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Los Angeles

Amour de soi – the Stanchion of Sixties Soul Sovereigns

Sam Cooke, Aretha Franklin, and Tina Turner

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Musicology

by

Sandra Marie Kilman

2026

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2026

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Amour de soi – the Stanchion of Sixties Soul Sovereigns
Sam Cooke, Aretha Franklin, and Tina Turner

by

Sandra Marie Kilman

Doctor of Philosophy in Musicology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2026

Professor Robert W. Fink, Chair

“Amour de soi – the Stanchion of Sixties Soul Sovereigns Sam Cooke, Aretha Franklin, and Tina Turner” argues that the career accomplishments of these musical artists exemplified Rousseau’s concept, *amour de soi* as they took a leap of faith and led the soul music genre. The mid-twentieth century music business was fraught with pitfalls, risks, as well as powerful, unscrupulous, and even some very dangerous participants. Attributes of courage, discipline, and faith were indispensable qualities for those artists who struggled to survive the exigencies of an industry with historical affiliations with sex work and organized crime. Female artists faced sexism, misogyny and the danger of sexual assault in this field dominated by men. African American artists encountered additional obstacles presented by racist music moguls. This project examines the history of the music industry and the racism present in locations relevant to the lives and careers

of Cooke, Franklin, and Turner. In relating their stories, this study argues that, in addition to the above referenced positive attributes, they exhibited an unquenchable *amour de soi* that powered their extraordinary achievements in the popular music genre, appropriately called, soul.

The dissertation of Sandra Marie Kilman is approved.

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University of California, Los Angeles

2026

DEDICATION

I am grateful that I was born into a loving family of musicians. Bennie Jr., my big brother who had Down Syndrome, was a Top 40 hits encyclopedia. He played his drums every day and learned to play a trumpet duet (the “Hurrah for the flag of the free” segment of Sousa’s The Stars and Stripes Forever”) with our dad. Bennie Jr. taught me so much about affection, kindness, and quickly getting past negative emotions. My father, Bennie, a gifted musician who performed from his teenage years until his seventies, was so accomplished, yet so modest. In the 1920s and 1930s, he was the Black leader of an otherwise all-White Canadian orchestra, featured in popular dance venues and on radio broadcasts. Daddy was gentle, friendly, and expert at making his trumpet sound sweet or sassy. I loved hearing him rehearse and watching his ears move up when he hit a climax on a high pitch. My mother loved music. Her mother played piano and insisted that all her daughters learn to perform music. Mom played violin because she could mask her shyness by turning her back to the audience. Like Mommy, I learned violin and so did my daughter and granddaughter. Walking in my mother’s footsteps was my childhood goal. She was beautiful, intelligent, dignified, and courteous. She was also a master negotiator. Most importantly, she loved us unconditionally. And, she believed in me, no matter what the task, thereby fortifying my confidence and determination and nurturing my *amour de soi*. She expected I would attend college and earn a degree. Although my path to that goal was circuitous, I eventually did what she thought I would do. I dedicate this work to you, my family of origin. Your loving examples lit my pathway. Thank you for your kindness.

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PREFACE

A life well-lived is a team sport. This project is dedicated to the team who brought me into this world and nurtured me from the beginning and throughout my life. I am eternally grateful for them - my family of origin – for the foundation of loving kindness that they gave me. I am grateful to my family of procreation – my husband, Dennis, daughter, Gia and granddaughter, Gianna for their love, patient support, helpful suggestions, and untiring encouragement. I am also thankful for the wise counsel of my cousin Robert Lane, who helped me navigate the dissertation process. To my Mckoin cousins – four brilliant women whose examples of independence, intellectual attainment, steadfast love, and storge have inspired me for decades – I offer my loving gratitude.

The faculty, and staff of UCLA's Musicology and African American Studies Departments who provided a fascinating educational journey for this nontraditional student are wonderful individuals – experts in their fields, kindhearted, and ever so supportive of students. My UCLA 'guardian angels include Robin D.G. Kelley, Elizabeth Upton, Raymond Knapp, Elisabeth Le Guin, Mitchell Morris, Kenny Burrell, and my committee chair Robert Fink. Marilyn Gray gently guided me through the dissertation writing process. Innumerable staff members supported my efforts, and brilliant students fueled my love of learning. For all you have done to assist me, I sincerely thank you.

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Osher Scholarship Award	2012
Joanne Mullenfeld Memorial Scholarship	2012
National Merit Scholarship	1968
National Merit Certificate of Merit	1968
Los Angeles Times Scholarship	1968
California State Scholarship	1968
Presidential Scholar	1968
Seal of the State of California by the California Assembly	1968

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UCLA, Department of Musicology, UCLA CLUSTER Program

Sirius Magic - Vocalist, Producer, Writer 1989-2010

Co-founded the band Sirius Magic, co-wrote original musical material and co-produced jazz/R&B album

Lou Rawls, Inc. - Vocalist 1986-1989

Performance in live concerts, on television and on recordings with Lou Rawls as duet partner and background vocalist.

Robert Guillaume - Vocalist 1985-1986

Performance in live concerts and on television with Robert Guillaume as duet partner and background vocalist.

The Jazz Hour - Talent Coordinator 1983

Coordinated recording sessions, handled contracts with performers on musical performance/interview show broadcast on BET.

PAPERS

“Black Out Loud: Black-ish Celebrates Juneteenth” 2026

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From Soulful to Serious: 1970s African American Popular Music 2019

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Swinging Soldiers: African American Military Bands in Europe 2018

Presented at “The Birth of Contemporary Europe: World War I, Music & the Arts” International Conference, Athens, Greece

The Wiz: Black Musical Power on the Great White Way
2018

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INTRODUCTION

This study examines the lives and careers of several African American soul singers who changed the world with their music, the risks they encountered in the entertainment industry, and the perpetual obstacle of racism that they challenged, withstood, and overcame. They grew out of the tumultuous decade of the Sixties when the times were ripe for marginalized groups – African Americans, draft-aged youth, women, gays, and lesbians – to stand up and speak out. All the singers treated here were born within 150 miles of each other in the northeast of the Mississippi Delta. As so many Black Southerners did since the mid-nineteenth century, they moved north along the river to industrial cities in the Midwest – Chicago, Detroit, and St. Louis – to escape the fetters of the Jim Crow South and create meaningful lives. Between the harsh working conditions that they and their forebears endured and the four-square work ethic characteristic of the American Midwest, they were well trained to take on challenges that required discipline, focus, persistence, and stamina. They were conditioned to face the exigencies of the entertainment industry – a seductively deceptive environment that presents itself as an easy path to fame and fortune for those with talent, but actually rewards grit and perseverance. Their training in music performance originated in Protestant churches where faith was taught and practiced. With a strong work ethic and faith that positive outcomes were possible, they embarked on careers in an industry rife with hidden dangers in a nation that has yet to exemplify the lofty ideals of equality embedded in its founding documents. Organized crime, corruption, and greed among the industry's powerbrokers were incessant threats to aspiring artists, and the ubiquitous jeopardy

presented by the myths of White narcissism manifesting as American racism incessantly hounded creative artists. The key ingredient that, combined with their talent, grit, and vision, enabled them to persevere and, eventually, prevail was the healthy form of self-love that Jean-Jacques Rousseau called *amour de soi*.¹ This form of confidence was foundational in their pioneering ability to take a leap and create a new music genre. They entered the music business with one goal in mind and were willing to adapt their approaches and give birth to soul, a genre that crossed over racial lines. This study examines their origins, youth, and professional life to understand how they left the constrained world into which they were born and, through an enlightened self-love, created powerful music that connected a divided America and engendered a multiracial international fandom. Through the lens of these lives, we delve into African American music history, the interconnectedness of criminal activities and the music industry, and the obstacles placed upon these performers by racism and sexism.

