m. to 11 p. m.

The first original picture of the Great Disaster shown in Macon.

WM. RAINEY, Tenori RagtimL

WM Rainey Plays at Douglass (Source: *Unknown Newspaper in 1912*)

Location: 363 Broadway and 355 Broadway (currently 355 Martin Luther King Blvd.) in Macon

Dates of Operations:1911-circa 1920; 1921-1973; 1997-Present

Owner/managers: Charles Henry Douglass, Owner; B.E. Edwards, Manager; Benjamin W. Stein, Manager

History: Charles H . Douglass opened three Douglass Theatres within a 10-year period, all of which were on Fourth Street/Broadway (currently Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard). The original Douglass Theatre was located at 363 Fourth Street in 1911 and was connected to the Colonial Hotel at 361 Fourth Street, which Mr. Douglass also owned. It was Macon's first Black-owned and operated theater and sat 350 people. The theater showed three or four daily shows, which included silent movies, minstrel shows, and vaudeville acts. Douglass founded the Florida Blossom Minstrels and Comedy Company in 1907 (Durrence 1997a). It is likely that they performed at the original theater once it opened. According to several newspaper articles, B.E. Edwards, a famous tenor, managed Douglass Theatre for several years. The first theater closed around 1920.

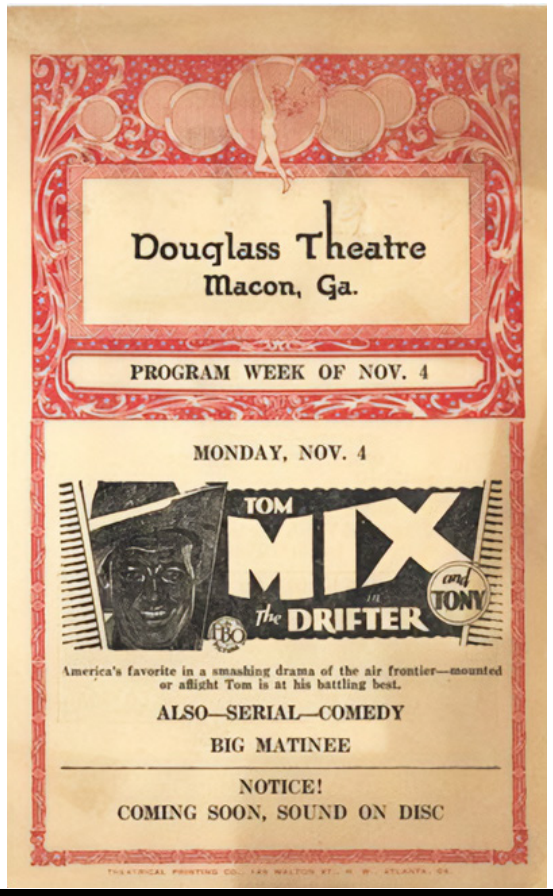
The second Douglass Theatre, at 1223 Fourth Street/ Broadway, operated as a movie theater (Toth 1980). In addition to opening this theater in 1917, Douglass also purchased two buildings at 355 and 359 Broadway for $30,000, which would later become the third Douglass Theatre that is still in operation today. The current Douglass Theatre opened in 1921 and seated approximately 800 people (Durrence 1997a). In the late 1920s, Douglass sold his majority share of stock in this location to Ben Stein who held boxing matches and showed movies. However, under Stein's leadership, revenue declined, and Mr. Douglass regained majority shares of the Douglass Theatre in 1929 (Durrence 1997b). He hired Bijou Amusement Company to manage the theater that same year.

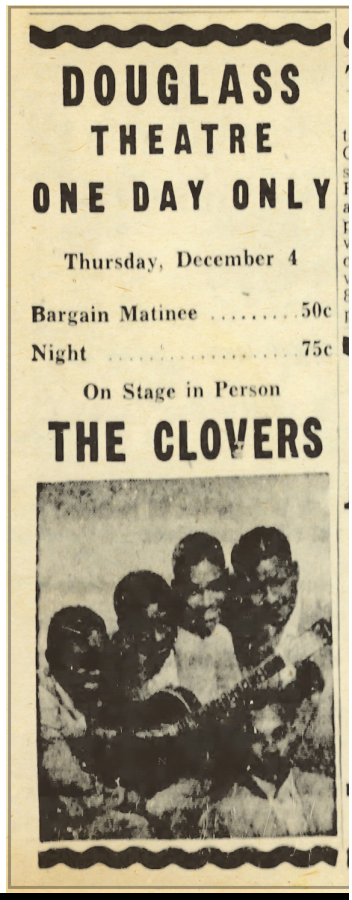
Although information about its operations during the 1930s is limited, the theater seemed to weather the Great Depression with continued operation. In 1940, Charles Douglass passed away and his family assumed theater operations. Douglass' wife and sons modernized the theater in 1944 by

pouring concrete over the original wooden auditorium floor. In 1953, a number of changes occurred: the marquee was replaced by a neon sign; the building was equipped with air conditioning and a sprinkler system; a drop ceiling was added to the lobby; and the concession stands were expanded (Durrence 1997a). Otis Redding is said to have been discovered at the Douglass Theatre in 1958 during one of the live talent shows called "the Teenage Party" hosted by DJ Hamp Swain (Toth 1980).

As the fight for desegregation grew and African Americans fought to be allowed in white theaters, patronage waned. By 1973, the Douglass Theatre had gone out of business. Between 1978 and 1992, several organizations and government entities fought to save this building from demolition. In 1994, the Macon City Council allocated 2.5 million dollars for the renovation of the theater. Renovations began the following year (Toth 1980). The Douglass Theatre re-opened to the public in 1997 and has remained in operation to the present.

Importance to the Chitlin' Circuit: Although the Douglass Theatre was founded before the Chitlin' Circuit was fully established, it and similar theaters from this time period set the stage for the types of venues that would later be part of the Chitlin' Circuit. In the later years of the theater, it was a location on the circuit and Otis Redding, a famous singer from the 1960s, was discovered here. The Douglass Theatre is important because it was Black owned and operated for the benefit of Black patrons. Many theaters across the country and the state of Georgia allowed African American spectators but were owned by white individuals. Famous performers and acts at this location included Ma and Pa Rainey, Bessie Smith, Butterbeans and Susie, Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, The Clovers, and more.



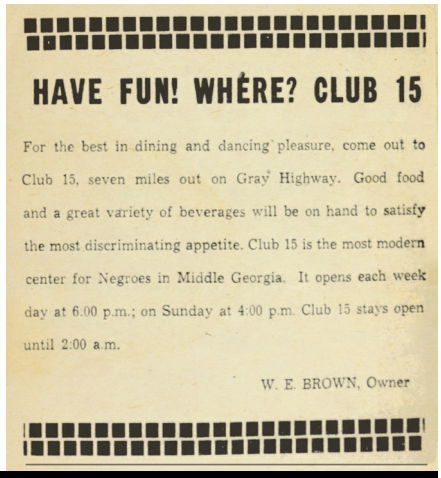


(Left) The Drifter Playbill Cover Source: Cinematreasures.com) **(Right) 1952 Advertisement for Clovers** (Source: *The Macon News*, 1952),

#37

Club 15

Region 6

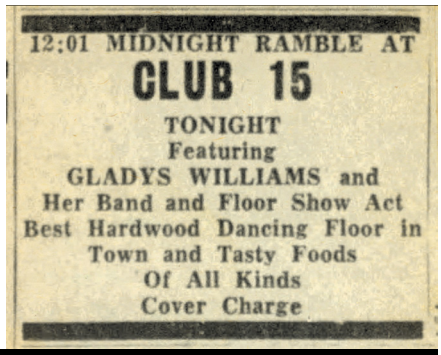


HAVE FUN! WHERE? CLUB 15

For the best in dining and dancing pleasure, come out to Club 15, seven miles out on Gray Highway. Good food and a great variety of beverages will be on hand to satisfy the most discriminating appetite. Club 15 is the most modern center for Negroes in Middle Georgia. It opens each week day at 6:00 p.m.; on Sunday at 4:00 p.m. Club 15 stays open until 2:00 a.m.

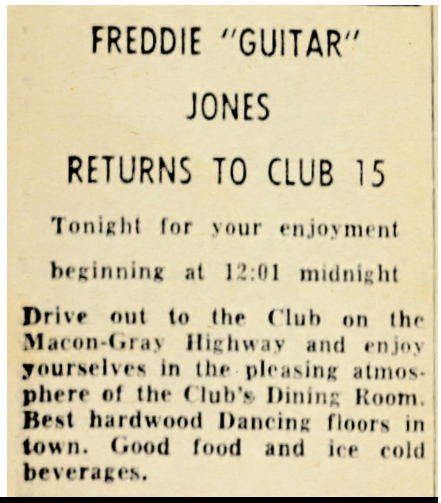
W. E. BROWN, Owner

1951 Club 15 Advertisement (Source: *Macon Telegraph*, 1951)



12:01 MIDNIGHT RAMBLE AT
CLUB 15
TONIGHT
Featuring
GLADYS WILLIAMS and
Her Band and Floor Show Act
Best Hardwood Dancing Floor in
Town and Tasty Foods
Of All Kinds
Cover Charge

1953 Midnight Ramble Advertisement (Source: *Macon Telegraph*, 1953)



FREDDIE "GUITAR"
JONES
RETURNS TO CLUB 15
Tonight for your enjoyment
beginning at 12:01 midnight
Drive out to the Club on the Macon-Gray Highway and enjoy yourselves in the pleasing atmosphere of the Club's Dining Room. Best hardwood Dancing floors in town. Good food and ice cold beverages.

1956 Advertisement for Freddy Guitar Jones(Source: *Macon News*, 1952)

Location: 3108 Gray Highway in East Macon

Dates of Operations: 1951-1970s

Owner/managers: W.E. Brown, Owner; Percy Welch, Manager

History: W.E. Brown opened Club 15 in 1951 as a club that served food and drinks. Advertisements never listed an address for this location but described it as seven miles out on Gray Highway in East Macon. The hours were 6:00 pm-2:00 am each weeknight. On Sundays, it opened at 4:00 pm and did not offer entertainment (Brown 1951). Throughout the 1950s, artists such as Gladys Williams, Percy Welch and his House Rockers, and Little Richard performed here. Club 15 hosted a Halloween concert where Freddie "Guitar" Jones and his band headlined in 1956 (Brown 1956). This location also hosted several midnight rambles although advertisements never specified if these were white only events like other venues (Brown 1953). Regional promoter Clint Brantley frequently promoted events at this location and brought artists to perform here. During Otis Redding's first tour as a solo artist in 1962, 12 out of 18 performances occurred at Club 15 (Otis Redding Foundation 2025). Although clubs are revenue generating facilities, Club 15 hosted a number of free concerts over the years and showed other ways of giving back, like in 1963 when W.E. Brown hosted a "Big Valentine Sweetheart Ball Benefit Concert" fundraiser for the March of Dimes (Brown 1963).

Also in 1963, a rivalry between Joe Tex and James Brown played out at Club 15. On July 26, Joe Tex opened for James Brown at the Macon City Auditorium. During Joe Tex's performance, he mocked James Brown. Brown waited until the after party at Club 15 to air his discontent. Johnny Jenkins and his Pinetoppers were performing at Club 15 and Joe Tex was in the audience. James Brown and some of his friends carrying shot guns shot at Joe Tex and his band members. The Pinetoppers stated in an interview that they didn't know what was going on but everyone was hiding on the floor and behind instruments. Although Joe Tex was unharmed, about seven others were injured in the shootout. James Brown sped away from the scene in his tour bus (Kachur 2024). Tex and Brown eventually settled their differences and continued working together.

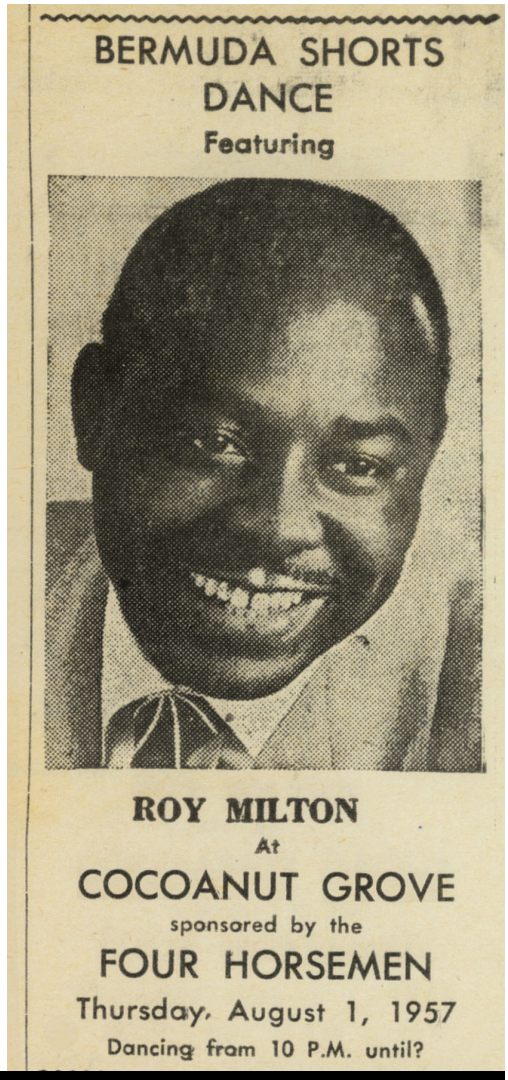
Percy Wech took over as club manager in 1967 (Welch 1967). Business appears to have slowed in the 1970s as there are rarely advertisements for Club 15 in newspapers. It seems Club 15 closed in the 1980s and is no longer extant. There are no known photographs of this location.

Importance to the Chitlin' Circuit: Club 15 is important as a juke joint in operation during the peak and fall of the Chitlin' Circuit. Clint Brantley, a popular regional promoter, encouraged nationally recognized and local artists to entertain guests at Club 15. Famous artists such as Little Richard, Percy Welch and his House Rockers, Otis Redding and many others performed and hung out at this location. Additionally, Club 15 is also a less common example of a rural juke joint that was widely advertised in newspapers.