Who is telling the story? Knowing the answer to this question is a critical factor in understanding history. The perspective of the storyteller influences the content of the narrative. For generations, Americans have been taught that Africans, who were kidnapped and enslaved to serve a class of masters that was predominantly European or

¹ Rousseau thought humans exhibit two types of self-love - "amour de soi" and "amour propre." Amour propre is a love of self that values oneself in comparison with others, attributing greater worth to the self than to others. Amour propre can have positive and negative implications and may underlie decent or indecent behavior. Amour de soi is a natural appreciation of the self that drives an individual to protect the self. For a comparison of these two passions see Lawrence D. Cooper, "Rousseau on self-love: what we've learned, what we might have learned," Journal, *The Review of Politics* 60, no. 4 (1998): 2, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A53643824/ITOF?u=lapl&sid=bookmark-ITOF&xid=6a06847c.

of European descent, were overpowered because they lacked several things. They lacked wealth on a continent replete with valuable natural resources. They lacked civilization – the type, that is, practiced by their northern neighbors. They lacked a respectable, monotheistic religion. And because of all these shortcomings, they, the Africans themselves, were inherently lacking as human beings. African people were viewed as essentially substandard and, therefore, it was easy to justify disadvantaging them. The moral of these falsehoods seemed to be that if these Africans were not so inferior to Europeans, they would not have been abused. The victims were responsible for their victimhood. In some form or other, this message has been massaged and manipulated repeatedly to fit contemporary times. This false narrative about ‘Black lack’ has morphed and transformed but, after centuries, it has not disappeared even though it is based upon myths and not upon historical fact.²

If the question “Who tells the story?” is given serious consideration, it is obvious why a false message – one that has haunted the Western world since the fifteenth century and has been the source of generations of anguish and social upheaval - persists. Most of the storytellers - historians, educators, authors of fact and fiction, playwrights, songwriters, and other chroniclers of human history who have recorded the history taught in American schools have not been the Africans themselves nor their descendants. And

² Black antislavery activist David Walker’s *Appeal... to the Colored Citizens of the World* published in 1829, repeats these racist ideas. See Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Bold Type Books, 2016), 164. For a broad discussion of many false “Black lack” narratives about Africa and Africans promulgated over the centuries since the inception of the Atlantic slave trade see Howard W. French, *Born in Blackness: Africa, Africans, and the Making of the Modern World, 1471 to the Second World War* (Liveright, 2021). <https://books.google.com/books?id=v0UfEAAAQBAJ>.

when the story of why an attacked population was violated is told nearly exclusively by the people who committed the violations and by their descendants, why would it surprise an objective observer that the story told would lack candor and accuracy? Why would it not have an inherent bias that helped paint the guilty as instead, the justified? Thankfully, over recent decades, increasing numbers of Black scholars have contributed to the history of the Black experience in the United States and have broadened the available perspectives of history.³

A Sad Tale of Black Entertainment

Over several centuries the myth of racial inferiority has had a significant impact on the personal lives and careers of almost every African American performer. Michael Eric Dyson argues that Black people have been entertaining White people from the inception of the transatlantic slave trade. As evidence, he cites the story of a fifteen-year-old African girl who died under the whip of Captain John Kimber in 1791 and mentions an etching by



Figure 1 Print of etching "The abolition of the slave trade" by Isaac Cruikshank

Scottish caricaturist Isaac Cruikshank that illustrates the cruel and notorious event. The Library of Congress maintains a print of the etching titled *The abolition of the slave trade Or the inhumanity of dealers in human flesh*

³ Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew: Volume II: A History of African Americans Since 1880*: 2, 2 vols., vol. 2 (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005); Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew: Volume I: A History of African Americans to 1880*., 2 vols., vol. 1 (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000); John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom* (1947).

*exemplified in Captn. Kimber's treatment of a young Negro girl of 15 for her virjen modesty.*⁴ In a speech delivered to the House of Commons in 1791, during a period when newspaper coverage of the parliamentary debates over abolition had generated considerable public interest in the issue, William Wilberforce accused Kimber of murder. At his trial, Kimber's motive for whipping the girl to death was revealed. She refused his command to dance with the other enslaved women.⁵ According to the indictment, she was ill after contracting gonorrhea. Crew members stated that the ship's surgeon raped and infected the girl before the ship left Africa. "Dancing the slaves" was a common practice on slave ships. Ostensibly it was ordered as exercise to maintain good health among the captives. However, it also sexually excited and entertained the crew of predominantly White men.⁶ Despite her youth, her illness, and the depression caused by ostracization from other Africans who feared her disease, the captain chose to torture and punish a child for the crime of declining to titillate him by dancing. This centuries old story emblemizes the intolerable injustices that have riddled the history of Black performance in the Americas.

Despite the bleakness of this early form of Black performance, the musical work of African Americans evolved and transformed through the centuries and has produced entertainers who made significant contributions to the body of American popular music

⁴Isaac Cruikshank, *The abolition of the slave trade Or the inhumanity of dealers in human flesh exemplified in Captn. Kimber's treatment of a young Negro girl of 15 for her virjen (sic) modesty.*, 1792.

⁵ Srividhya Swaminathan, "Reporting Atrocities: A Comparison of the Zong and the Trial of Captain John Kimber," *Slavery & Abolition* 31, no. 4 (2010/12/01 2010): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2010.521336>.

⁶ Michael Eric Dyson, *Entertaining Race: Performing Blackness in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2021), 1.

and gained worldwide recognition and admiration. Over six chapters, this study examines the stories of three of these entertainers - the sovereigns of Sixties soul music. Chapters 1 and 2 discuss the “King of Soul,” Sam Cooke, who like too many other Black men who challenge the status quo died under suspicious and demeaning circumstances. Through the lens of his professional life, we explore the history of African American music and its connections to the Great Migration and organized crime. Chapters 3 and 4 treat the “Queen of Soul,” Aretha Franklin, and the challenges she faced as a Black woman in an era when these intersecting marginalizations dominated the life choices of even the most talented artists. Finally, Tina Turner, the international “Queen of Rock and Roll,” comes to the fore in final chapters with a deep dive into her youth in the South in Chapter 5 and a focus on her professional life in Chapter 6. Deep roots in the American South affected all three of these exceptional artists, as did the practice of faith. But what set them apart was an unshakable *amour de soi* that sustained them as they navigated a dangerous profession and an unjust society.

Chapter 1 Crossing Over with The King of Soul Sam Cooke

“Sam Cooke evokes a world teeming with cultural nuances hidden from white society.” *Michael Eric Dyson*

Cooke’s community and his crossover cohort

In the early 1950s, a handsome young athlete whose family had moved from his birthplace in Gilmer, Texas to the California Bay Area seeking better educational opportunities for their children, high-jumped out of

George Washington High School into a track scholarship at San Francisco State. John Royce Mathis stood only 5’ 7” tall, more than a foot shorter than Oakland’s Bill Russell, the top college high jumper in the region. But in 1956, Mathis set a school record and beat Russell’s



Figure 2 Bill Russell high jumping over Johnny Mathis

highest leap by jumping 6’5 ½”, a height just a few inches shy of the 1952 Olympic record, at the University of Nevada, Reno. Although his athletic talent was impressive, young Mathis was even more gifted in music.

Mathis’s plan to become a teacher of physical education was disrupted by his success as a jazz singer. When Columbia Records producer George Avakian heard the 19-year-old athlete sing at the Black Hawk nightclub, the executive encouraged him and promised to contact him again in a year. Despite Avakian’s expression of interest, the youngster refocused his efforts on qualifying for the 1956 U.S. Olympic track team. Just one week before the Olympic trials were scheduled to begin in Los Angeles, Avakian

invited Mathis to sign a deal with Columbia. Instead of heading south to the Olympic trials, the young man flew east to New York to begin a career in the recording industry. After seasoning in New York's nightclub scene and a shift in focus to crooning, on November 5, 1956, Columbia released "Wonderful, Wonderful," Johnny Mathis's debut single. It became a top hit in 1957 and remained on the Billboard charts for thirty-nine weeks.

Mathis's vocal styling was more akin to the "smooth" sound Nat King Cole's deployed in pop ballads like "An Affair to Remember" and "Around the World" than to the increasingly popular rock and roll vocal style employed in other 1957 hits like "Be-Bop-a-Lula" by Gene Vincent and "Love Me" by Buddy Holly. Mathis did not favor the rhythmic delivery style which dominated 1950s Black rhythm & blues (e.g., Jackie Wilson's "Reet Petite" [1957], Chuck Berry's "Rock and Roll Music" [1957], Little Richard's "Tutti Frutti" [1955] or Fats Domino's "Blueberry Hill" [1956]). Despite his adoption of a more mainstream pop vocal style than was common for young Black vocalists of his era, Mathis's initial success was the first in a string of financially successful records; his next single, a rendition of "It's Not for Me to Say" by the popular songwriting team of Al Stillman and Robert Allen, reached number five on the *Billboard* Top 100 singles chart a mere three months after "Wonderful, Wonderful." Mathis scored again when his August 1957 recording of the Stillman-Allen follow-up, "Chances Are," earned a spot on *Billboard's* "Honor Roll of Hits," the collection of songs that topped the nation in all three revenue-producing categories: record sales, sales of sheet music, and radio play.

Mathis's recording of "Chances Are" was so popular that it has become an iconic musical representation of the 1950s. Twenty years after its release Steven Spielberg included an excerpt of the song in his 1977 Academy Award winning film *Close*

Encounters of the Third Kind. After lending its name to a romantic film starring Robert Downey, Jr. and Cybil Shepherd in 1989, the record was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame in 1998. This was a rare accomplishment for a Black singer of the late 1950s: only one other recording by an African American solo artist also had the distinction of being a top twenty single on *Billboard*'s 1957 "Honor Roll." "You Send Me" introduced the world of popular music to a young singer-songwriter whose meteoric career influenced American culture for decades to come. Sam Cooke crossed over from the field of gospel music with a remarkable rendition one of his original compositions – a tune that skyrocketed him into the elite world of American pop music hitmakers.

Cooke, who began singing gospel music in his father's church when he was a young child growing up in Chicago's Bronzeville community, created a sensation with "You Send Me" just one month after "Chances Are" solidified Mathis's position as a rising



Figure 3 Sam Cooke

"sepia" star. Although Cooke was a newcomer to the pop music world, he was already a polished singer. Before crossing over to pop, he had six years' experience as the tenor lead of The Soul Stirrers, the nation's preeminent Black gospel group, and, at 26, had already been performing for almost two decades. His gospel audience was predominantly comprised of Black churchgoers, but to the mainstream public – the predominantly White pop music audience – he was an unfamiliar, attractive and exotic whirlwind establishing a brand on both the Pop and rhythm & blues charts. An exploration of the music industry history of St. Louis and Chicago, Midwestern cities where Turner

and Cooke lived and performed will elucidate challenges they encountered as they built their careers in a racist cultural milieu and provide insight into the significance of their accomplishments.

The Great Migration

Like many of his Bronzeville neighbors, Cooke's family was rooted in the South. He was born on January 22, 1931, the fifth but not the last child to join the family of Annie Mae and Reverend Charles Cook in Clarksdale, Mississippi. Only ten months later, Ike Turner, bandleader, soul music icon, and fellow Rock and Roll Hall of Fame honoree, was born in the same small Delta town. All these future stars joined the multitude of African Americans who over the course of the early 20th century migrated north. Cooke's whole family relocated to Chicago in 1933, when he was just two. Turner, moved to St. Louis as a young adult in the 1950s, where he met Anna Mae Bullock from east Tennessee, soon to become his wife. All these travelers arrived in cities with thriving immigrant Black populations and entertainment districts that played a significant role in American popular music history and in the lives of soul singers Cooke and Tina Turner.

St. Louis and Chicago, the most prosperous cities on the migration route north along the Mississippi River, were common destinations for up-and-coming Black musical talent during the Great Migration of the twentieth century. But this was not the first mass movement of African Americans to St. Louis. Decades before, labor shortages caused by the Great War triggered a migration of over 100,000 Black Mississippians to cities like

Memphis, St. Louis, Chicago, and Detroit.⁷ With the Mississippi River as a conduit for the first Black exodus from the post-Reconstruction south, St. Louis had been a nearby destination and became a locus for African Americans fleeing upriver to escape the newer form of slavery created by the southern sharecropper's life since the late 1870s. By the thousands, sharecroppers who had tired of the economic prison created by their debts to landowners and company stores boarded boats along the Mississippi riverbanks and debarked in St. Louis. According to civil rights activist Charlton H. Tandy's estimation, approximately 20,000 "Exodusters" – southern Blacks escaping from Jim Crow debt bondage and subjugation to postwar freedom in the "free state of Kansas" – passed through St. Louis in 1879 and 1880.⁸ Tandy, a nineteenth-century Rosa Parks, helped integrate St. Louis's public trolleys. When he arrived in St. Louis in 1857, White riders sat inside the trolleys while Black riders stood, hanging on from the outside where they could be injured or killed by rough rides over the cobblestone streets. After an 1868 injunction that outlawed this segregation proved ineffective, Tandy organized a boycott, then took to direct action, stopping trolleys by holding the horses' reins until Black riders were seated.⁹ A few years later in 1879, when many of the Exodusters disembarked at the St. Louis levees and realized that they needed money to buy additional boat tickets to complete their journey to Kansas, Tandy rallied the African American community to assist

⁷ Clyde Woods, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta* (London New York: Verso, 1998), 115.

⁸ Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 184.

⁹ Sarah Sims, "How Charlton Tandy integrated St. Louis streetcars," *The St. Louis American* (2020). <https://www.stlamerican.com/news/local-news/how-charlton-tandy-integrated-st-louis-streetcars/>.

migrants by providing food, clothing, shelter, and money for tickets. The warm welcome offered by Black St. Louisans was not shared by the White community or leaders like



Figure 4 Exodusters on St. Louis levee

German-born Mayor Henry Overstoltz, who like the Exodusters had migrated to St. Louis with his family. Overstoltz sent an ominous warning to potential Southern Black migrants by telegraph to authorities in Vicksburg and

Memphis, later published in the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*.

A large number of colored people having recently arrived in this city from different points in the south on their way West entirely destitute of means to make the journey, and as I am informed that many more may soon be expected it is my duty to warn the colored people against coming to this city without money to support themselves and to pay their fare West. The city of St Louis is wholly unable to support them or to furnish them means of reaching their destination.

There are no opportunities of obtaining employment here at present, much suffering and destitution must certainly be endured by colored people coming to this city without money or friends. As I see and understand this fact and have no power or means to prevent its consequences, I urgently warn all colored people against coming North under such circumstances. Do not leave your homes on false promises. Do not start on the long journey westward unless you have money enough to pay your way.¹⁰

The Globe-Democrat estimated that ninety percent of migrants would be stranded in St. Louis and noted that “charitably-disposed colored families of the city” were providing housing for those who needed it.¹¹ Nell Painter quotes an Exoduster who compared their

¹⁰ The St. Louis Globe-Democrat, "The Darky Deluge," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* (St. Louis, MO), 1879_03_16 1879, https://www.newspapers.com/image/571063259/?match=1&clipping_id=new.

¹¹ The St. Louis Globe-Democrat, "The Darky Deluge."

migration to that of the Biblical Israelites and asserted: "Dis is our Red Sea, right hyah in St. Louis."¹² Tandy and other prominent Black St. Louisans organized the Colored Refugee Relief Board which raised donations, provided housing, and employed notaries to document the oppression Exodusters left behind in the South in the form of affidavits that were eventually presented to Congress.¹³

Although Kansas was their original destination, many Exodusters decided to stay in St. Louis. Firstly, although the city had its own version of oppressive racism, by reaching St. Louis the migrants had escaped the economic prison that sharecropping represented in the rural South. Secondly, the African American community in St. Louis was supportive and welcomed the travelers, including those who were destitute. Additionally, the city provided educational opportunities for the migrant children not available in the deep South. Sumner High School, the first Black secondary school built west of the Mississippi River had been established in 1875 because of demands from the African American community. Fifteen years later, Sumner (named after abolitionist Senator Charles H. Sumner) housed the Cottage Avenue School (later named Stowe Teacher College after author Harriet Beecher Stowe), established to train teachers. Last but possibly not least for the musically inclined, St. Louis was the turn of the century epicenter for a new genre of African American popular music that was primed to sweep the nation: ragtime.

¹² Painter, *Exodusters: Black migration to Kansas after Reconstruction*, 195.

¹³ Bryan M. Jack, "Colored Refugee Relief Board (1879-1880)," *BlackPast* (2009_12_01 2009). <https://blackpast.org/african-american-history/colored-refugee-relief-board/>.

Ragging America

By the late nineteenth century, St. Louis musicians and vocalists had developed the practice of “ragging” familiar tunes and composing original syncopated instrumental works called “rags.” This musical style employing the application of the syncopated rhythms of juba (a dance of enslaved African Americans) to band music was popular from the 1890s through 1916.¹⁴ In a 1909 article announcing the demise of the genre, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch claimed that ragtime music originated in “the slums of St. Louis and overspread the world.”¹⁵ Although ragtime is usually associated with piano and band music by twentieth century listeners, the article reports that “a negro woman, whose name is unknown to fame, is declared to have invented ragtime in St. Louis in 1888.” Describing her as “glossy black,” “tall and stalwart, and rich voiced,” the article noted that “Mammy” was popular with White men – American and European alike.¹⁶ Mammy’s contributions to popular music were applauded, relished, and, in accordance with American tradition, stolen for profit.¹⁷ Mama Lou was hardly anonymous within the Black community or unheralded by its historians: Louise Rodgers *aka* Letitia Lula Agatha Fontaine (1862-1918)¹⁸ performed during an era when Black women and their accomplishments often

¹⁴ Peter Dickinson, “The Achievement of Ragtime: An Introductory Study with Some Implications for British Research in Popular Music,” *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 105 (1978): 66, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/766248>.

¹⁵ St. Louis Post-Dispatch, “Rag time music (invented in St. Louis) is dead,” *St. Louis Post - Dispatch* (1879-1922) (St. Louis, Mo.), 04/04/1909 1909, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/rag-time-music-invented-st-louis-is-dead/docview/579745304/se-2?accountid=14512>.

¹⁶ St. Louis Post-Dispatch, “Rag time music (invented in St. Louis) is dead.”

¹⁷ Matthew D. Morrison, *Blacksound: Making Race and Popular Music in the United States* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2024), 4, 6.