(Left) 1962 Easter Advertisement (Source: *Macon Telegraph*, 1962), **(Right) 1963 Valentine Ball and Square Dance Advertisement** (Source: *Macon Telegraph*, 1963)

#66 Cocoanut Grove

Region 12



1957 Advertisement for Roy Milton (Source: *The Herald*, 1957)

Location: On Route 17/ Ogeechee Road in Savannah

Dates of Operations: April 11, 1936- mid-1960's; Demolished circa 2000

Owner/managers: Mamie and Jerry Cox, Owners; Percy Welch, Manager

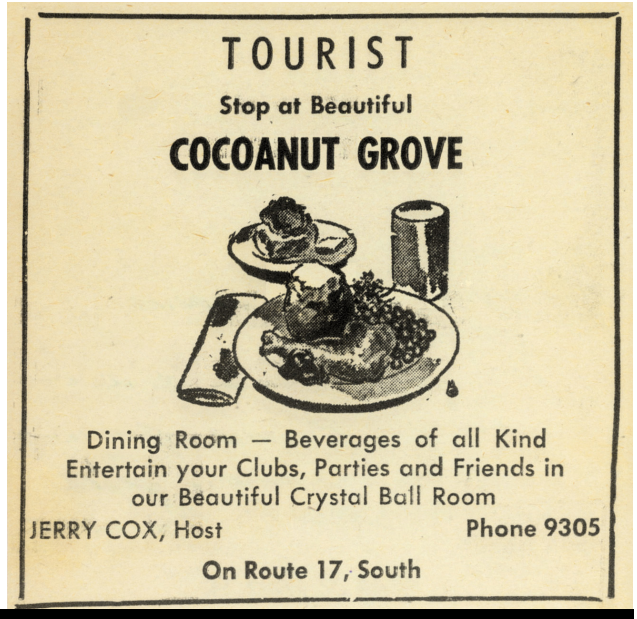
History: Husband and wife, Jerry and Mamie Cox established Cocoanut Grove (also spelled Coconut Grove) in 1936. Both Mr. and Mrs. Cox previously worked as butlers for actress Marie Dressler. Upon her passing, she bequeathed the couple $50,000 and warned them to "beware of sharks and not let people take your money." They followed Dressler's wishes and invested the money into Cocoanut Grove, a nightclub and tourist camp with a dining hall. The tourist camp consisted of six cabins where guests could stay. Jerry owned and managed the facility and Mamie helped with food preparation and housekeeping. According to a 1936 article in the *Macon Telegraph*, Cocoanut Grove was an immediate success (*Macon Telegraph* 1936).

From its inception, Cocoanut Grove acted as a multi-use venue. In one ad, they mention that one can "entertain your clubs, parties and friends (Freeman 1947)." As early as 1937, the Beta Phi Lambda chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Incorporated was hosting their monthly meetings here. They describe Cocoanut Grove as a "reputable night-club… and esteemed venue featured[featuring] live performances by local jazz bands"(Alpha Phi Alpha 2018). Over the years, other organizations in the National Pan Hellenic Council used Cocoanut Grove to host their meetings, dances, and other events. The Frogs Social Club and the Aristocrats Social Club also hosted regular meetings at Cocoanut Grove (Suzette1947). One organization even hosted a beauty contest here (Freeman 1959).

Through the 1940s to the 1960s bands like Purvis Henson, The L'Allegros, Walter Langston's Orchestra, James Drayton and his G.I. Band, and Roy Milton entertained guests in the Crystal Ballroom. The Coxes remodeled the Crystal Ballroom in 1947 by enlarging the bar, adding new mirrors with neon lights around them, and added extra tables and seating (Suzette 1947). In the 1949 *Greenbook*, Cocoanut Grove is listed as a trailer park (Green 1949). The Lincoln Inn, another club in Savannah on the circuit, closed in 1952. In the article announcing Lincoln Inn's closing, it stated "Gus Hayes has sold the Lincoln Inn…Negroes seeking fun now motor out to the Cocoanut Grove (Fryer Woolcock 1952)." This announcement alludes to Cocoanut Grove being the only music/dance venue in Savannah for a while where Black residents could dance and enjoy live music. Three years later, Ray Charles played at Cocoanut Grove (Suzette 1955).

Towards the end of the 1950s, Cocoanut Grove underwent some changes. Eugene Ingram is listed as the host for all events now instead of Jerry Cox. Additionally, advertisements in 1959 refer to it as the "new Cocoanut Grove with an air-conditioned lounge" (Ingram 1959). Themed dances happened throughout the year as well such as Christmas, New Year, Fourth of July, and April Fool Tramp dances. By 1963, Jerry Cox battled sickness (Cox 1963). After 1965, there were few advertisements for Cocoanut Grove. The entire site was eventually demolished around 2000. There is currently a Wendy's and Walmart where this location once stood.

Importance to the Chitlin' Circuit: Most locations on the Chitlin' Circuit only served one purpose - providing space for entertainment. Cocoanut Grove served many purposes including lodging, restaurant, meeting venue, and club. Although other locations may have a hotel next door to their club, Cocoanut Grove had separate cabins that guests could rent out. The majority of artists that performed at this venue were local, whereas many other venues focused on having big name entertainers. As a tourist camp with an entertainment facility, the Cocoanut Grove represents an less-common venue type on the Chitlin' Circuit. It is the only venue of this type identified during this project.



1947 Advertisement
(Source: *The Herald*, 1947)

1947 Amenities Advertisement
(Source: *The Herald*, 1947)

4th of July dance Advertisement
(Source: *The Herald*, 1959)

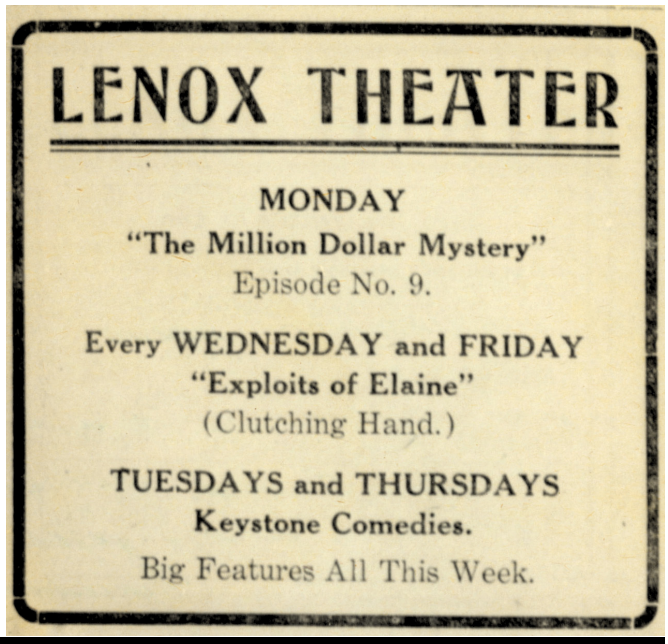
#47 The Lenox Theater

Region 7

Location: 1128 9th Street (James Brown Boulevard) in Augusta

Dates of Operations: Circa 1915-1970s; demolished in 1978

Owner/managers: G.N. Stoney, John P. Waring, John Norflett, William H. Wilborn, Founders/Owners; Earl Stone Pinkerton, Manager


LENOX THEATER

MONDAY
"The Million Dollar Mystery"
Episode No. 9.

Every WEDNESDAY and FRIDAY
"Exploits of Elaine"
(Clutching Hand.)

TUESDAYS and THURSDAYS
Keystone Comedies.

Big Features All This Week.

1915 Showings (Source: *The Augusta Herald*, 1915)

History: The Lenox Theater was founded by four Black Augusta businessmen, William H. Wilborn, John P. Waring G.N. Stoney, and John Norflett (also spelled Norfleet), and was designed by architect Geoffrey Lloyd Preacher. Most sources state that the Lenox Theater opened in 1920 or 1921 and cost $100,000 to construct (*Augusta Chronicle* 2020). However, there are advertisements in the *Augusta Herald* as early as May 16, 1915, for pictures showing at the Lenox. Also, the Lenox Theater is listed in the 1917 Augusta city directory as a moving pictures house at 1128 9th Street with J.A. Norfleet as the manager (City Directory Co. of Augusta 1917). In a 1921 *Augusta Herald* article, the founders of the theater petitioned the Superior Court to create the Lenox Theater Stock Company as a "$100,000 affair" (Floyd 1921). When the theater opened, it was described as having a large arched lobby with tile floors and mural decorations on the wall. The Lenox Theater sat 570 on the orchestra floor and offered 300 more seats in the balcony. Gas steam radiators heated the space in the winter and a cyclone fan cooled it in the summer (Lombardo 2006).

In 1917, the Lenox Theater Co is listed as pledging to donate $10.00 to the Red Cross Fund (Floyd 1917). Having money to donate is made possible by continuously hosting a variety of events that attract people. For a week in 1920, the theater exclusively showed "Negro pictures, with the star present in person…at each performance" (Floyd 1920). In 1921, the theater hosted vaudeville shows and allowed a Black war hero Captain Needham Roberts to speak to audiences about his experience on the battlefields of World War I. The ad mentioned that "white and colored [people] are invited," to hear him speak (*Augusta Herald* 1921). A newspaper article stated that there were whispers of an outsider opening another theater on the south side of Augusta, but there was no reason for Lenox to worry because it is backed by men "whose character is an open book and whose loyalty is to Augusta"(Floyd 1920). However, in 1924, the Lenox theater was sold to the Standard Life Insurance Company, and it was anticipated that another company would operate the playhouse (Wimberly 1924).

During the Great Depression, there is not much press about events and movies taking place at the Lenox. There is an article in the *Atlanta Daily World* in 1932 that says the Whitman Sisters performed there (Lee 1932). Also, during this period, Earl Stone Pinkerton took over theater management and remained in that position until his

Historic Photograph of Exterior
(Source: *Historic Augusta*)

death in 1956. Reportedly, performers such as Ray Charles, Ethel Waters, and James Brown performed at the Lenox over the years (*Augusta Focus* 1997).

As the fight for integration steamed forward, patronage at Lenox Theater declined. A fire in 1966 closed the theater for a period of time and burned historical documents. It was renovated and continued operation until the early 1970s. When a teenage girl was found dead in the theater in 1974, it closed. Efforts were made to reopen the theater, but it was demolished by the city of Augusta in 1978 (Lombardo 2006).

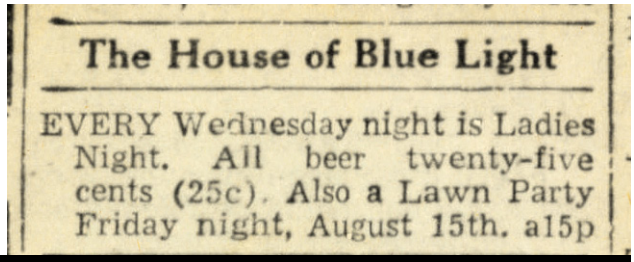
Importance to the Chitlin' Circuit: Over the years, the Lenox Theater served many purposes including movie theater, vaudeville house, gathering place, and concert hall. This location is important because it is the earliest known theater in Augusta to be opened by Black people, for Black people. Additionally, it was designed by a well-known architect, G. Lloyd Preacher. Lenox Theater remained in operation throughout the many changes in entertainment and with their shows continuously updated to stay relevant.

Lenox Theater Interior (Source: *Cinematreasures.com*)

#19 House of Blue Lights

Region 5

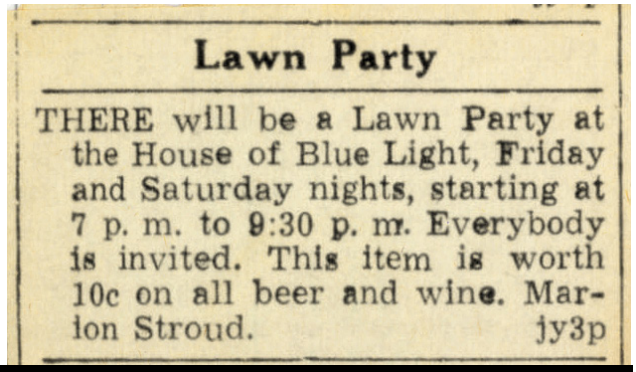
1993 Photographs of the Exterior (Source: https://dulltooldimbulb.blogspot.com/2009/02/house-of-blue-lights-juke-joint.html)



The House of Blue Light

EVERY Wednesday night is Ladies Night. All beer twenty-five cents (25c). Also a Lawn Party Friday night, August 15th. a15p

1952 Ladies Night Advertisement (Source: *Banner Herald*)



Lawn Party

THERE will be a Lawn Party at the House of Blue Light, Friday and Saturday nights, starting at 7 p. m. to 9:30 p. m. Everybody is invited. This item is worth 10c on all beer and wine. Marion Stroud. jy3p

1953 Lawn party Advertisement (Source: *Banner Herald*)

Location: Barnett Shoals Road in Athens

Dates of Operations: Circa 1947- Early 1970s

Owner/managers: Marion Stroud, Owner

History: Marion Stroud, a Black businessman, opened the House of Blue Lights, presumably around 1947, as the earliest mention of the club in local newspapers is that same year. According to his obituary, he operated the club from the late 1940s to the early 1970s. Local bands such as the Twisters, the Imperials, and the Grains of Sand performed here. Recording artists like Gene Allison, Millie Jackson, and L.C. Cook performed at this location as well (*Zebra Magazine* 1995). It is possible Little Richard came here or heard of this place because he mentions the House of Blue Lights in the first verse of his song *"Good Golly Miss Molly."*

The House of Blue Lights was more than a club, it was also a gathering space for Black Athenians. Over the years, they hosted a variety of events like fish fries, Thanksgiving dinners, Fourth of July barbecues, picnics, and lawn parties. In the 1950s, Athens had a Negro League baseball team called Athens' Cuban Redsox. Frequently, players and spectators gathered at House of Blue Lights to continue the party following their games (Allen 1997). A fire burned part of the building in 1958, but it did not shut the business down long (Cook 1958). House of Blue Lights resumed operation until the early 1970s (*Zebra Magazine* 1995).

Importance to the Chitlin' Circuit: The House of Blue Lights was important to the Chitlin' Circuit because it was one of the few clubs in Athens that catered specifically to Black Athenians. There was a big theater in town, the Morton, as well as veteran facilities that allowed live music and allowed Black patronage, but, based on archival research, this location was one of the few Black clubs in Athens. The House of Blue Lights is also notable because its owner, Marion Stroud, was a local leader, businessman, and architect that fostered relations with residents of the area.

#46 Palace Theatre

Region 7

1922 Boxing Contest Advertisement (Needs Source)

Location: 531 Campbell Street in Augusta

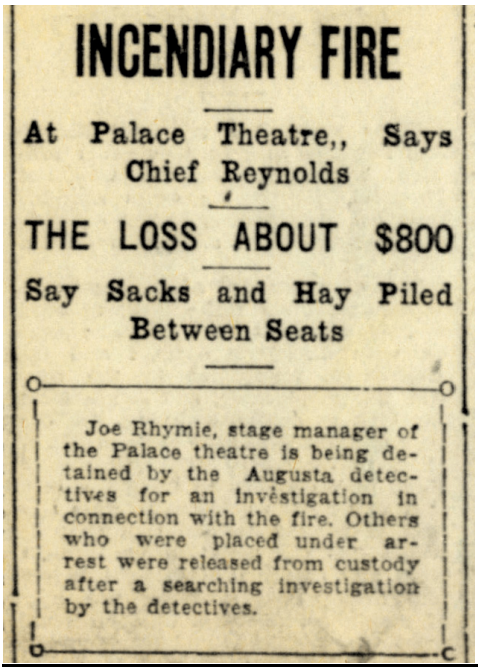
Dates of Operations: 1920s-Unknown

Owner/managers: George Kirsh and James Paterson, Owners

History: There is limited information for this resource and there are only two years of newspaper articles about it. The Palace Theatre was located at 531 Campbell Street on the corner of Walker Street. Campbell Street has been renamed twice; first to 9th street and then to James Brown Boulevard. George Kirsch, a Greek businessman, owned the Palace Theatre and James Patterson was the equipment manager/owner. According to a 1922 article in the *Augusta Herald*, there were two Palace Theatres in the same location owned by Kirsch and Patterson. The original theater supposedly opened in 1913 and the building standing today opened circa 1922 (Floyd 1922). However, the earliest located newspaper mention of this theater is from 1920.

Between 1921 and 1922, advertisements for the Palace Theatre included movies, boxing contests, and vaudeville acts such as the Young and Dooley Jazz Babies and Arthur Bruce Players. One of the boxing advertisements mentions reserved seats for white people and vaudeville attractions as well. Two fires occurred between 1921 and 1922. While the 1921 fire was an accident caused by a tossed cigarette, the 1922 fire was declared arson. Police suspected the stage manager, Joe Rhymie, and detained him. Once the fire was extinguished, investigators discovered hay and cloth sacks stuffed between the seats and strewn around the piano in the orchestra section.

It is unclear as to when the Palace Theatre ceased operating as a theater, but the building continued to be used in a variety of ways. Red Star Restaurant operated as this location and doubled as a restaurant and hotel from the 1950s to the 1970s. According to an article housed by the *Augusta Chronicles* Archives, "Red Star was a popular and classy place for Black people to hangout during segregation." Black entertainers also stayed in the hotel when they came to town (*Augusta Amusements* 2010). A 1969 advertisement for James Brown states that patrons could purchase tickets for his show at the Red Star Restaurant (*Augusta Amusements* 2010). The property was abandoned for quite some time. Based on Google Streetview, the building underwent a full renovation between 2007 and 2012.


INCENDIARY FIRE

At Palace Theatre,, Says Chief Reynolds

THE LOSS ABOUT $800

Say Sacks and Hay Piled Between Seats

Joe Rhymie, stage manager of the Palace theatre is being detained by the Augusta detectives for an investigation in connection with the fire. Others who were placed under arrest were released from custody after a searching investigation by the detectives.

Article about Arson (Source: *Banner Herald*)

Importance to the Chitlin' Circuit: The Palace Theatre played a role in the early parts of the Chitlin' Circuit as a vaudeville venue that also hosted musical acts. Once this building ceased operating as a theater, it went on to continue to serve Black Augustans in the realm of music by being a safe location for Black entertainers to stay for the night, a gathering place for people during segregation, and serving as a ticket selling location for different Black performances in Augusta through the years.

#17 Morton Theatre

Region 5

Location: 195 W Washington Street in Athens

Dates of Operations: 1910-1973; 1993-present

Owner/managers: Monroe Bowers "Pink" Morton, Owner

Photograph of Drugstore Inside Theater (Source: Morton Theater)

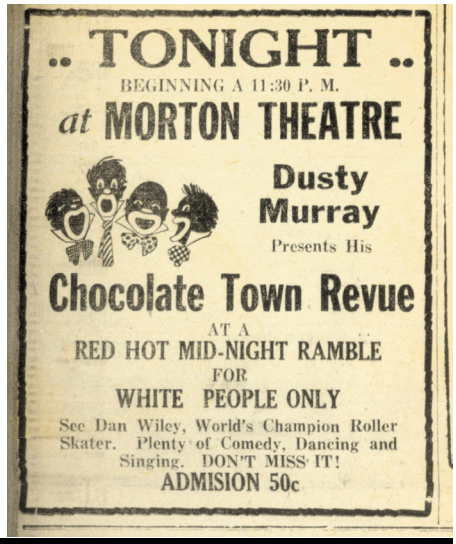
History: Monroe Morton, a local Black businessman opened the Morton Theatre in 1910 for about $2,715 (Downtown Athens 2025). Morton designed the building to host various businesses on the first floor and the theater to encompass the rest of the building. Some of the businesses that operated in the retail space included the office of Dr. Ida Hiram, the first state licensed Black female dentist, and the E.D. Harris Drug Store, Athens' first Black-owned drug store (Bridgers 2010).

When the Morton Theatre opened, it was announced as "the new [C]olored play house" showing the Whitman Sisters with tickets ranging from 10 to 30 cents (Rowe 1910). Between 1911 and 1914, Morton hosted performances by the Dandy Dixie Minstrels, The Brooks Smith Players, and the Black Patti Musical Comedy Company. In 1912, Booker Washington's Institute's (Tuskeegee) band came up from Alabama to perform for the Athens mayor and city council members at the Morton (*Athens Banner* 1912). An unnamed show packed the house in 1913 and was described as "one of the largest audiences that ever witnessed a performance." The 10-person cast put on such a show that "at times, the applause was almost deafening (*Athens Banner* 1913)."

Towards the end of World War I, Morton Theatre became a meeting place for Black Athenians to learn about ways to support the troops and learn ways to take care of themselves at home. The Red Cross hosted several meetings at the theater and staff donated money to the Red Cross cause in 1917. There were also meetings teaching locals how to conserve food. On July 4, 1918, there was a "Patriotic Celebration" Program at Morton Theatre. Black Athenians attended to have a good time, but also to learn about how to raise and save food, learn food regulations, and see how they can help the troops win the war. Also in 1918, the theater underwent its first renovation which included painting the interior beige and adding pressed metal to the ceiling (Morton Theatre 2025).

The 1920s and 1930s saw continued success for the Morton. In 1922, Donna Terressa performed with the Mystery Revue People in a "classy" vaudeville show that was billed as the biggest show of the season. The advertisement calls the show clean, moral, and refined. It even mentions an electrified element (*Athens Republique* 1922). In 1926, there was a dance contest to see who could do the Charleston the best. Students of the Union Baptist Institute performed "China Silk," an opera, at the Morton in 1930 (*Banner Herald* 1930). In 1934, there was a 22-round boxing match featuring an all-Black fight card. There was a section designated for whites only for this event (*Banner Herald* 1934). This boxing match was not the only event hosted by the Morton that allowed white patronage.

Theater Postcard (Source: Thomas County Historical Society)


.. TONIGHT ..
BEGINNING A 11:30 P. M.
at MORTON THEATRE
Dusty Murray
Presents His
Chocolate Town Revue
AT A
RED HOT MID-NIGHT RAMBLE
FOR
WHITE PEOPLE ONLY
See Dan Wiley, World's Champion Roller Skater. Plenty of Comedy, Dancing and Singing. DON'T MISS IT!
ADMISION 50c

1930 Midnight Ramble Advertisement (Source: Thomas County Historical Society)

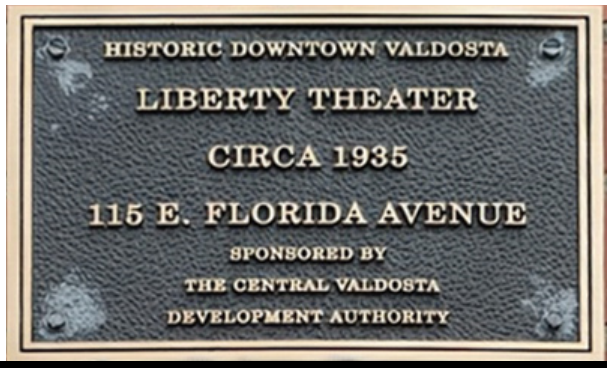
Throughout the early 1930s the Morton Theatre hosted several midnight rambles. Midnight rambles are events at Black theaters or clubs that occur at midnight for white spectators. Some midnight rambles at the Morton included Dusty Murray and his Chocolate Town Revue, the Dixie Brevities, and John Henderson's Brown Skin Models.

The second renovation for Morton Theatre took place in the 1930s as well in which a projection booth replaced the original upper-level gallery. Sometime later, a fire broke out in the projection room and the Fire Marshall ordered the theatre, but not the retail spaces to shut down (Morton Theatre 2025). The building remained in the Morton family until the 1970s and businesses operated out of the first floor. During the 1980s, Athenians worked together to reignite interest in the building and raise funds to restore it. The Athens-Clarke County Unified Government took over ownership of the building in 1991 and reopened the theatre in 1993 (Morton Theatre 2025).

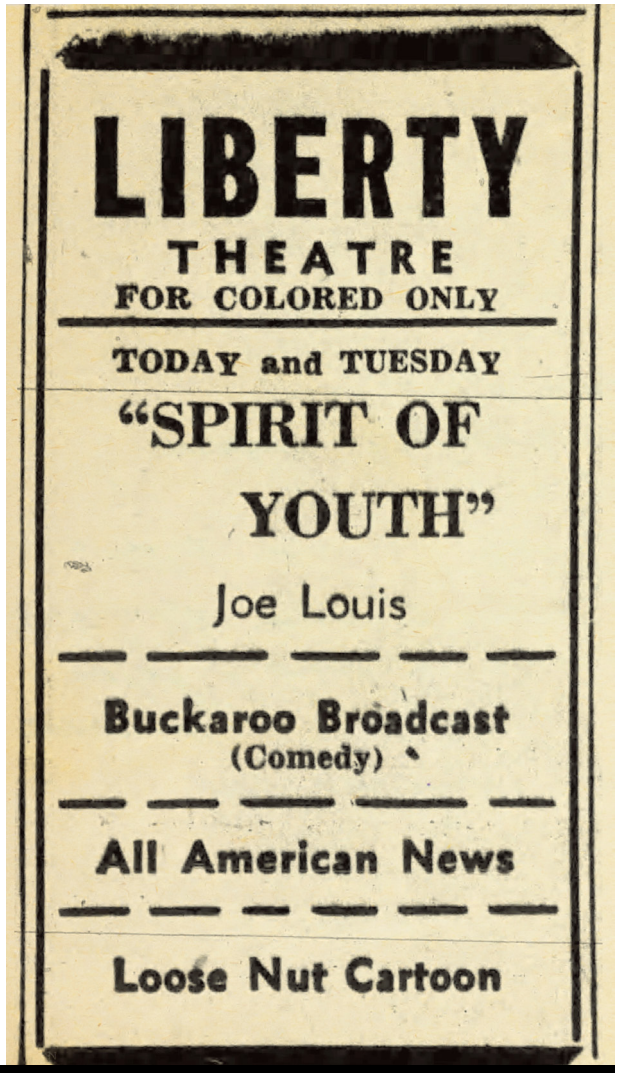
Importance to the Chitlin' Circuit: The Morton Theatre is important to the Chitlin' Circuit as an early theater that hosted a variety of shows including vaudeville acts, live music, movies, and boxing matches. It also served as a meeting place for Athenians to gather and learn about ways they could help troops and prepare for tough times on the home front. The Morton building also served as a Black business center in Athens with a variety of businesses that operated out of it.

#51 Liberty Theater (Valdosta)

Region 11



Historic Sign (Source: Historic Downtown Valdosta)



1946 "Spirit of Youth" Advertisement (Source: The *Valdosta Daily Times*, 1946)

Location: 115 East Florida Avenue, Valdosta

Dates of Operations: 1940-1955

Owner/managers: Roy E. Martin, Owner; J.A. Cooey, Manager; Mrs. C.C. Bowen, manager

History: While several sources record 1935 as the opening year of the Liberty Theater, there are mentions of events taking place at a Liberty Theater as early as 1928 (C.C. Brantley 1928). Additionally, a 1940 newspaper article advertises the opening of "the new Liberty Theater, an exclusively Negro Theater." The advertisement continues by saying a dance hall (called the Casino) was constructed on the side of the theater and that a good picture will be shown and a popular orchestra will play the music for the opening dance (Wilson 1940). Both the new and old Liberty Theaters were owned by Roy E. Martin Sr., the owner of the Martin Theater chain in Georgia. J.A. Cooey served as manager for at least three Martin Theaters including the Liberty (*Associated Press* 1941b).