¹⁸ Louise Rogers headstone in St. Peters Cemetery, St. Louis.

went unreported in the mainstream media. Unsurprisingly, she is *not* a celebrated part of American popular music history although she deserves to be remembered as a ragtime pioneer. There are relatively few references to her popularity and her influence on American popular music. Since no recordings or photographs of her have been located, she has been largely excluded from musicological discussion. Because the venue in which she performed was also St. Louis's most celebrated bordello, Babe Connors' Castle Club, some degree of stigma was attached to her work. From as early as 1888,



Figure 5 Castle Club, 212 Sixth St., St. Louis, MO

Mama Lou worked at a well-maintained White row house at 210 S. Sixth Street, known as the city's most elegant whorehouse.¹⁹ The Castle Club's patrons were well-off White men who paid the club

membership dues and \$20 admission fees to lounge under expensive crystal chandeliers enjoying performances by eight to ten young women who often danced in skirts without underwear on mirrored floors much to the delight of the paying audience. But the primary popular attraction in the Chestnut Valley sporting district of St. Louis was Mama Lou.

¹⁹ Dennis Owsley, *City of Gabriels The History of Jazz in St. Louis, 1895-1973* (St. Louis: Reedy Press, 2006), 1.

The Castle Club successfully targeted the discretionary spending of a White male market by providing entertainment that corresponded with three longstanding American stereotypes for Black women: “Jezebel,” “Mammy,” and “Sapphire.” The young Jezebels who titillated patrons by dancing shamelessly “in little more than stockings” on mirrored floors were advertised as “creoles,” implying that their café-au-lait skin color and prominent European features (light skin, thin lips and nose, straight hair) signaled a mixed-race ancestry.²⁰ (Connors claimed to her profit that they were all imported from Louisiana.)²¹ Mama (or Mammy) Lou performed a combination of the other two stereotypes for Black women. Her physical characteristics (dark skin, round body) and wardrobe – a “comic maid’s costume of calico dress, gingham apron, and red bandana” – (later employed and popularized nationwide by the Aunt Jemima trademark) embodied the sentimental housekeeper or “mammy.”²² But her contemptuous mocking of both whores and johns in song better fits the description of Sapphire, whose viperous tongue was legendary.²³ Mama Lou and her octaroon dancers retailed the dominant stereotypes of Black femininity to the most powerful men in segregated St. Louis, sustaining their hegemonic identities in a mixed-race bordello where some of these men would venture

²⁰ Eric McHenry, “Queen of the Castle,” *The American Scholar* (2023_09_06 2023). <https://theamericanscholar.org/queen-of-the-castle/>.

²¹ Carolyn M. West, “Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel: Historical images of Black women and their implications for psychotherapy,” *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training* 32 (10/01 1995): 462, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-3204.32.3.458>, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232579424_Mammy_Sapphire_and_Jezebel_Historical_images_of_Black_women_and_their_implications_for_pschotherapy.

²² David A. Jasen and Gene Jones, “Introduction: Tom Turpin and the Birth of Ragtime,” in *Black Bottom Stomp: Eight Masters of Ragtime and Early Jazz* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 2.

²³ West, “Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel: Historical images of Black women and their implications for psychotherapy,” 461.

upstairs, be stripped naked and stand vulnerable in front of Black women.²⁴ Reinforcing the traditional American racial hierarchy contributed to the sustained success and international reputation of Connors' Castle Club and to the influence of Mama Lou's songs on popular music in the United States and abroad where Canadian, British, and French singers performed songs from her repertoire.

Connor needed Mama Lou to fight off competition from the segregated bordellos owned by Priscilla Henry at 206 and 208 S. Sixth Street. Although one offered White women and the other offered Black women to the White men in St. Louis, Black men were not allowed to patronize the White brothel. Born in 1829 on the Forks of Cypress plantation in Alabama, in 1866 Henry moved north to St. Louis where an emancipated woman could work as a washerwoman. She became destitute in 1867 when she worked as a scullery maid in a hotel that burned down. Henry moved into a "boardinghouse for colored women" where sexual favors were sold for cash by women who had little opportunity for being offered respectable jobs. Entrepreneurial to the core, she shunned work as a prostitute and began doing business as a washboard laundress in an alley. When that enterprise did not provide a sustainable income, she became a sex worker.

Henry's change in profession came at a time when St. Louis officials chose to regulate, rather than eliminate the lucrative sex industry. To mitigate the negative consequences of the high poverty rate among women in postbellum boomtown St. Louis, local authorities passed the Social Evil Ordinance in 1870 which legalized prostitution and

²⁴ Mia Moody, "From Jezebel to Ho: An Analysis of Creative and Imaginative Shared Representations of African-American Women," *Journal of Research on Women and Gender* 3, no. 1 (2012): 74, <https://digital.library.txstate.edu/handle/10877/12850>.

required health checks for workers. Catering to local patrons, a transient work force and pioneers hoping to pass through the “gateway to the West,” the temporary legalization of prostitution – a branch of the entertainment industry closely associated with music for decades – expanded the sex workforce and established a national reputation for St. Louis, at that time one of the nation’s largest cities, as a place where high class brothels prospered. Records from the St. Louis Female Hospital demonstrated that most sex workers in the late 1870s were migrants who had lived in the city for less than a year.²⁵ Many of these destitute migrants were African American women escaping the South.

Black women who fled the South and entered the Reconstruction-era sex trade in St. Louis did not, of course, escape racism. The city’s brothels were strictly if irregularly segregated, with houses selling access to either White and mulatto women or Black and mulatto women but never White and Black women in the same house. In 1880 only one brothel offering white prostitutes was owned by an African American, Mary Phillips. Newspaper articles condemned her as a “bad woman” yet, although they criticized Black madams, like Henry and Connors, who employed Black or mulatto women, they refrained from demonizing them until after their deaths.²⁶ Henry and Connors were assisted by White men as they founded their businesses. Thomas R. Howard, a White ex-Confederate soldier who had been Madam Henry’s regular client, became her lover and investment manager. Henry, who as a forty-six-year-old illiterate formerly enslaved

²⁵ Ashley B. Cundiff, "River Town Brothel Culture: Sex Worker Mobility, Policing, and Agency 1870 to 1940" (PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 2016), 72, <https://asset.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/ZRDK2WOXMEGNJ85/R/file-7d782.pdf>.

²⁶ Cundiff, "River Town Brothel Culture: Sex Worker Mobility, Policing, and Agency 1870 to 1940," 77.

woman arrived in St. Louis caring for her infant sister amassed a fortune estimated to be worth approximately \$2 million in 2020 dollars. Her wealth enabled her to purchase the plantation where she was born and enslaved to house her younger siblings and their children, to provide assistance to the needy in her community, and to buy up property across St. Louis where she set up other madams, expanding her business until it was one of the most successful in the entire Mississippi River region.²⁷ For over twenty years, Howard remained her romantic partner and business advisor. But in August 1895, the year of her death, Howard was arrested several times for crimes victimizing Henry. He was accused of robbing her, attempting to defraud her by conspiring to falsify deeds that transferred two of her properties to him and, most heinously, for fatally poisoning Henry's sister (and beneficiary) and attempting to poison his longtime lover. After suffering, and taking medicine Howard administered for six years, Henry died of "indigestion" three months after Howard was arrested for the poisoning charges.

Racism influenced the dissimilar treatment of Henry and Howard by St. Louis daily newspapers. "HER WEALTH IS NOTHING NOW. Wicked, Notorious Old Priscilla Henry Is Dead" was the headline on the front page of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch on November 4, 1895, that announced her demise.²⁸ Although she had clearly been Howard's victim at least two of the three crimes he was accused of committing, Howard, who had been arrested three times, was once again a free man. Three weeks after her death he reported

²⁷ The Telegraph, "Unstoppable: Missouri Historical Society Press publishes book about St. Louis region's women's activism," *The Telegraph* (2020_10_13 2020): 4. <https://www.thetelegraph.com/features/article/Unstoppable-Missouri-Historical-Society-Press-15645967.php>.

²⁸ St. Louis Post-Dispatch, "Her Wealth Is Nothing Now," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (St. Louis, MO), 1895_11_04 1895, https://www.newspapers.com/image/138136359/?match=1&clipping_id=193322039.

the death of an impoverished man who he allowed to sleep in a vacant room in his building.²⁹ The schizoid newspaper article that declared Henry's "wickedness" in the headlines but praised her remarkable business acumen and rise to wealth were replete with judgmental commentary about this Black woman who, in 2022, the Missouri Historical Society honored as one of "50 Unstoppable St. Louis Women."³⁰ Yet, the articles treated Howard with journalistic fairness, reporting unbiased facts free of subjective attacks on a White man who victimized his Black lover.