Six months after the Liberty Theater opened, a fire broke out in the adjoining Casino club. The theater was not harmed and shows continued as scheduled (*Associated Press* 1940). In March of 1941, a film titled "Valdosta in Reelife" featured both Liberty theaters among many other locations around town (*Associated Press* 1941a). Between 1943 and 1945, the Boy Scouts and 4-H girls hosted paper drives to assist in World War II efforts. Paper was collected and stored at the old Liberty Theater and then shipped to the nation's mill to be repurposed. Also, during this time period, there is no mention of the Liberty Theater on Florida Avenue, just the old Liberty Theater. In 1946, the *Valdosta Daily Times* announced the re-opening of the Liberty Theater on Florida Avenue with a showing of the "Spirit of Youth" (*Associated Press* 1946). Although the newspaper acknowledged that the club section of the theater closed years prior, no reasoning was given as to when or why it temporarily closed.

The Lowndes County Sheriff's Safety Patrol hosted a free movie day for their staff in March of 1949. On this day, law enforcement members attended a business meeting in the morning and then the Black staff went to see a double feature matinee at the Liberty Theater while the white staff went to the Ritz Theater in town to see their movies (*Valdosta Daily Times* 1949). Later that month, Dasher High School's 'Y' clubs hosted a percentage day at Liberty Theater. Movie goers could choose from two qualifying movies, "Big City Blues" starring Louis Jordan and "Hagan Girl" featuring Shirley Temple. A percentage of all proceeds collected from tickets sold for these two showings were given back to the students to help fund their trip to a district conference in Savannah. In addition to being a local movie theater, this location also hosted musical performances by B.B. King and Ella Fitzgerald according to Malia Thomas at WTXL in Valdosta (Thomas 2024). It is unclear as to when the theater officially ceased operations; however, part of the building was demolished in 2024. There is still a food pantry (Quola) operating in the other part of the building (Thomas 2024).

Importance to the Chitlin' Circuit: Liberty Theater was important to the Chitlin' Circuit as one of the few larger Black venues available to residents of Valdosta and the nearby area. Additionally, it was more than a theater. There was the Casino dance hall within the building and a café beside it as well. Patrons received a range of entertainment and recreation at this location.

Liberty Theater Rendering (Courtesy: Valdosta Heritage Foundation)

#50 Ritz Theater

Region 10

Original Neon Sign (Source: Thomas County Historical Society)

1960 Image of Jackson Street (Source: Need Source)

Location: 323 W Jackson Street in Thomasville

Dates of Operations: 1935- mid 1960s, Demolished in 1976

Owner/managers: Nat Williams Sr.

History: The Ritz Theater was a Black movie theater and music hall in the Bottom, the Black business district of Thomasville. Artists such as Jimmie Coleman and the Suspenders, and the Fort Valley singers performed on the Ritz stage. According to WTXL news, the Ritz was founded by Nat Williams Sr. of the Interstate Enterprises movie theater company. The Ritz Theater acted as the main entertainment venue for the Black residents of Thomasville until around the time of desegregation. The building was demolished in 1976 (Tarboush 2024). In 2017, the city of Thomasville constructed the Ritz Amphitheater close to the theaters' former location to honor the music heritage of the Ritz Theater.

Importance to the Chitlin' Circuit: Unlike many theaters across the state at this time, there is no record of vaudeville acts performing at the Ritz Theater, simply movies and musical acts. Additionally, this location is important to the Chitlin' Circuit because it is the only identified venue in Thomasville and one of the few locations in Region 10, Southwest Georgia that yielded information during research.

#24 Liberty Theatre (Columbus) Region 8

1946 Swing Session Revue Advertisement (Source: *Ledger-Enquirer*, 1946)

Location: 813 8th Avenue in Columbus

Dates of Operations: 1925-1974; 1997-Present

Owner/managers: Roy E. Martin, Owner

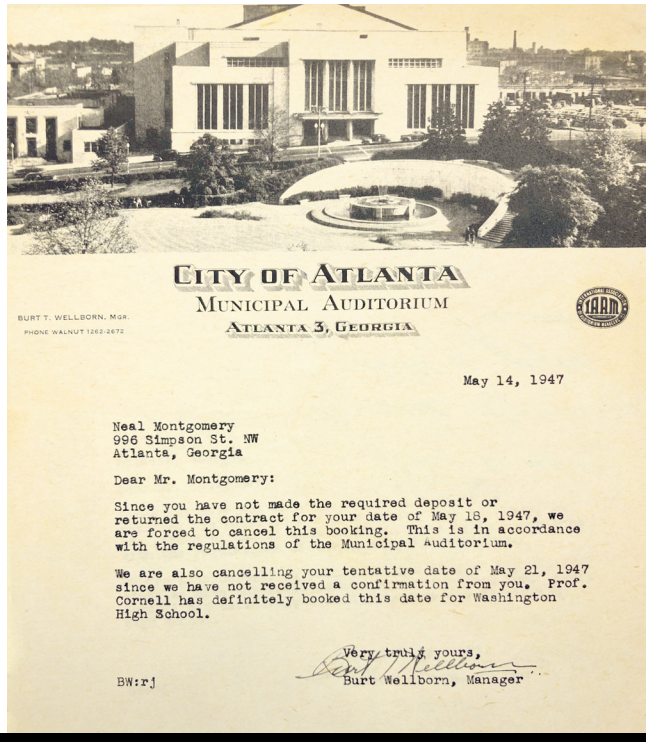
History: Similar to the Liberty Theatre in Valdosta, this Liberty Theatre was also a member of the Martin Theater chain and was opened by Roy E. Martin. At the time of its opening, in 1925, the Liberty was the only theater in Columbus that Black patrons could attend. Inside the brick building were 600 seats including a balcony, making this the largest seating capacity in Columbus for a movie theater. During the silent movie era, local bands provided the soundtrack to the films. In addition to movies, the Liberty also held vaudeville, minstrel, and live music shows with performances from artists such as Bessie Smith, Marian Anderson, Butterbeans and Susie, and Columbus' own Ma Rainey. Due to integration and a decline in road shows, business at the Liberty Theatre waned, and by 1974 the theater closed. The Martin Theater conglomerate donated the Liberty to the William H. Spencer High School alumni group called the Owlettes. Due to a resurgence of public interest, the Liberty Theatre reopened in 1997 (Liberty Theatre 2025). As of 2024, the building was closed for renovation, and its centennial was celebrated in April of 2025.

Importance to the Chitlin' Circuit: The Liberty Theatre is the longest running theater in Columbus to cater to Black audiences since opening. Upon opening, this theater had the largest seating capacity in the city. It is said that Harlem Renaissance greats such as Ella Fitzgerald, Ethel Waters, Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington, and Lena Horne performed at the Liberty Theatre. Additionally, it acted as a multi-purpose venue where people could see movies, musical acts, and vaudeville shows.

1950s Exterior Image (Source: Cinematreasures.com)

#10 Atlanta Municipal Auditorium

Region 3



CITY OF ATLANTA
MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM
ATLANTA 3, GEORGIA

BURT T. WELLBORN, MGR.
PHONE WALNUT 1262-2672

May 14, 1947

Neal Montgomery
996 Simpson St. NW
Atlanta, Georgia

Dear Mr. Montgomery:

Since you have not made the required deposit or returned the contract for your date of May 18, 1947, we are forced to cancel this booking. This is in accordance with the regulations of the Municipal Auditorium.

We are also cancelling your tentative date of May 21, 1947 since we have not received a confirmation from you. Prof. Cornell has definitely booked this date for Washington High School.

Very truly yours,
Burt Wellborn, Manager

BW:rj

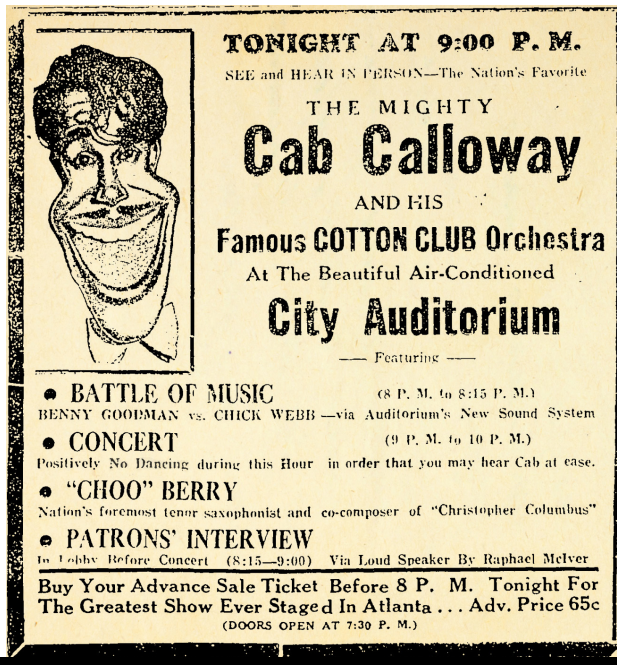
Atlanta Municipal Auditorium Letterhead
(Source: Auburn Avenue Research Library, James Neal Montgomery Collection)

Location: 30 Courtland Street in Atlanta

Dates of Operations: 1909-1979

Owner/managers: City of Atlanta, Owner; John Robert Dillon, Architect

History: Although it started as a concert and performance venue for white residents of Atlanta, Black audiences were allowed on certain days or in certain sections early on. The auditorium was renovated in 1938. A fire broke out in 1940 partially burning the building, but it re-opened in 1943 (Rogers 1970). Renowned booking agents/ regional promoters such as B.B. Beamon and James Neal Montgomery had partnerships with the Atlanta Municipal Auditorium. In the 1950s, there were several instances of racial uncertainty regarding the auditorium. In 1951, the auditorium denied Black patrons front door entrance although they had allowed Black spectators front door entrance for at least 20 years (Montgomery 1951). Also in 1951, Josephine Baker vowed that she would not perform at the auditorium if the audience was segregated. The city agreed to not enforce segregation in the auditorium for



Cab Calloway Advertisement
(Source: *Atlanta Daily World*, 1938)

her show (*Associated Press* 1951). In 1956, Nat King Cole refused to perform or even travel to Atlanta since it was so close to Birmingham where he was attacked on stage the week prior. Nat King Cole said that "Atlanta is in the middle of a hot bed about segregation just like Birmingham." As a result, the auditorium refunded hundreds of tickets (*Atlanta Daily World* 1956). The auditorium was sold to Georgia State University in 1979.

Importance to the Chitlin' Circuit: Although this was a large city-owned facility, and was not the typical club, theater, or juke joint associated with the Chitlin' Circuit, this auditorium hosted larger audiences than other venue types could. Black promoters hosted events at auditoriums like this one and often reversed the typical seating arrangement for interracial yet segregated venues in the South. In large auditoriums, Black patrons regularly had access to the floor and were able to enjoy performances by Black artists from the front row. Additionally, some more famous cross-over artists that required larger venues performed exclusively at large city-run auditoriums like this one. The Atlanta Municipal Auditorium only hosted established artists. Musicians getting started in their careers would not have been able to perform here. Lastly, city-run auditoriums like this one were able to host Black and white audiences simultaneously while still maintaining segregation standards.

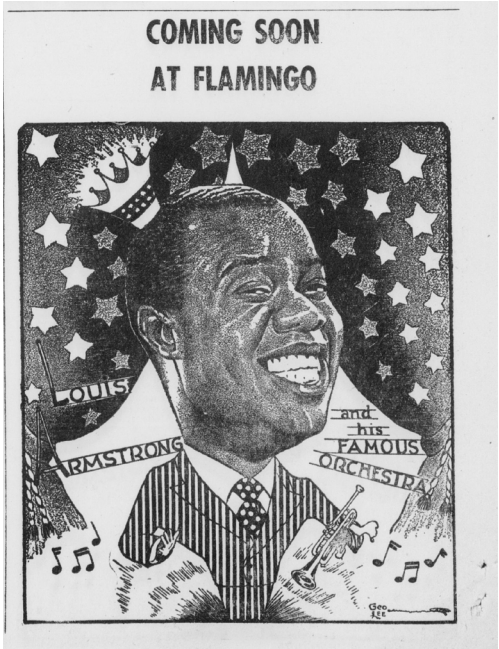
Circa 1942 Segregated Audience (Source: Performance and City Auditorium, James Neal Montgomery collection, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System)

#54

The Flamingo

Region 12

1956 Kelsan Afro Affairs Advertisement (Source: *The Herald*, 1956)



1957 Louis Armstrong Advertisement (Source: *The Herald*, 1957)

Location: 1031 W Gwinnett Street in Savannah

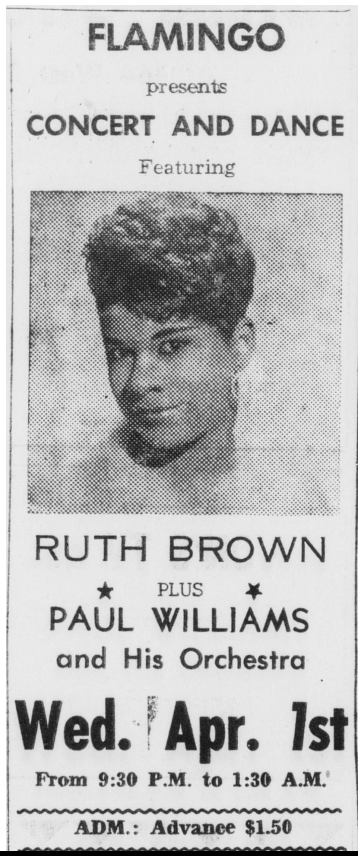
Dates of Operations: 1956 - mid-1960s

Owner/managers: Bennie Harvey, Manager; O.E. Traverse, Assistant Manager

History: The Flamingo ballroom and restaurant opened in January 1956 with a musical performance of Buddy Johnson and his orchestra. A newspaper article about the new business states that the building was constructed of steel reinforced concrete and had a 10,000 square foot dance floor covered with asphalt tile. The dance floor was the largest in the city and could support 2,000 dancers. Pink paint tinted the interior walls while the ceiling was white. Some fancy amenities at the time included air conditioning, florescent lighting, and built in sound amplifiers. The restaurant offered 24-hour food service and no alcohol (*Savannah Tribune* 1956). During the opening year alone, the Flamingo hosted artists such as Count Basie, the Jimmy Wiley Band, Little Richard, Joe Tex, Camille Howard, and many more. In the later years, Ruth Brown, Rocky Hodges, and Louis Armstrong performed at the Flamingo. The Flamingo also offered dance showcases by the Kelsan Afro Affairs, Afro Cuban Dancers, and "Veda-the exotic dancer."