The American music industry has roots that are deeply intertwined with criminal activity. "Resorts" that provided female "entertainment" usually offered music and other intoxicants (alcohol, opioids, cocaine) for their patrons' enjoyment while waiting for service. Henry's connections included having the first pianola in the city and sheltering W.C. Handy, a hometown associate who was a trained musician and aspiring composer. Handy stayed with her in 1892, the year his famous "St. Louis Blues" was published; he may well have heard the story that inspired this groundbreaking song from a woman at Henry's establishment.³¹ As prosperous as she was, Henry was livid when Sara "Babe" Connor bought the house at 210 Sixth Street, next door to Henry's two resorts. She had to compete with the attraction of Mama Lou.

²⁹ St. Louis Post-Dispatch, "Died in a vacant room," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (St. Louis, MO), 1895_11_27 1895, https://www.newspapers.com/image/138137928/?match=1&clipping_id=193364440.

³⁰ The Telegraph, "Unstoppable: Missouri Historical Society Press publishes book about St. Louis region's women's activism."

³¹ Jeannette Cooperman, "Babe & Priscilla," *St. Louis Magazine* (2019_09_19 2014): 5. <https://www.stlmag.com/culture/Literature/babe-%26-priscilla/>.

Although the presentation of longstanding racist stereotypes enhanced the profitability of Connor's business, the musical talent of Mama Lou was the most critical factor in establishing it as an entertainment venue that contributed generously to American popular music. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported that "young [white] men" visited "the slums to hear "Mammy," as she was called, sing her new music."³² T.S. Eliot's family home at 2635 Locust St. was less than two miles from Chestnut Valley, where ragtime was born and nurtured. As a young man "Tom" Eliot enjoyed the art music appropriate to his class position, but also relished ragtime tunes and African American folk ballads like "Frankie and Johnny" and "Stagolee," associated with Mama Lou and the Castle Club.³³ Although Eliot, born in 1888, was probably too young to have visited the Castle Club himself, he might have heard her tunes performed by young white men in blackface during his teenage years at Smith Academy, the private Catholic preparatory school which, like Washington University, had been founded by his wealthy grandfather.³⁴ Another eminent figure who loved and performed the classical canon was fascinated by Mama Lou's music. A well-known story attributed to George S. Johns, an associate editor and music critic at the *Post-Dispatch*, appeared in that newspaper next to the news article about the death of Polish pianist, composer, and Prime Minister Ignacy Paderewski. Johns reported that he took Paderewski to the Castle Club where the virtuoso was so

³² St. Louis Post-Dispatch, "Rag time music (invented in St. Louis) is dead."

³³ Stacy I. Morgan, *Frankie and Johnny: Race, Gender, and the Work of African American Folklore in 1930s America* (University of Texas Press, 2017), 20. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7560/312070>; Morgan, *Frankie and Johnny: Race, Gender, and the Work of African American Folklore in 1930s America*.

³⁴ Jeannette Cooperman, "On St. Louis's T.S. Eliot and the Arrogance of a Poet's Love," *The Common Reader* (2023_01_15 2023). <https://commonreader.wustl.edu/on-st-louiss-t-s-eliot-and-the-arrogance-of-a-poets-love/>.

taken with Mama Lou's performance of "Ta-Ra-Ra-Boom-De-Ay" that he went to the piano and learned the song as she sang it. Paderewski's interest in African American music – which he called "America's only original contribution to music" was allegedly born

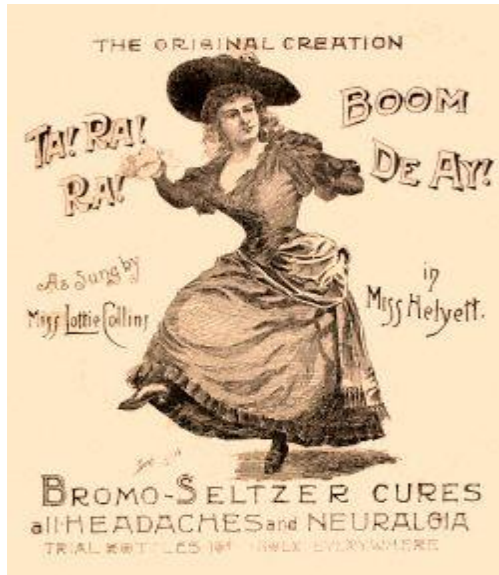


Figure 6 British ad features Lottie Collins, early 1890s

that night.³⁵

The song that intrigued Paderewski traveled far and wide in time and space from the St. Louis brothel. With a title that sounds like a string of silly vocables, "Ta-Ra-Ra-Boom-De-Ay" was an early example of the coopting of Black music by white music industry profiteers that became routine in the twentieth century. It was performed on stage and in film domestically and internationally, but Mama Lou

received no compensation for the song attributed to her. Although the melody may have folk roots, it was Mama Lou's interpretation that inspired the extensive reach of the song. Musicologist David Ewen described the power of her voice and the originality of her repertoire which included African American spirituals, unlikely choices for a night club, bordello setting. "She seemed to dig deep inside her entrails for the songs of her race that she emitted like some mighty lamentation."³⁶ When Henry J. Sayers, publicist for a musical troupe, heard Mama Lou sing "Ta-Ra" and decided to add the number to his

³⁵ St. Louis Post-Dispatch, "When Paderewski played piano and Mama Lou sang," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (St. Louis, MO), 1941_06_30 1941, https://www.newspapers.com/image/139084807/?match=1&clipping_id=189974679.

³⁶ David Ewen, *The life and death of Tin Pan Alley* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1964), 82. <https://archive.org/details/lifedeathoftinpa0000ewen/page/86/mode/2up>.

group's repertoire, he cleaned up the lyrics. "I had never tried my hand at songwriting, but I thought with a few changes I would clean up the stuff."³⁷ Sayers' lyrics were unsuccessful, but he was able to profit by selling his rights to a song publisher who listed Sayers as the composer and the lyricist. Sayers also sold the song to British actress Lottie Collins's husband for her use in a dance routine that took London by storm and helped earn the performer a weekly salary higher than that paid to the editor of the *London Times*.³⁸ In its European edition published in Paris, the *New York Herald* reported, "London has gone stark-mad over the refrain of the music-hall song called "Tarara, boom, deay...There is hardly a theatre in London in which the refrain is not alluded to at least once a night."³⁹ The song is credited with helping to launch the four-decade-long career of Polaire, the French-Algerian singer-actress who was internationally renowned and immortalized on the 1895 cover of *Le Rire* in a drawing by Toulouse Lautrec. Polaire, a Lady Gaga-ish *chanteuse excentrique* who, like Mama Lou, often shocked her audiences, performed "Ta Ra-Ra Boum" at the Folies-Bergère.⁴⁰ After Collins performed the song in New York, it became a national favorite. Although Polaire may have profited greatly from her affiliation with the song, Mama Lou's only recorded gain was her salary and her national reputation among bordello patrons.

³⁷ Ewen, *The life and death of Tin Pan Alley*, 82.

³⁸ "LIVE MUSICAL TOPICS," *New York Times* (1857-1922) (New York, N.Y.), 04/03/1892 Apr 03 1892, <https://www.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimeswindex/newspapers/live-musical-topics/docview/94921277/sem-2?accountid=14512>.

New York Herald, "Americans in England," Article, *The New York Herald (European Edition)*, 1892/02/29/1892, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/YSOJTX372758366/IHTO?u=uclosangeles&sid=bookmark-IHTO&pg=1&xid=d1646640>, Gale.³⁹

⁴⁰ *Le Matin*, "Tablettes Theatrales," *Le Matin* (Paris), 1892_10_05 1892, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5549864/f3.item>.

The international aspect of the excitement generated by “Ta-Ra” was matched by another song allegedly lifted from Mama Lou’s repertoire. Band leader Theodore Metz claimed he wrote the melody of “There’ll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight” and published it in 1886. His McIntyre and Heath Minstrels often paraded down the streets playing the tune when they came to perform in a town and helped popularize the melody. However, the song was heard at the Castle Club, performed by Mama Lou and pianist Tom Turpin, before Metz’s claim to authorship was made. This harmonically simple ditty (twelve bars of tonic plus two each of dominant and tonic) with lyrics both religious (“the preachin’ does begin,” “when you gets religion, you wanna shout”) and secular (“there’ll be girls for ev’rybody”) that suggest an origin in the Black South (“when you hear dem a bells,”) became so popular nationwide that it was used in political campaigns and as a war anthem for Teddy Roosevelt’s Rough Riders in the Spanish-American War.⁴¹

If Mama Lou had been credited with authorship of either of these two popular songs which have been performed throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, she would have prospered economically, and her professional legacy would have been well-established. Ronald Radano reminds us that “shortchanging or stiffing working musicians of their pay has been an enduring practice for as long as African American musicians have been making money.”⁴² Mama Lou had two challenges to overcome to be compensated fairly: her race and her gender. But several white female musical artists

⁴¹ Deirdre O’Connell, “Howling ‘A Hot Time’: The Paradoxical Anthem of the Progressive Age,” *Journal of American Studies* 55, no. 3 (2021): 598, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002187582000167X>, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/437A61345F68D89CC7F2BAB7D0846796>.

⁴² Ronald Radano, *Alive in the Sound*, ed. Ronald Radano, Josh Kun, and Nina Sun Eidsheim, *Refiguring American Music*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2025), 181. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478061137>.

profited from Mama Lou's songs. European White female musical artists Lottie Collins and Polaire prospered from Mama's popularization of folk-based melodies with scabrous lyrics, and so did Canadian American singer-actress May Irwin. Irwin, who is remembered as the actress Thomas Edison hired to perform the first screen kiss, was recreating a memorable moment from the Broadway hit *The Widow Jones*. In the show, Irwin introduced her signature song, "The Bully Song". Sportswriter and horse-race judge Charles Trevathan is credited with the tune's authorship but many who knew him said that he heard Mama Lou perform the song at Babe Connor's brothel.⁴³

Two other "long-legged" standards are also thought to be tunes Mama Lou's performed. "Stagger Lee" was rhythm & blues singer Lloyd Price's first pop #1 hit in 1958, six decades after Mama Lou introduced it.⁴⁴ She also was an early performer of "Frankie and Johnny," a song firmly established as part of American folklore and still so popular in the 1960s that Sam Cooke performed it in his successful 1964 engagement at New York's Copacabana. When Mama Lou performed these songs in the early 1890's, she may not have composed the melodies as they may have been part of African and African American folk traditions. However, McHenry argues that her renditions were the proximate source for the transcriptions that white men published under their names. For a period in the early 1890s, Thomas ("Tom") Turpin (1871-1922), who began his music career at the Castle Club and was eventually known as the "Father of St. Louis Ragtime," accompanied

⁴³ Sigmund Spaeth, *A history of popular music in America* (New York: Random House, 1948), 286. <https://archive.org/details/historyofpopular00spae/page/286/mode/2up>.

⁴⁴ Elaine Viets, "Staggerlee Shot Billy," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (St. Louis, MO), 1979_03_18 1979, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/139626305/?match=1&terms=%22babe%20connors%22>.

Mama Lou on piano and undoubtedly learned a great deal about ragtime from her tutelage.

Tom Turpin earned his patriarchal status by popularizing ragtime as a distinctly African American musical style. His association with Mama Lou was a substantial



Figure 7 Ad for the Rosebud Bar

beginning. The experience he gained at The Castle Club prepared him to be a saloonkeeper who performed in his bar and held exciting, popular “cutting contests” (musical battles in which pianists attempted to showcase their skills and outshine other participants) that attracted the best ragtime pianists

from the region. Jasen and Jones claim that ragtime’s “home address” was 2220-2222 Market Street because the new musical style spent six years of its youth in Turpin’s Rosebud Bar. By becoming the first “patron of the syncopated arts,”

Turpin enabled and supported the formation of the first “school of American popular composers.”⁴⁵ In 1897, Turpin’s composition “Harlem Rag” became the first published piano rag authored by a Black musician. Notating the rhythmic intricacies of ragtime – the steady, march-like left-hand bass with syncopated melodies in the right-hand – the sheet music offered amateur pianists on both sides of the color line the opportunity to learn this ebullient musical style. By 1900, St. Louis was the home of

⁴⁵ Jasen and Jones, "Introduction: Tom Turpin and the Birth of Ragtime," 1.

ragtime, home of Turpin, the genre's first patron, John Stark, its first major publisher, and its most highly acclaimed composer, Scott Joplin.

Several factors led to St. Louis becoming a mecca for skilled African American musicians like Joplin. During the 1860s, after railroads began to service the city, the population increased dramatically making St. Louis the third largest city in the United States by 1870. As St. Louis became a key transit hub, the hospitality industry grew in the 1890s, entertaining travelers in saloons, hotels, bordellos, and theatres. These venues provided jobs at all levels for popular musicians, attracting the best pianists from around the region.⁴⁶ At the same time, an influx of German immigrants populated St. Louis with gifted music teachers who set high standards for their students. Many young Black musicians learned to sightread and understand music theory from German music teachers in the public school system. Julius Weiss, born and classically educated in Saxony, moved to Texas where he taught the pre-teen Scott Joplin for about five years. In turn, Joplin himself was a piano teacher in Sedalia, Missouri when he published ragtime's first major hit, "The Maple Leaf Rag" in 1899. A year later, like many other pianists, he moved to St. Louis where he joined the coterie who performed in whorehouses and competed at Turpin's bar. The German influence on St. Louis's musical heritage extended beyond public school classrooms into the cultural life of the community. German traditional brass bands, classical music, and choral groups broadened the musical horizons of local Black musicians. Because of the German American focus on

⁴⁶ David A. Jasen and Gene Jones, *That American rag: the story of ragtime from coast to coast* (New York: Schirmer Books, 2000), 2. <https://archive.org/details/thatamericanrags00davi>.

music education many African American musicians in St. Louis were skilled not only in ragtime, blues, and early jazz genres but also had training in music theory and pedagogy that distinguished them from talented, but self-made Black musicians. German American entrepreneurs also offered employment opportunities for Black musicians.

Prior to World War I, St. Louis was the headquarters of two German American excursion steamboat companies – the Eagle Packet Company and the Streckfus Steamboat Line. Both companies had excursion boats that ran short trips featuring live music and a dance floor.⁴⁷ Streckfus tried various marketing tactics (e.g., trading stamps, beauty contests) to attract well-to-do white St. Louisans to its segregated excursion service but eventually focused company advertising on their skilled orchestras.⁴⁸ They employed talented, educated musicians who could sight read and learn new material quickly because the bands updated their repertoire to accommodate the clientele's interest in current hit songs. Bandleader Fate Marable led two-hour daily rehearsals in addition to performing for the patrons. Acclaimed drummer Zutty Singleton noted that New Orleans musicians considered working with Marable “going to the conservatory” because of the skills required of musicians on the Streckfus line.⁴⁹ In the early 1920s, before his move to Chicago and his ascension to national acclaim, a young Louis Armstrong worked as part of Marable's band headquartered in St. Louis. On the river, he learned enough sightreading to keep the job for three years. With a tradition of trendsetting popular music

⁴⁷ David Chevan, "Riverboat Music from St. Louis and the Streckfus Steamboat Line," *Black Music Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (Autumn, 1989 1989): 154, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/779421>.

⁴⁸ Chevan, "Riverboat Music from St. Louis and the Streckfus Steamboat Line," 156.

⁴⁹ Chevan, "Riverboat Music from St. Louis and the Streckfus Steamboat Line," 162.

that dated back to the ragtime of Scott Joplin and the blues of W. C. Handy and the jazz of Armstrong, by the 1950s when Ike Turner arrived from the South, St. Louis was fertile ground in which rock and roll and rhythm and blues artists like Turner and Chuck Berry thrived.

Chicago, Chicago, that Toddling Town

Cooke was still a toddler in 1933, the year newly elected President Roosevelt fulfilled his campaign promise to end prohibition and the Cook family moved from Clarksdale to Chicago. Of the approximately 1.5 million African Americans who moved north between 1916 and 1930, the “toddlin’ town” experienced the largest single influx. During that period, Chicago’s black population grew by 500%, from under 50,000 to almost 250,000. This impressive growth inspired Fred Fisher, the German immigrant lyricist of “Chicago (That Toddling Town),” to include a line (rarely heard today) calling out “more Colored people up in State Street you can see, than you’ll see in Louisiana or Tennessee” in 1922.⁵⁰ The metropolis of the Midwest was unlike other cities of the region. It offered more job opportunities for migrants but also presented more dangers. Cooke spent his childhood and teenage years in the Midwest center of organized crime and the home of the Chicago Outfit, the vice operation inherited, through murder, by violent mob boss and nightclub owner, Al Capone.

⁵⁰ Charles Hiroshi Garrett, “Louis Armstrong and the Great Migration,” in *Struggling to Define a Nation, American Music and the Twentieth Century* (University of California Press, 2008), 87. Frank Sinatra definitive rendition of the song in 1957 omitted the racially tinged third verse.