In addition to being a concert venue, local groups, clubs, and schools hosted events at the Flamingo. The Alfred E. Beach High School held their senior prom at the Flamingo ballroom (*The Savannah Tribune* 1956c). A children's gospel group called the Rosebud Singers hosted a gospel hour at the Flamingo (*The Savannah Tribune* 1956a). Lloyd Price and his band had a themed party where guests were encouraged to wear Bermuda shorts (Travers 1956). In 1957, the South Atlantic Golfers Association sponsored a giveaway gathering at the Flamingo (Walters 1957). Flamingo management in conjunction with local organizations put on events for charity. In 1956, the Women's committee of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis raised $1,410 for the March of Dimes by doing a King and Queen contest with the Flamingo (*The Savannah Tribune* 1956b). In 1963, the Flamingo ballroom, local PTA and a branch of the Ancient Free Masons (A.F.M.) partnered together to host the Polio Twist Party, an awareness dance to for Type 1 Polio (Williams 1963). According to a 2015 article in the Savannah Tribune, the Flamingo closed in the mid-1960s (*Savannah Tribune* 2015). This

1958 Clyde McPhatter Advertisement (Source: *The Herald*, 1958)



1959 Ruth Brown Advertisement (Source: *The Herald*, 1959)

corroborates with the fact that there are no newspaper articles about this location after 1963 and construction for Interstate 16 began the same time and decimated neighborhoods that serviced this location.

Importance to the Chitlin' Circuit: The Flamingo was important to the Chitlin' Circuit for a variety of reasons. Many famous groups performed here in the approximate 10 years it operated. The Flamingo also allowed local bands to perform, and it was a venue that anyone could use to host their event. Although the Flamingo started with a bang and seemed to be consistently doing financially well, it closed around the same time as other locations due to an interstate going through the neighborhood around it in the early-to-mid-1960s.

#2 Idle Hour

Region 1

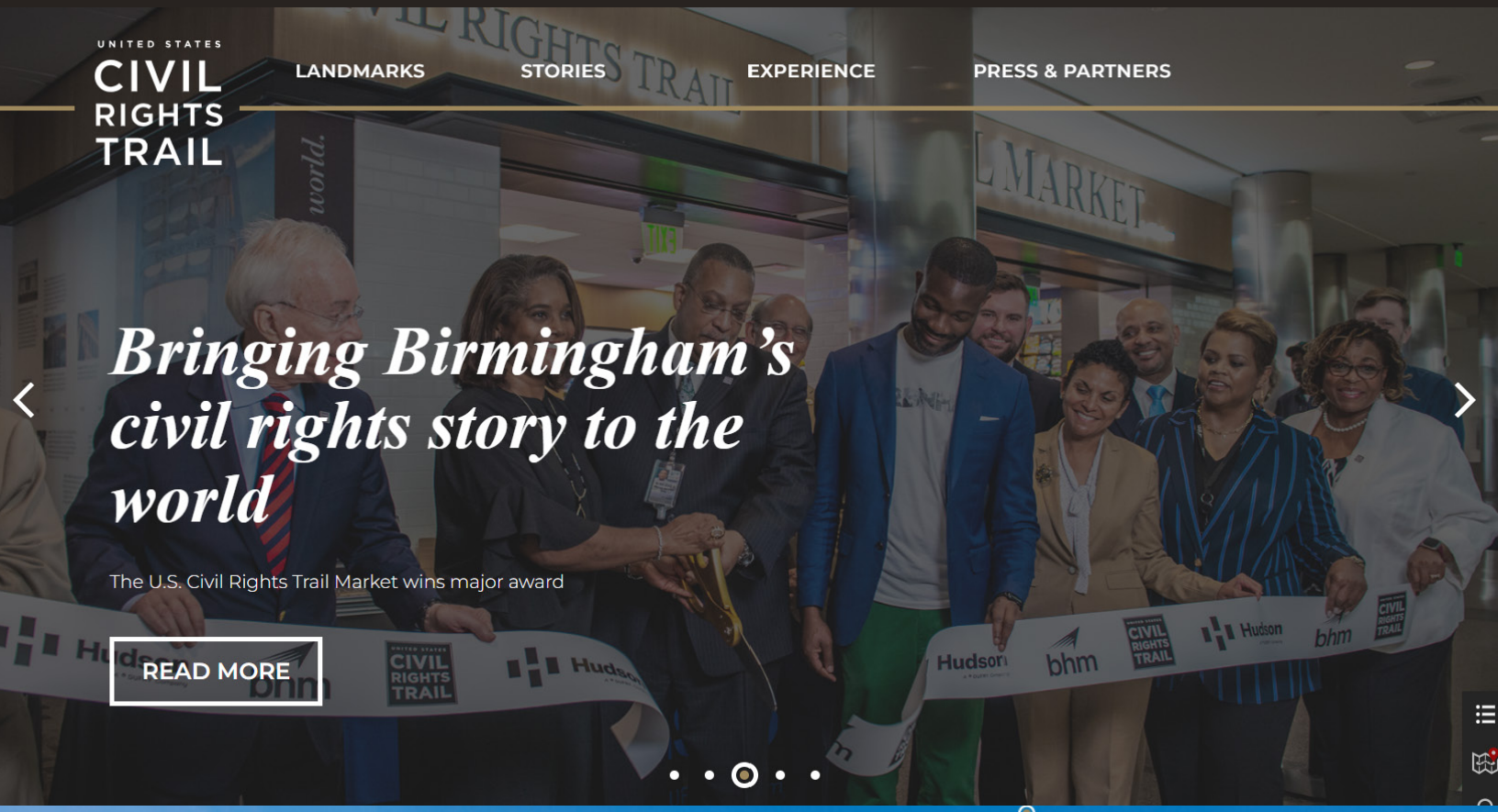
Location: Moran Lake Road in Rome

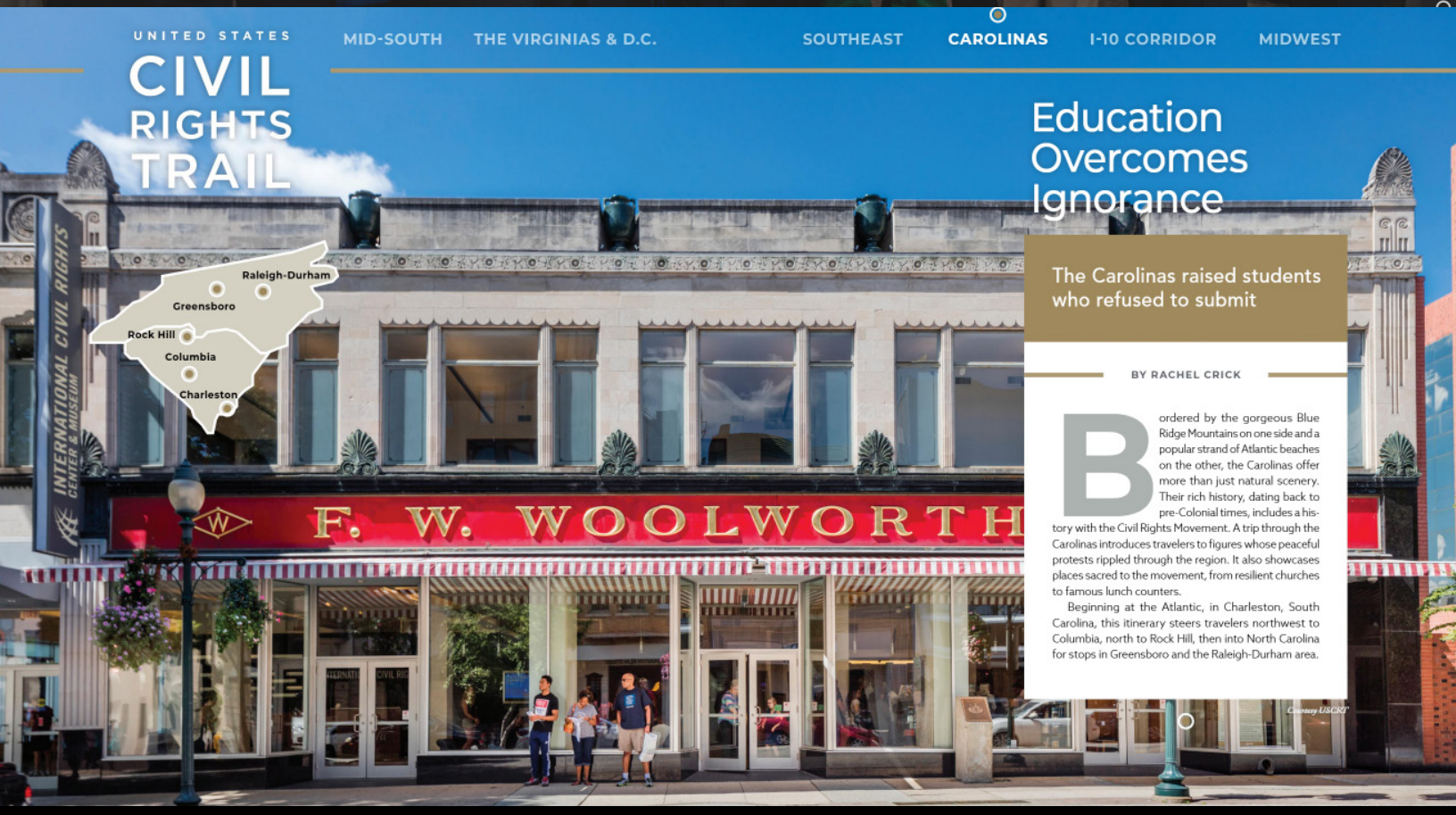
Dates of Operations: 1956 - mid-1960s

Owner/managers: Clifford Thomas and Johnny Flood, Owners

History: Idle Hour was a club/restaurant in Rome that specialized in fried chicken and good music. When Idle Hour opened, Floyd County was a dry county, so legally, Idle Hour could not serve alcohol. However, the owners of Idle Hour found a work-around by allowing guests to bring in one quart of their own drinks and store them in a locker. Then a waitress would go to said locker and bring the guest their drink in a plastic cup. Idle Hour was in a concrete block building , which operated without indoor toilets for many years. Although club hours were flexible, the doors typically opened around 6:00 or 7:00 pm and stayed open until around 3:00 am from Friday to Sunday. Wednesdays and Thursdays were exclusively for dancing. Some well-known artists performed at Idle Hour including Little Richard, Billy "Prince of the Blues" Wright, Big Maybelle, and James Brown. Following integration, business declined at Idle Hour and it eventually closed its doors in the mid-1960s (Man 2004).

Importance to the Chitlin' Circuit: Idle Hour is important to the Chitlin' Circuit as a representative of a smaller venue in a smaller town. This location shows that musicians visited a variety of locals and venue types.





Images from the U.S. Civil Rights Trail Website, Captured in 2025

CHAPTER FIVE | RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Existing Heritage Trails Review

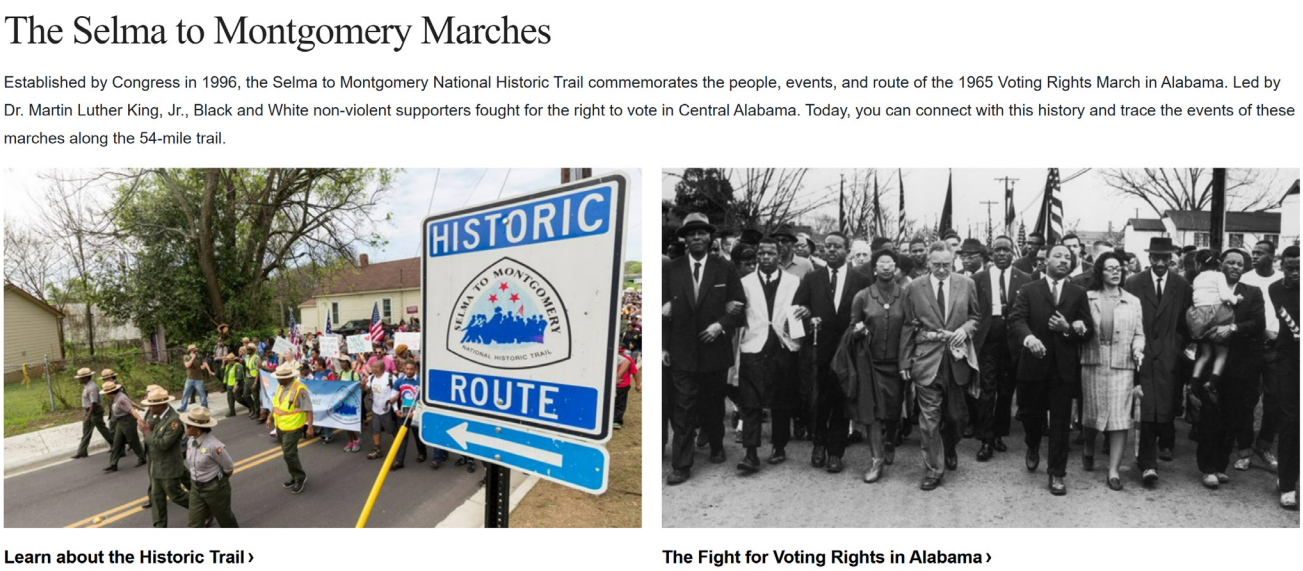
A review of existing African American heritage trails was conducted for this project to help inform recommendations for the future planning of the Chitlin' Circuit Heritage Trail. The heritage trails reviewed included the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, the U.S. Civil Rights Trail, the Columbus, Georgia Black Heritage Trail, and the Bartow Cartersville African American Heritage Trail.

The review of each heritage trail is summarized below and followed by recommendations for the planning of the Chitlin' Circuit Heritage Trail. Each review identifies when the trail was established, how the trail locations are physically marked, and how the trail locations are interpreted, through both physical signage as well as digital interpretation.

Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail

Authorized by Congress in 1996, the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail is a 54-mile trail following U.S. Highway 80 at the Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church in Selma and ending at the Alabama Capitol Building in Montgomery. Commemorating the historic Voting Rights March from Selma to Montgomery, a five-day march beginning March 21, 1965. The trail includes recreation areas, three interpretation centers, the Lowndes Interpretive Center, and interpretive centers in Selma and Montgomery.

The trail is under the purview of the National Park Service (NPS) and a NPS website devoted to the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail provides information about how visitors can plan for visiting the interpretation centers and various locations along the route.



The NPS Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail Website, Images Capture in 2025

Features of the physical trail include:

- Roadside signage marking the historic route with directional arrows
- Three interpretation centers, with two at the beginning and end of the trail.

Features of the website include:

- Visitor information for planning a trip to the sites along the march and interpretation centers.
- Historical information and timeline about the historic March.
- Information about 8 places on the trail, from the Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church to the Edmund Pettus Bridge and campsites where marchers were allowed to rest.
- A Storymap about the historic march with location specific information tied to maps.
- Multimedia presentations including a 22-minute documentary featuring interviews of march participants.
- Opportunities for group tours and volunteering.

U.S. Civil Rights Trail

Launched in 2018, the U.S. Civil Rights Trail extends from Topeka, Kansas to Wilmington, Delaware to Sarasota, Florida. It is defined as a collection of churches, courthouses, schools, museums, and other landmarks that played a pivotal role in advancing social justice during the 1950s and 1960s.

The origins of the heritage trail began in 2014 when President Barack Obama called for the NPS to identify civil rights sites for the UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and in 2016, Georgia State University created a list of 60 civil rights landmarks for potential inclusion. State tourism departments from across the Southeast joined to identify additional sites and began organizing the heritage trail, launching the website in 2018. Currently, the trail includes over 100 sites in 15 states.

The U.S. Civil Rights Trail Marketing Alliance and a review committee composed of historians, academics, and travel professionals meet annually and review applications for new sites wishing to be members of the trail.

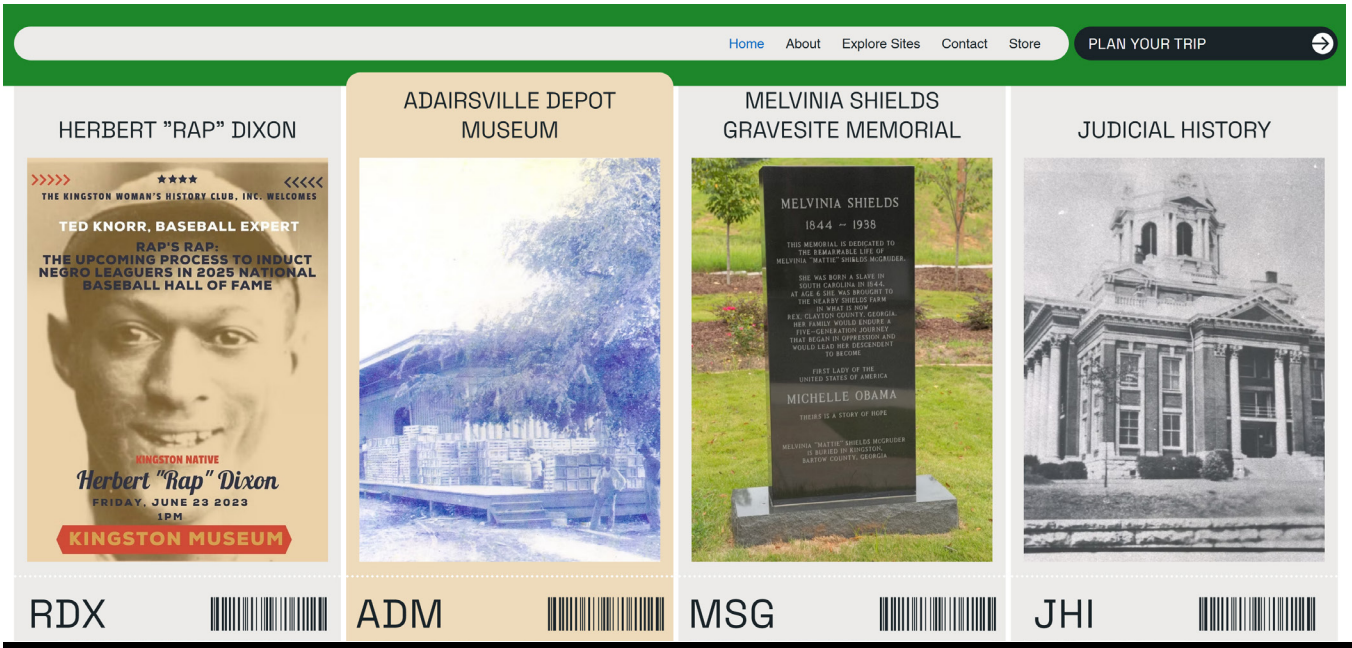
Features of the physical trail include:

- There are no signs marking individual sites related to the U.S. Civil Rights Trail, all designations live in the digital realm. There are no separate interpretations provided at the locations outside the interpretations provided by whatever state or federal agency, such as the NPS, that has oversight over the site.

Features of the website include:

- Organized by Landmarks, Stories, and Experience.
- Interactive map and itinerary planner where user can explore by region or state.
- Divided into regions: Mid-South, Virginias and D.C., The Southeast, The Carolinas, Interstate 10 Corridor, The Midwest.
- Multimedia: Videos with oral history interviews and 23 podcast episodes focusing on pivotal moments during the Civil Rights era.

- Annual updated travel guides featuring profiles on important people associated with the history of Civil Rights movement and places along the trail, highlighting local restaurants and other sites along the trail route
- Playlist via Spotify entitled “Music of the Movement,” featuring songs by Otis Redding, Marvin Gaye, and James Brown.
- Interactive timeline where the user can follow the trail through time, beginning in 1951 with Robert Russa Moton High School in Farmville, Virginia to 1968 when President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1968.
- Link to purchase The Official United States Civil Rights Trail Book.



Individual Sites Recognized on the Bartow-Cartersville African American Heritage Trail Website, Images Captured in 2025

Columbus, Georgia Black Heritage Trail

The Columbus, Georgia Black Heritage Trail was designated a National Recreation Trail (NRT) in 2000. The trail has 30 sites identified with African American history in Columbus, including the Ma Rainey Home, Liberty Theatre, Porterdale Cemetery, and the First African Baptist Church.

Features of the physical trail include:

- Black Heritage Trail markers at each location with a number corresponding to a map included with each marker.

Features of the website include:

- There is no single website devoted to the heritage trail, but a webpage on the Explore Georgia website includes a profile on the trail and highlights six of the stops and the American Trails website includes the list of all 30 sites to facilitate a self-guided tour.

Bartow-Cartersville African American Heritage Trail

Established by the Cartersville-Bartow County Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Bartow-Cartersville African American Heritage Trail originated from a 2017 Georgia Humanities grant to create a walking tour of African American history in Cartersville. The walking tour quickly expanded to include 10 driving destinations.

Features of the physical trail include:

- Black Heritage Trail markers at each location with a number corresponding to a map included with each marker.
- Brochure including map and site descriptions available at each trail location, the Euharlee Welcome Center & History Museum, and welcome centers in the Adairsville and Cartersville depots and Clarence Brown Conference Center.

Features of the website include:

- Multimedia website featuring embedded videos that highlight the people and places to learn about along the trail.
- Individual profiles for each of the 21 sites covering places and themes such as African American Real Estate Developers; the Service Trades: Blacksmiths, Draymen, and Barbers; and Georgia Washington Carver Park.
- Website includes a store with branded t-shirts.

Recommendations for the Development of the Heritage Trail

Review of the four heritage trails listed above gives guidance for the direction the Chitlin' Circuit Heritage Trail may take in physical markers and digital presence. The model set forth by the U.S. Civil Rights Trail is an excellent example of maximizing use of digital and multimedia to effectively capture the dynamic nature of a heritage trail and covers many possibilities that would lend well to the music and vibrancy of the Chitlin' Circuit era. The Bartow-Cartersville African American Heritage Trail is an effective example of a local heritage trail with an engaging website that also highlights how branding the trail, like the U.S. Civil Rights Trail, can translate into books, podcasts, playlists, and even apparel. Some of the trails reviewed did not have physical markers at each location but had a digital presence.

Recommendations to consider for planning the Chitlin' Circuit Heritage Trail were gleaned from the four examples above, along with the guidance from the NTHP's Seven Steps to Plan a Heritage Trail and take into consideration an organizational framework to undertake the work in suggested phases, which may lend well to grant cycles.

According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, there are three main types of heritage trails.

- A basic trail includes a listing of sites either on a website or in a printed brochure.
- An interpreted trail provides additional site information and historic interpretation in the form of guidebooks, audio tours, and signage.

- A full-service trail also has wayfinding signage along the route, visitor centers, special events, and tours.

Phase I: Establish Trail Planning Team and Make Foundational Decisions

- Consider people and organizations that would want to partner on the heritage trail planning and development and form a planning team.
- Consider the trail type desired. Based on the history of the Chitlin' Circuit and the dynamism of the music, artists, and venues, an interpreted trail would be a good fit for consideration.
- Choose stories and the places that tell those stories- these are your trail sites.
- Choose a theme or themes that emerge from the historic context contained within this document that help direct how storytelling throughout the trail is portrayed.

Phase II: Design of Signage and Website

- Once trail sites and interpretive themes are chosen, conduct any further research needed to tell the site stories.
- Plan for a strong digital presence: what organization can host the trail website? Suggest finding grant sources for having a website professionally developed. Websites should be able to host multimedia content, including music and video files.
- Design should be thematic as well- from website, to brochure, to physical signage, the design should be united.
- Can physical signs be used at the selected sites? What type of permissions are needed to install interpretive signs?
- If signs are used, create text and design signage.

Phase III: Launch Trail

- Create launch plan, along with communication plan considering press releases, in person ceremonies at sites, and engagement with project partners.
- Have website launch and signage fabricated and installed.

The Chitlin' Circuit history can be told in many ways, and a few specific ideas to consider include:

- If oral history interviews are conducted, consider video recording them to produce quality videos that can be cut into clips for website use;
- Create a playlist housed on the website;
- Consider the use of QR codes for the physical signs so visitors can listen to music or interview clips while at a site;
- Consider branding sites by region and designating region-specific colors to design elements that will be displayed through the website and signage;
- Consider creating a podcast series to host on the website.

Summary of Identified Venues

As a result of the research conducted for this historic context, 89 locations in Georgia that served as venues during the Vaudeville and Chitlin' Circuit eras were identified (Appendix). Of that number, 20 have an unknown status (22.5%), 40 are non-extant (44.9%), and 29 are extant (32.6%). The regions with the greatest number of identified sites are the following:

- Region 12- Coastal- Savannah (23.6%)
- Region 6- Middle Georgia- Macon (23.6%)
- Region 3- Atlanta (20.2%)
- Region 7- Central Savannah River Area- Savannah (9%)

Regions 4 (Three Rivers) and 9 (Heart of Georgia Altamaha) have no representation, and Regions 1 (Northwest Georgia), 2 (Georgia Mountains), 5 (Northeast Georgia), 8 (River Valley), 10 (Southwest Georgia), and 11 (Southern Georgia) all have 6 or less venues.

Recommendations for Further Research

As plans for the heritage trail become more known and sites are selected, further research may be necessary to identify more venues specific to the regions listed above where less is readily known about Black performance venues in those areas. Additionally, further research into juke joint locations is needed if the trail is to include representation of that form of venue besides the House of Blue Lights in Athens. There are online sources that identify the Get Away in Zebulon as a juke joint but researchers visiting the Get Away for this project spoke to the owner's grandson who stated live music was not a part of the Get Away's history. The Georgia Music Hall of Fame Collection at the University of Georgia is another resource that may aid in the identification of important people and places associated with the circuit in Georgia, and it should be considered in future research endeavors.

Oral history interview projects will likely aid in this additional research to help fill in the gaps that archives can't fill to tell the stories of Black entertainment more effectively during the Vaudeville and Chitlin' Circuit eras in local communities that were not uncovered under the scope of this context report. Further local research and oral history interviews concentrating on regions 1, 2, 5, 8, 10, and 11, with particular attention to regions 4 and 9 with no identified venues, is recommended. Oral history interviews, if conducted, should be prioritized so those with knowledge can be identified and their memories captured. Because of the era of the circuits, those with firsthand experience and knowledge of the 1940s to 1960s should be sought and interviewed as a priority and those with second generation knowledge should also be considered for interviews. These interviews should be archived at a repository available to future researchers.

Conclusion

The Chitlin' Circuit Heritage Trail is an exciting opportunity to commemorate and celebrate the rich and vibrant history of Black music and performance in Georgia. The stories of the people and places that made this history- from Little Richard to Ma Rainey, from the Royal Peacock to the Morton Theatre- enrich our collective understanding of Black entrepreneurship, artistry, and resilience during racial segregation. This heritage trail will continue to amplify those stories and voices and encourage the preservation of the physical spaces that remain.

APPENDICES

(Source: Unidentified Coed Groups, James Neal Montgomery collection, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System)

Appendix 1. Identified Circuit Venues in Georgia

The following list of venues was compiled using information from historic newspapers, archival collections, and previously completed research. Though all the most well-known venues are included, the list likely only represents a fraction of the spaces used by performers on the Chitlin' Circuit and earlier segregated Black entertainment networks. It is important to note that some of the locations mentioned in the compiled list were mentioned in one source and not found anywhere else. Therefore, it is unclear if some of these locations actually existed or what purpose they served, but to avoid missing a potential venue, they were added. The venues are organized using the 12 Georgia Regional Commissions, with Regions 4 and 9 (Three Rivers and Heart of Georgia, Altamaha, respectively) lacking any identified spaces. Regions 3, 6, and 12 contain the largest concentrations of venues due to the availability of archival collections and historic newspapers from those parts of the state.