Figure 8 Ad for Colosimo's Restaurant and Cabaret, Chicago, IL

Organized crime was deeply rooted and maintained connections with local authorities in Chicago where murder in service of ambition and profit was all too common. In 1895, seventeen-year-old Vincenzo "Big Jim" Colosimo, emigrated to Chicago from his native Italy and through friendships with city officials was hired as street sweeper. He organized his coworkers and formed an effective lobbying organization thereby forming a political bond between the underworld and the city's leaders.⁵¹ Aided by his personal and political friendships with important Chicagoans, by 1910

Colosimo (also known as "Diamond Jim") employed many musicians and singers in the approximately 200 profitable brothels, gambling dens, and saloons and the popular restaurant and cabaret at 2126 Wabash Street located just a ten-minute drive from where the Cook family would eventually live in Bronzeville. When Prohibition became law in 1919, he refused to enter the alcohol trade. Because of his refusal to become a bootlegger, there was suspicion that Colosimo was assassinated in 1920 by his Brooklyn-

⁵¹ June Sawyers, "THE VICE LORD WHO FELL IN LOVE WITH A CHOIR SINGER: [FINAL EDITION, C]," *Chicago Tribune (pre-1997 Fulltext)* (Chicago, Ill.), July 26 1987, <https://www.proquest.com/chicagotribune/newspapers/vice-lord-who-fell-love-with-choir-singer/docview/291034451/sem-2?accountid=14512>.

raised assistant, Johnny Torrio and Torrio's right-hand man, New Yorker Alphonse Capone who immediately established an extremely profitable bootleg business.⁵²

During the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression, organized crime and the entertainment industry were closely linked in Chicago. Prior to the passage of the Volstead Act in 1919, organized crime profited mainly from gambling and prostitution which took place in brothels that provided musical entertainment. From 1920 through 1933 organized crime earned enormous profits from the illegal sale of alcoholic beverages. Under the Volstead Act, which set out the detailed prohibitions of liquor, beer, and alcoholic beverages only broadly outlined in the Eighteenth Amendment, by the late 1920s saloons in Chicago's South Side became locations controlled by local ethnic gangs affiliated with organized crime. Crime families operated 'speakeasies' – where those in the 'in crowd' could knock on the door and whisper *sotto voce*, "Harry sent me," to be afforded entry to a 'joint' where various outlawed activities were offered to a thirsty public along with musical entertainment. Again, the live music industry was entwined with illegal sales of liquor, women, and the chance to win money. These speakeasies were precursors to the nightclubs in which Cooke would perform in the 1950s and 1960s.

The live performance of music was a dangerous pathway to success because it was immersed in the criminal world. Growing up in Chicago, Cooke was aware of the dangers of association with gangsters and still chose this career path that sustained a dramatic power imbalance between performers and their employers. The relationships

⁵² Lisa McGirr, *The War on Alcohol: Prohibition and the Rise of the American State* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015), 70–76.

between larger-than-life organized crime figures and public officials firmly established the power that mobsters wielded over the public and over those it employed as performers. The ties between crime gangs and their protectors – from police officers up the political ranks to judges, and even to United States Senators – empowered mobsters to rule certain neighborhoods without fear of reprisal. Criminal networks proliferated in impoverished African American neighborhoods like Bronzeville and in immigrant communities and residents could not rely on protection from local authorities. The history of Cicero, Illinois provides an enlightening case study of the extent of criminal and government ties. In 1923, Chicagoans elected Democrat William Emmett Dever to the office of mayor. Nicknamed Decent Dever because he promised to enforce the law, he arrested bootleggers in what came to be known as the “Great Beer War.” Mayor Dever transformed Chicago from one of the “wettest” to one of the “driest” cities. He closed gambling houses and fired four hundred ‘dirty’ cops who had protected vice.⁵³ During the Dever administration, Al Capone moved his Chicago Outfit headquarters to Cicero, a suburb that was home to a large Czech American community. In a move African American Chicagoans likely found frighteningly reminiscent of Jim Crow tactics, he strongarmed the local elections using brute force and machine-gun toting thugs stationed at voting locations to ensure that only the ‘right’ votes were cast. Cicero’s incumbent mayor, Joseph Z. Klenha, who had asked the Chicago Outfit for help, was reelected. In return for

⁵³ Rose C. Feld, "DEVER TELLS OF CHICAGO'S WAR ON CRIME: MAYOR STAMPED OUT RUM RUNNING AS FIRST MOVE IN RESTORING CITY'S RESPECT FOR LAW -- HAD TO DISMISS 400 POLICE IN FIGHT ON PROTECTED VICE," *New York Times* (1923-) (New York, N.Y.), 02/15/1925 1925, <https://www.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimeswindex/newspapers/dever-tells-chicagos-war-on-crime/docview/103608672/sem-2?accountid=14512>.

Capone's assistance, Klenha allowed Capone's Chicago Outfit to control Cicero until the notorious mobster was convicted of tax evasion and sent to prison in 1931. In the mayoral election of 1932, without Capone's support, Cicero's citizens rejected Klenha's Republican machine by an unprecedented turnout of Democratic voters illuminating the power Capone had previously wielded over Cicero's citizens.

The mob's control of the music business has affected the lives and careers of musicians in the Chicago area throughout the twentieth century. Organized crime laundered illegal income through nightclubs they controlled by direct ownership or by silent partnership. In 1929, a band led by the legendary jazz pianist and bandleader Earl 'Fatha' Hines performed at The Sunset Café (*aka* The Grand Terrace Café) in Chicago. They were the house band at Chicago's thriving "black and tan" nitery for twelve years. In a 1975 documentary produced for the British ATV Network, Hines recalled two enlightening stories about the power and influence held by organized crime over the Chicago entertainment scene. One night as he sat in the kitchen of the Grand Terrace, a nightclub where his band performed, Hines witnessed four of Capone's men enter. One of the men told Ed Fox, the owner of the Grand Terrace, that the Capone operation was taking twenty-five percent ownership of the café in exchange for 'protection.'⁵⁴ Fox protested that he did not need their service because he had been in business for a few years and had been successful without any protection. He ordered the men to leave.

⁵⁴ "Sunset Cafe: Handsome Place Will Open Its Doors to the Public Next Week," *The Chicago Defender (National edition) (1921-1967)* (Chicago, Ill.), 07/30/1921 1921, <https://www.proquest.com/hnpchicagotribune1/historical-newspapers/sunset-cafe/docview/491892981/sem-2?accountid=14512>.

One of the men responded by telling Fox, in a threatening manner, that Fox had two sons and “you like your boys and we’d like to see you keep them.” With that threat, Capone prevailed and became Fox’s partner. Hines recalled that Al Capone “came in there one night and called the whole band and show together” to explain how the musicians were to behave. Hines recounted Capone’s instructions and their effect on the musicians.

“We just want you people to attend to your own business. We’ll give you all the protection in the world, he said we want you to be like the three monkeys – you hear nothing, you see nothing and you say nothing. And that’s what we did. And I used to hear many things, many of the things that they were going to do but I never tried to tell anyone. And sometimes the police used to call looking for some fall guy ... used to come in and say, “Oh, what were they talking about?” I said “I don’t know” ... because they had a habit of putting the pictures of these different people that would bring information in the paper and the next day you find them out there in the lake somewhere swimming around there with some chains attached to the feet and all that. You know what I mean.”⁵⁵

Gangsters’ control over Black musicians and their careers was not benign. When Hines wanted to perform in New York, Ralph Capone (Al’s elder brother) stated that “the only way Hines would leave the Grand Terrace was in a pinewood box.”⁵⁶

Capone was a jazz lover whose interactions with Black musicians could be beneficial or dangerous. Acclaimed band leader Lionel Hampton benefited from Capone’s largesse when he moved to Chicago in 1925 during his teenage years. His grandmother brought the family from Alabama to Chicago because his uncle, who worked for Capone “making bathtub gin,” found an apartment for them at 35th and King

⁵⁵ Charlie Nairn, *Earl 'Fatha' Hines* (United Kingdom: ATV Network, 1975).

⁵⁶ Frank Bovenkerk, "Jazz and the Mob: A Story of Unexpected Patronage," (2021), 134.

Drive.⁵⁷ Al Capone's generosity was sometimes tinged with danger. When Fats Waller finished his show one night at Chicago's Sherman Hotel, several of Capone's men accosted him, placed him in a car at gunpoint, and blindfolded him as they drove to a place in Joliet where a party celebrating Capone's birthday was in full swing. The men sat Waller at a piano and Capone told him to play for the guests. He was held there for 'a day-and-a half, playing number after number. After every request, a one hundred dollar bill was placed in his pocket. When he was finally allowed to leave, "all his pockets were full of one hundred dollar bills."⁵⁸

Impresarios, nightclub owners, and managers of musical artists affiliated with organized crime exercised broad influence over the lives of the musicians in their orbit. The decades-long relationship between one of America's most widely acclaimed musicians and his renowned manager is a prime example of this influence – one that could also be recognized as direct control – over the artist began in Cooke's hometown. In 1935, jazz pioneer Louis Armstrong approached Joe Glaser, a tough Chicago businessman and Capone associate, for protection after the trumpeter had survived several harrowing incidents. In 1932, Armstrong, who had two managers with whom he was fighting, escaped the disagreement by sailing to London. After his return, a well-known mobster accosted Armstrong in Chicago and, holding a gun on the musician,

⁵⁷ Marion E. Kabaker, "South Side roots set the tempo for a legendary career: Lionel Hampton was interviewed by Chicago free-lance writer Marion, E. Kabaker," *Chicago Tribune (pre-1997 Fulltext)* (Chicago, Ill.), 08/09/

1992 Aug 09 1992, <https://www.proquest.com/chicagotribune/newspapers/south-side-roots-set-tempo-legendary-career/docview/283256718/sem-2?accountid=14512>.