ALSO SEE MAP ON PAGES 72-73

GEORGIA'S REGIONAL COMMISSIONS

- REGION 1: NORTHWEST GEORGIA
- REGION 2: GEORGIA MOUNTAINS
- REGION 3: ATLANTA REGIONAL COMMISSION
- REGION 4: THREE RIVERS
- REGION 5: NORTHEAST GEORGIA
- REGION 6: MIDDLE GEORGIA
- REGION 7: CENTRAL SAVANNAH RIVER AREA
- REGION 8: RIVER VALLEY
- REGION 9: HEART OF GEORGIA ALTAMAHA
- REGION 10: SOUTHWEST GEORGIA
- REGION 11: SOUTHERN GEORGIA
- REGION 12: COASTAL

VENUE NAME	ADDRESS/ LOCATION	CITY	EXTANT OR NON-EXTANT	DATES OF OPERATION
REGION 1, NORTHWEST GEORGIA				
Carver Theater	Not Available	Rome	Non-Extant	Not Available
Idle Hour Club	Moran Lake Road	Rome	Non-Extant	1950s- Mid-1960s
Metropolitan Theater	500 block of N Broad St.	Rome	Non-Extant	4 years in the early 1900s
Mix Masters Club/Club Rural	Faced Kingston Hwy	Rome	Non-Extant	1940s
Romeo/ Georgian Theater	Rome 5 points	Rome	Non-Extant	Not Available
REGION 2, GEORGIA MOUNTAINS				
Bill's Rendezvous	332 Hughes Street	Toccoa	Non-Extant	1950s
REGION 3, ATLANTA REGIONAL COMMISSION				

VENUE NAME	ADDRESS/ LOCATION	CITY	EXTANT OR NON-EXTANT	DATES OF OPERATION
81 Theatre/Arcade Theatre	81 Decatur St.	Atlanta	Non-Extant	1909-1920 (Arcade) 1920s-1964 (81)
Airdrome Theatre	Not Available	Atlanta	Non-Extant	1910s
Atlanta Municipal Auditorium (now Dahlberg Hall at GSU)	30 Courtland Street	Atlanta	Extant	1909-present
Auburn Casino	185 Auburn Ave NE	Atlanta	Extant	1956-1968
Central Theater	14-16 Central Avenue	Atlanta	Non-Extant	1910s
Club Royale/Odd Fellows Building	228-250 Auburn Avenue	Atlanta	Extant	1930s
Dixie Theater	127 Decatur Street	Atlanta	Non-Extant	1910s
Famous Theatre	Decatur St	Atlanta	Non-Extant	1910s-1920s
Herndon Stadium	41 Sunset Ave NW	Atlanta	Extant	1948 - 2014
Luna Park Theatre	Decatur St	Atlanta	Non-Extant	1910s-1920s
Palm Garden Theatre	Glenwood Ave	Atlanta	Non-Extant	1910s
Paradise Theatre	Peters St	Atlanta	Non-Extant	1910s
Paschal's La Carrousel	830 Hunter Street (Currently Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr)	Atlanta	Extant	1961-1964
Poinciana/Morocco Lounge	145 Auburn Ave	Atlanta	Extant	1940s-1950s (Poinciana) 1956-1967 (Morocco Lounge)
Top Hat/Royal Peacock	185 Auburn Ave	Atlanta	Extant	1937-1949 (TopHat) 1949-1970s (Royal Peacock)
Sunset Casino/Magnolia Ballroom	Corner of Sunset Ave and Magnolia St NW	Atlanta	Non-Extant	1926- c.1945 (Sunset) 1947-1960s (Magnolia)
Vendome	10 Ivy Street (Currently Peachtree Center Avenue)	Atlanta	Non-Extant	1900s - ?
Waluhaje	239 West Lake Ave	Atlanta	Extant	1948- c.1965

VENUE NAME	ADDRESS/ LOCATION	CITY	EXTANT OR NON-EXTANT	DATES OF OPERATION
REGION 4, THREE RIVERS				
REGION 5, NORTHEAST GEORGIA				
Buffalo Club	Not Available	Athens	Not Available	1930s
House of Blue Light	1157 Barnett Shoals Road	Athens	Extant	1947-1970s
Maddox Center (Black VFW)	165 Magnolia St.	Athens	Extant	1947-1963
Morton Theatre	195 W Washington St	Athens	Extant	1909/1910-1973; 1993-present
Pastime Theatre	Broad St	Athens	Non-Extant	1910s
VFW Post 3910	136 Glenhaven	Athens	Extant	1944-present
REGION 6, MIDDLE GEORGIA				
Adam's Lounge	2732 Old Gray Hwy	Macon	Extant	1959-early 2000s
Blue Note	411 W Walton St	Milledgeville	Extant	1940s-late 1970s
Club 15	3108 Gray Hwy (south of PBS Printing)	East Macon	Non-Extant	1951-1970s
Club Trailway	Highway 22	Haddock	Not Available	1954-1957
Do-Drop In	814 Harrisburg Rd	Milledgeville	Non-Extant	1940s-1960s
Douglass Theatre	363 Broadway and 355 Broadway (Currently 355 Martin Luther King Blvd.)	Macon	Extant	1912-1971, 1997-present
Ebony Lounge	Ebony Lounge Road	Milledgeville	Non-Extant	1949-1980s
Macon City Auditorium	415 1st Street	Macon	Extant	1920s-present
Manhattan Club/ Manhattan Country Club	4114 GA-18	Clinton	Non-Extant	1940s
Moon Over Harlem	Fort Hill Street/ William Street intersection	Macon	Not Available	1940s

VENUE NAME	ADDRESS/ LOCATION	CITY	EXTANT OR NON-EXTANT	DATES OF OPERATION
Ocmulgee Park Pavilion	Riverside Drive	Macon	Non-Extant	1910s-1920s
Paradise Trail	500 Williams	Macon	Non-Extant	1941-1948
Rainbow Garden	Jeffersonville Road	Macon	Not Available	c. 1933- c. 1948
Roxy Theatre	445 Hazel Street	Macon	Extant	1949 - 1958
Savoy Ballroom	322 Demsey Avenue	Macon	Not Available	1940s
Shady Rest	Shady Rest Road	Milledgeville	Not Available	1940-1956
Southside Beach	322/332 Dempsey Avenue	Macon	Not Available	1943
The Cotton Club	1204 1/2 Broadway	Macon	Non-Extant	1941 - 1950
The Two Spot	221 Fifth Street	Macon	Non-Extant	1942-1963
Tip Top Inn	1004 Mitchell St	East Macon	Extant	1930s-1960
VFW Post 9709/Duke's Club	476 Poplar St	Macon	Extant	1947-1959 (VFW) 1960-1964 (Duke's)
REGION 7, CENTRAL SAVANNAH RIVER AREA				
Airdome Theater	Not Available	Augusta	Not Available	1908 - 1910s
Augusta Sea Beach	Near Monsanto Corp south of Augusta between Highway 56 and Phinizy Swamp	Augusta	Not Available	1930s
Del Mar Casino	Not Available	Augusta	Not Available	c.1920-1940s
Imperial Theater	749 Broad St.	Augusta	Extant	1918- Present
Lenox Theater	1128 9th St (Currently James Brown Blvd)	Augusta	Non-Extant	1920-1970s- demolished in 1978
New Globe Theatre	43 13th Street	Augusta	Not Available	1910s
Palace Theatre	531 Campbell St	Augusta	Extant	1920s-Unknown
Star Theatre	723 Broad Street	Augusta	Not Available	1910s
REGION 8, RIVER VALLEY				

VENUE NAME	ADDRESS/ LOCATION	CITY	EXTANT OR NON-EXTANT	DATES OF OPERATION
Airdrome Theaters	Not Available	Columbus	Non-Extant	1910s-1920s
Dunbar Theater	1201 1st Ave	Columbus	Extant	1920s
Golden Rest	1026 7th Ave (Sometimes listed as 1020 and 1029)	Columbus	Extant	C. 1940-c. 1955
Liberty Theatre	813 8th Ave	Columbus	Extant	1925-1960s
Rex Club	Corner of 6th Ave and 8th St	Columbus	Non-Extant	1930s
REGION, 10 SOUTHWEST GEORGIA				
Albany Alcazar	Not Available	Albany	Not Available	1930s
Albany Theater	107 N Jackson St	Albany	Extant	1927-1970s
Ritz Theater	323 W Jackson St	Thomasville	Non-Extant	1930s-c. 1964; Demolished in 1976
REGION 11, SOUTHERN GEORGIA				
Liberty Theater	115 E Florida Ave	Valdosta	Extant	1940- 1955; Demolished in 2023
REGION 12, COASTAL				
Arcadia Theatre	131 E Broughton Street	Savannah	Non-Extant	1910s-1930s; Demolished 1954
Coconut Grove	Route 17/Ogeechee Rd.	Savannah	Non-Extant	1936-1960; Demolished circa 2000
Dolphin Club	366 S Riverview Dr	Jekyll Island	Extant	1959-1966
Dunbar Theatre	467 W Broad St.	Savannah	Non-Extant	1921- circa1960
Eastside Theatre	718 E Broad St	Savannah	Extant	1946-1969

VENUE NAME	ADDRESS/ LOCATION	CITY	EXTANT OR NON-EXTANT	DATES OF OPERATION
Grand Palace Theatre/ New Palace	10-16 W Broad St	Savannah	Not Available	1902-1903
Hollywood Casino	Stiles Avenue (north of Bay Street Extension)	Savannah	Not Available	1930s-1940s
Jake's Place	Across from 1004 New River Rd	Mentionville, Darien	Non-Extant	1940s-2015; Demolished c. 2020
Joe's Blue Room and cocktail Lounge	530 1/2-532 W Broad St	Savannah	Non-Extant	1948-1960
Lincoln Inn	Not Available	Savannah	Not Available	1940-1950
Little Savoy Night Club	Not Available	Savannah	Not Available	1930s -1940s
Melody Theatre	E Broad St	Savannah	Extant	1946-1948
Neptune Cafe	811 W Broad St	Savannah	Non-Extant	1943-1958
Pekin Theatre	625 W. Broad St (Currently Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd)	Savannah	Non-Extant	1909-1929
Piney Pig Juke Joint	Highway 301	Ludowici	Extant	1940s-1950s
St. Andrew's Auditorium	367 S Riverview Dr	Jekyll Island	Non-Extant	1960-1966
Star Theatre	508 W. Broad St	Savannah	Non-Extant	1910s-1960s
The Cotton Club	Not Available	Savannah	Not Available	1930s
The Flamingo	1031 W Gwinnett St	Savannah	Non-Extant	1956- c.1963; Demolished circa 1964
Tremont Park Night Club	Tremont Park at Ogeechee Road and First Ave (maybe Corvair Ave currently)	Savannah	Not Available	1930s - 1940s
Wondering Dream Club	Not Available	Savannah	Not Available	1930s

Appendix 2. Identified Artists Who Performed on Georgia Circuits

This list includes the names of artists encountered during research on the Black entertainment circuits that crossed through Georgia. It should not be interpreted as a complete list, as the names of all the artists who performed on these circuits is unknowable. Due to the source material for the names included here (largely advertisements in historic newspapers), these are likely the most popular artists to perform on the circuit. Local and lesser-known artists are underrepresented and should be the focus of future research on Georgia's circuits.

ARTISTS NAME	POPULARITY TIMEFRAME	FROM GEORGIA
Al Jackson	1940s-1970s	
Amos Milburn	1940s-1950s	
Andy Kirk (and his Clouds of Joy)	1930s-1940s	
Annie Laurie	1940s-1950s	♪
Aretha Franklin	1960-2010s	
Arthur Lee Simpkins' Augusta Nighthawks	1920s-1940s	♪
Arthur Prysock	1940s-1960s	
Bama State Collegians	1930s-1940s	
BB King	1951-2000s	
Ben E. King	1960s	
Bessie Jones	1960s-1970s	♪
Bessie Smith	1920s-1930s	
Betti Mays	1940s	
Big Joe Turner	1950s	
Big Maybelle	1940s-1950s	
Big Momma (Willie Mae) Thorton	1950s-1960s	

ARTISTS NAME	POPULARITY TIMEFRAME	FROM GEORGIA
Bill Doggett	1950s-1960s	
Billie Holiday	1930s-1940s	
Billy Bland	1950s-1960s	
Billy Eckstine	1940s-1950s	
Billy Wright	1940s-1950s	♪
Bo Diddley	1950s-1960s	
Bobby "Blue" Bland	1950s-1960s	
Brantley's Central City Orchestra/ Brantley-Williams Colored Orchestra/ Black Diamond Orchestra/Villa Grill Sultans	1920s-1940s	♪
Brook Benton	1950s-1960s	
Brown Dots, The (Ivory "Deek" Watson)	1940s-1950s	
Bunker Hill	1960s	
Butterbeans and Susie	1920s-1950s	
Cab Calloway	1930s-1950s	

ARTISTS NAME	POPULARITY TIMEFRAME	FROM GEORGIA
Cadillacs, The	1950s-1960s	
Cal Green	1950s	
Camille Howard	1940s-1950s	
Carolina Cotton Pickers	1920s-1940s	
Cecil Gant	1940s	
Checkers, The	1950s	
Chuck Berry	1950s-1960s	
Chuck Jackson	1950s-1960s	
Clara Smith	1910-1933	
Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown	1950s-1970s	
Clarence Love	1940s	
Claude Hopkins	1930s	
Claude Trenier (and the Treniers)	1940s-1950s	
Clovers, The	1950s	
Clyde McPhatter (Dominoes, Drifters)	1950s-1960s	
Contours, The	1960s	
Cootie Williams	1940s - 1950s (1930s with Duke Ellington)	
Count Basie	1920s-1940s	
Dee Clark	1950s-1960s	
Dinah Washington	1940s-early 1960s	
Dionne Warwick	1960s-1970s	

ARTISTS NAME	POPULARITY TIMEFRAME	FROM GEORGIA
Dominions/ Domineous, The (Macon-based group)	1950s	
Dominoes, The	1950s	
Drifters, The	1950s-1960s	
Duke Ellington	1920s-1970s	
Earl Hines	1920s-1940s	
Eddie "Fats" Smith	1940s	
Eddie Boyd	1950s-1960s	
Eddie Kirkland	1949-1963, 1970s	
Eddie Robinson and Orchestra	1940s	
Eddie Vinson	1940s-1960s	
Ella Fitzgerald	1930s-1980s	
Erskine Hawkins	1930s-1940s	
Esquerita	1950s-1970s	
Esther Phillips (also known as Little Esther)	1950s-1960s	
Ethel Waters	1920s-1940s	
Etta James	1950s-2010s	
Fats (Lucas/Luke) Gonder	1940s-1960s	♪
Fats Domino	1947-1963	
Fats Waller	1930s-early 1940s	
Faye Adams	1950s	
5 Royales	1950s	

ARTISTS NAME	POPULARITY TIMEFRAME	FROM GEORGIA
Fletcher Henderson	1920s-1940s	♪
Florida Blossom Minstrels	1900s-1940s	
Frankie Lymon	1950s-1960s	
Freddie King	1960s-1970s	
Garnet Mimms	1950s-1960s	
Gene Ammons	1940s-1950s	
Georgia Sea Island Singers	1920s-1970s	♪
Georgia White	1940s	♪
Gladys Knight and the Pips	1950s-1980s	♪
Gladys Williams	1930s-1960s	
Gorgeous George	1960s	
Griffin Brothers	1940s-1950s	
Hal Singer	1940s-1950s	
Hampton Institute Creative Dance Group	1930s	
Hank Ballard (Midnighters)	1950s-1960s	
Ida Cox	1920s	♪
Ike and Tina Turner	1950s-1970s	
Impressions, The	1950s-1960s	
Ink Spots, The	1930s-1940s	
International Sweethearts of Rhythm, The	1940s	
Irma Thomas	1959-1960s	

ARTISTS NAME	POPULARITY TIMEFRAME	FROM GEORGIA
Irvin C. Miller/ Brownskin Models	1920s-1950s	
Isley Brothers, The	1950s-1970s	
J. Neal Montgomery and His Orchestra/ Syncopators	1930s	♪
Jackie Brenston (and his Delta Cats/Rocket 88s)	1950s	
Jackie Wilson	1950s-1970s	
James Brown and the Famous Flames	1950s-1970s	♪
Jay McShann	1940s	
Jerry Butler	1960s	
Jessie Hill	1950s	
Jimi Hendrix	1960s	
Jimmy Jones	1960s	
Jimmie Lunceford	1930s-1940s	
Jimmy Smith	1950s-1960s	
Joe Liggins and the Honeydrippers	1940s-1950s	
Joe Tex	1950s-1970s	
John Lee Hooker	1948-1970s	
Johnnie Taylor	1950s-1960s	
Johnnie Walker (and his band)	1940s	♪
Johnny Ace	1950s	
Johnny Guitar Jenkins and his Pinetoppers	1960s-1970, 1990s	♪

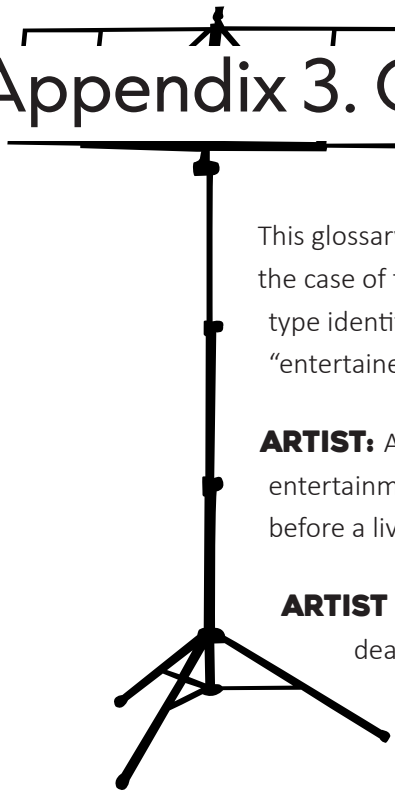
ARTISTS NAME	POPULARITY TIMEFRAME	FROM GEORGIA
Junior Parker	1950s	
Junior Walker	1950s-1964	
King Kolax	1930s-1940s	
Larry Darnell	1950s	
Lavern Baker	1950s-1960s	
Lee Dorsey	1950s-1960s	
Lee Richardson	1940s	
Levi Mann	1940s	
Lightnin' Hopkins	1940s-1960s	
Lil Green	1940s	
Lil Greenwood	1950s	
Lionel Hampton	1940s-1950s	
Little Anthony and the Imperials	1950s	
Little Richard (and the Upsetters)	1951-1957, 1964-1970s	
Little Walter	1940s-1950s	
Little Willie John	1950s-1960s	
Louis Armstrong	1920s-1960s	
Louis Jordan	1930s-1950s	
Lowell Fulson	1940s-1960s	
Lucky Millinder	1930s-1940s	♪
Luis Russell	1920s-1940s	
Ma Rainey	1920s	
Mable Lee	1940s-1950s	♪
Madeline Green	1930s-1940s	

ARTISTS NAME	POPULARITY TIMEFRAME	FROM GEORGIA
Maggie Jones	1922-1938	
Mahalia Jackson	1940s-1960s	
Mantan Moreland	1930s-1940s	
Margie Day (Walker)	1950s	
Marv Johnson	1960s	
Marvelettes, The	1960s	
Marvin Gaye	1960s-1970s	
Mary Wells	1960s	
Midnighters, The	1950s-1960s	
Milton Larkin	1940s	
Miracles, The	1950s-1980s	
Muddy Waters	1940s-1980s	
Nappy Brown	1950s	
Nat King Cole	1940s-1960s	♪
Nina Simone	1950s-1970s	
Noble Sissle	1920s-1930s	
Olympics, The	1950s-1960s	
Orioles, The	1950s-1960s	
Orlons, The	1960s	
Otis Redding	1960s	
Patti LaBelle (and the Bluebells)	1960s	
Peg Leg Bates	1920s-1950s	♪
Percy Welch	1950s-1960s	♪
Pigmeat Markham	1920s-1940s	

ARTISTS NAME	POPULARITY TIMEFRAME	FROM GEORGIA
Prairie View Co-Eds	1940s	
Ravens, The	1940s-1950s	
Ray Charles	1950s-1960s	♪
Roosevelt Sykes	1940s	
Rosco Gordon	1950s-1960s	
Roy Brown	1940s-1950s	
Roy Hamilton	1950s	♪
Roy Milton	1940s-1950s	
Rufus Thomas	1940s-1960s	
Ruth Brown	1950s	
Ruth Ellington	1930s	
Sam Cooke	1950s-1964	
Sammy Ward	1960s	
Sarah Vaughan	1940s-1950s	
Screamin' Jay Hawkins	1950s-1960s	
Silas Green from New Orleans	1900s-1950s	
Sims Twins	1960s	
Sister Rosetta Tharpe	1940s	
Slim Harpo	1950s-1960s	
Snookum Russell	1930s-1940s	
Solomon Burke	1950s-1960s	
Sonny Boy Williamson	1937-1947	
Stevie Wonder	1960s-2020s	

ARTISTS NAME	POPULARITY TIMEFRAME	FROM GEORGIA
Sugar Chile (Frankie) Robinson	1940s-1950s	
Sugar Pie DeSanto	1950s-1960s	
Sunset Royal Entertainers	1930s	
Supremes, The	1960s	
Tab Smith	1940s - 1950s	
Tams, The	1960s-1980s	
Ted Taylor	1950s-1960s	
Temptations, The	1960s-1970s	
Thomas A. Dorsey	1920s-1950s	♪
Timmie Rogers	1930s-1970s	♪
Tiny Bradshaw	1930s - 1950s	
Tiny Topsy	1950s-1960s	
Todd Rhodes	1940s-1950s	
Troubadors	1930s	
Vandellas, The (Martha and)	1960s	
W.B. Dixon	1930s	
Walter Barnes	1930s	
Williams and Brown (George and Bessie)	1920s	
Willie Mabon	1950s	
Wilson Pickett	1960s-1970s	
Wynonie Harris	1940s-1950s	
Zilla Mays	1950s	♪

Appendix 3. Glossary



This glossary contains definitions for many of the common terms used in this context. In the case of the roles/positions people held on the circuit, we included definitions for each type identified through research, including more self-explanatory words like “artist” or “entertainer.” Similarly, we included definitions for each of the venue types identified.

ARTIST: A person who practices an artform. In the context of segregated Black entertainment circuits, this word refers to a person who performs an artform either before a live audience or through recordings.

ARTIST REPRESENTATIVE/MANAGER: A person hired to handle business dealings on behalf of an artist. In this role, a person often interacts with booking agents, promoters, and other members of the entertainment industry to secure opportunities for their clients.

AUDITORIUM: A type of venue that provides space for public gatherings, typically featuring a prominent stage and seating to accommodate large numbers of people, as well as open floor space on the lowest level. These were one of the largest venue types to feature segregated Black entertainment for the enjoyment of Black patrons in the Jim Crow era.

BOOKING AGENT/ARTIST PROMOTER: A person hired to secure performance dates for an artist.

CHITLINS/CHITTERLINGS: A dish associated with Southern Black culinary traditions that consists of fried or stewed hog intestines.

CHITLIN’ CIRCUIT: A network of safe spaces for Black entertainers relegated to perform in segregated venues from the 1910s to the mid-1960s. Locations within the circuit evolved over time and included tent shows, theatres, and juke joints. These locations ranged from Black-owned businesses to white-owned properties that had African American audience nights. Great and well known African American artists would perform one or two nights at a location before moving on to the next. The forms of entertainment in the Chitlin’ Circuit also evolved over time. Vaudeville and minstrel acts, comedy, blues, and early rock n roll were the most prevalent throughout this time period.

CIRCUIT: A network that connects performance venues.

CLUB/NIGHT CLUB: A type of venue intended for socialization and entertainment, often serving alcohol and providing music. Less intimate than a juke joint, these spaces are usually patronized by a larger number of people, and occupants likely do not know everyone in attendance. Though not a necessary element, these spaces are occasionally more elevated in décor and appearance than juke joints.

DESEGREGATE: The removal of policies or laws requiring racial segregation. The process of removing segregationist policies is known as "desegregation."

ENTERTAINER: Artists who perform live presentations of their artform.

GIG: A live performance engagement arranged at a venue.

JIM CROW: The legal and social system of racial segregation that existed in the United States between the late nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth century.

JUKE JOINT: A community-centered venue type that provided an intimate social and entertainment experience that typically included drinking, dancing, games, and music, either performed live or through recordings. Unlike most other forms of venues, juke joints occupied any space available and were typically found in buildings previously constructed for another purpose.

MINSTRELSY/MINSTREL SHOW: A type of theatre popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries where actors portrayed racial stereotypes of Black people and culture, typically in blackface. Though minstrel shows often featured white actors in blackface, Black entertainers also performed as minstrels between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Black minstrel acts were a common feature of the segregated Black vaudeville circuits.

PARK/OUTDOOR FACILITY: A type of venue that typically provides performance spaces in an open-air environment. Occasionally, these facilities will include a pavilion or other building or structure for public gatherings where artists can perform.

PERFORMER: See "Entertainer."

RECORD LABEL/COMPANY: The businesses that record, produce, promote, and distribute the artforms of musicians and other performance artists.

REGIONAL PROMOTER: A person who books events on the local level for artists, their managers, and national-level booking agents. As part of the job, the person also oversees local advertising for the event, ticket sales, permitting, and occasionally arranging transportation and lodging for the visiting artist. The geographic range of a regional promoter can vary from the city level to covering venues across multiple states.

SEGREGATION: The separation of groups of people by an aspect of their identity. In this context, this term specifically refers to separation by race – or racial segregation.

SOUL CIRCUIT: The entertainment network that succeeded the Chitlin' Circuit and maintained similar connections between venues that allowed artists to secure gigs but with higher pay, better accommodations and travel arrangements, and integrated audiences.

STADIUM: A type of open-air venue that has tiered seating surrounding a large field, which is typically used for sporting events but can be adjusted for live music performances. This venue type is uncommon on the Chitlin' Circuit in comparison to clubs, theaters, and juke joints.

STROLL: Often written as “the Stroll.” This term was occasionally used to describe the Black business and entertainment districts of cities in the early-to-mid twentieth century. It likely originated from Chicago’s Black business district along State Street, which was known as “the Stroll.” The term was used by musician and newspaper contributor Walter Barnes in his description of Black communities during his travels through the South.

TERRITORY BANDS: Jazz ensembles that performed for dances across small regions of the United States during the 1920s and 1930s. These bands were often featured on local radio stations as well.

THEATER: A type of venue with a prominent stage and rows of seating for the presentation of shows. These spaces are typically privately owned and usually seat less people than auditoriums. In the early twentieth century, many circuit theaters also included screens in the stage area for showing films.

TIME: A word used in vaudeville to describe the performance dates provided by a circuit, such as “being on Dudley time” or “hitting the big time.”

URBAN RENEWAL: The redevelopment of targeted areas within a city. In the mid-to-late-twentieth century, this process was federally-funded and involved the demolition of neighborhoods and business districts that public officials determined to be slums or urban blight, replacing these communities with public facilities, private development, and housing projects.

VAUDEVILLE: A form of entertainment popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that featured several distinct performances of various acts, which typically included a mixture of dancing, singing, comedy, acting, unusual talents, and minstrelsy.

VENUE: A space that is made available for events, including to artists for live performances.

VENUE OWNER: A person who owns a business or space that can be opened for events. In the context of segregated Black entertainment circuits, these people typically operate juke joints, clubs, or theaters, and hire artists to entertain visitors to these spaces.

VETERAN SERVICE/FRATERNAL/SOCIAL ORGANIZATION BUILDING: A common venue type on the Chitlin’ Circuit. These spaces operated as meeting spaces for local chapters of larger organizations but were often also used as public spaces where community events could be held, including dances and live music performances.

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