⁵⁸ Mike Wallington, "This Joint is Jumpin': Jazz Musician Fats Waller," (2008), 1:05. <https://youtu.be/orykZBD9nQA?si=o1gzb-ENI39Ei9NO>.

forced Armstrong to travel to New York and fulfill a contract with one of the managers.⁵⁹ Armstrong had also been threatened by Dutch Schultz and other gangsters in New York.⁶⁰ Since his early years in New Orleans, Armstrong, believed that a black man needed the protection of a white man to survive and prosper.⁶¹ This type of association could be the difference between life and death or success and failure for a Black man in the 1930s. So, in 1935 the troubled trumpeter sought Glaser's patronage. Glaser was the former owner of The Sunset Café and a well-known associate of Al Capone's and the man in charge of the notorious mobster's prostitution ring.⁶² Capone protected entertainers and offered them a laissez-faire relationship with the mob. If lowly-paid musicians never 'squealed' on the gangsters around them, they were likely to avoid harm. But eventually, some gifted musicians like Armstrong gained celebrity and began to earn a substantial income. The potential profit that such marketability could generate caught the attention of the criminals in the venues where these musicians performed. This was what transpired with Armstrong and Glaser.

Glaser, the son of a prosperous physician who once aspired to follow in his father's professional footsteps, abandoned that goal and left medical school after fainting in an operating room. He became a fight promoter associated with organized crime figures. Taking on some of the less than stellar behaviors of his associates, Glaser fixed fights

⁵⁹ Bovenkerk, "Jazz and the Mob: A Story of Unexpected Patronage," 129.

⁶⁰ Simon Hodgson, "A Hell of a Businessman: A Biography of Joe Glaser," *Act-sf.org*, 2016, <http://blog.act-sf.org/2016/01/a-hell-of-businessman-biography-of-joe.html>.

⁶¹ Bovenkerk, "Jazz and the Mob: A Story of Unexpected Patronage," 130.

⁶² Chris Jones, "Behind a great trumpeter, the notorious Joe Glaser," *Chicago Tribune* (2016_01_29 2016). <https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/theater/ct-armstrong-jones-ae-0131-20160128-column.html>.

and regularly indulged his notorious temper. He once forced a journalist who criticized him to leave Chicago.⁶³ In 1928, thirty-two-year-old Glaser was convicted of raping fourteen-year-old Dolores Wheeler and was sentenced to ten years in prison. His gangland connections and their political pull may have served him well because he avoided facing the rape charges in court for a year and, despite his eventual conviction, he never was incarcerated. After the trial ended, Glaser tried to avoid serving his sentence by marrying his victim in Kentucky. When this ploy failed, he made an unsuccessful request for a new trial. A motion for arrest of judgment was entered to buy time so that the accuser-victim and her parents, who had moved and were missing, could be located. The judge wanted to question the Wheeler family about their sworn statements Glaser's defense lawyers presented in which the girl's family denied the allegations against Glaser. The judge questioned the statements of facts because "several very suspicious things have happened in connection with the obtaining of them."⁶⁴ As soon as these documents were presented to the court, the family disappeared."⁶⁵ Dolores's female cousin was sentenced to nine months for facilitating the rape by bringing the girl to Glaser's apartment. John Wheeler, the girl's stepfather, assisted in the commission of the crime. He picked her up from the care of the nuns at the House of Good Shepherd and did not

⁶³ Laurence Bergreen, *Capone: The Man and the Era* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 232.

⁶⁴ "Child Attacker Finally Tried; Gets 10 Years: [1]," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) (Chicago, Ill.), 02/08/1928 1928, <https://www.proquest.com/hnpchicagotribune1/historical-newspapers/child-attacker-finally-tried-gets-10-years/docview/180888254/sem-2?accountid=14512>.

⁶⁵ "Court Refuses Glaser's Move for New Trial: Grants Judgment Stay as Girl Is Sought," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) (Chicago, Ill.), 02/26/1928 1928, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/court-refuses-glaser's-move-new-trial/docview/180882086/se-2?accountid=14512>.

bring her back to their care.⁶⁶ The stepfather also gave his consent for her marriage to Glaser. Mr. Wheeler received a six-month sentence for his attempt to help “fix [the] assault case.” Although two members of the victim’s family were imprisoned, Glaser’s conviction was overturned because Dolores Wheeler, the teenage complainant, could not be found.⁶⁷ Three years later, she returned from California where her husband had sent her, and seventeen-year-old Dolores Wheeler Glaser divorced her husband charging him with abandonment.⁶⁸ That organized crime was able to disappear people who opposed or challenged them was old news to Chicagoans.

Glaser became one of the most famous artist managers in the entertainment industry despite his known criminal activities and relationships. Because Capone was an owner of The Sunset Café, under Glaser’s management mobsters, their associates, and wealthy white patrons frequented the “Black and Tan” club and the streets of Bronzeville. When Glaser left his position as manager of the Sunset Café to focus on managing Armstrong, he had just been indicted for conspiring to steal a truckload of liquor delivered to his café.⁶⁹ His decision to manage Armstrong led to a close personal and professional

⁶⁶ "Judge directs investigation of Glaser's appeal: suspects girl's new story is "fixed"," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* (Chicago, Ill.), 02/21/1928 1928, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/judge-directs-investigation-glasers-appeal/docview/180890533/se-2?accountid=14512>.

⁶⁷ "Effort to fix assault case leads to jail: Judge accuses Wheeler of selling daughter," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* (Chicago, Ill.), 04/15/1928 1928, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/effort-fix-assault-case-leads-jail/docview/180938846/se-2?accountid=14512>

⁶⁸ "Joe Glaser sued by wife: sequel to assault case," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* (Chicago, Ill.), 01/15/1931 1931, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/joe-glaser-sued-wife-sequel-assault-case/docview/181161601/se-2?accountid=14512>

⁶⁹ "Vote to indict Joe Glaser in liquor robbery: plot to steal booze for cafe is charged," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* (Chicago, Ill.), 04/09/1935 1935, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/vote-indict-joe-glaser-liquor-robbery/docview/181574384/se-2?accountid=14512>.

relationship that lasted from 1935 until Glaser's death in 1969. Although Glaser was known to brag that "this [Armstrong] is my nigger" and "these shines are all alike. They are so lazy," Armstrong allowed Glaser to handle and control much of his personal life.⁷⁰ Despite Glaser's criminal connections and racist narcissism, his reputation as a tough businessman attracted other Black artists - including giants like Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, B.B. King, Lionel Hampton, Pearl Bailey, and a young Aretha Franklin - to Associated Booking Corporation (ABC), the management company he founded. But Glaser abused their trust. Julia Blackburn, Billie Holiday's biographer, claims Glaser (who referred to himself as "one of Billie's boyfriends") was behind her 1947 drug arrest and ensured she had no lawyer when she faced the judge.⁷¹ Armstrong, who earned millions of dollars and became a fixture in the American popular music scene beloved by a multiethnic international audience, believed that he would eventually own ABC, but when Glaser died in 1969, he found out that Sidney Korshak, a Beverly Hills lawyer affiliated with the Chicago mob, had acquired the company.⁷² Glaser left an estate of \$3 million, while Armstrong's was just over \$500,000.⁷³ Assessments of Glaser made by well-known entertainment industry leaders in the 2019 documentary about African American music executive Clarence Avant, *The Black Godfather*, clarify his power over and dominance of Black musical talent. Entertainment industry mogul David Geffen states that Glaser "was a tough guy" and "was connected." According to Avant, who worked for Glaser as an

⁷⁰ Bovenkerk, "Jazz and the Mob: A Story of Unexpected Patronage," 130.

⁷¹ Jones, "Behind a great trumpeter, the notorious Joe Glaser."

⁷² Hodgson A Hell of a Businessman: A Biography of Joe Glaser.

⁷³ Bovenkerk, "Jazz and the Mob: A Story of Unexpected Patronage," 130.

agent/manager, "They were all Al Capone's boys." Irv Cohen, Glaser's longstanding assistant explained the breadth of Glaser's control over Black musicians. "At one point we had about 70% of all the Black talent in America to book." Music culture historian Nelson George summarized the hegemony of organized crime over the music industry.

Prohibition creates the modern entertainment business in America. The underworld creates a network of restaurants, speakeasies, places where you can get drinks, and they provide entertainment. So, when Prohibition was repealed, the structure created by Prohibition remained. Now we have all this talent and they need management. And so, the gangsters who were involved with the speakeasy world are still there, and now there's a legitimate business to be run.⁷⁴

Traveling and Testifying

Thus, organized crime dominated Bronzeville, the African American community on the South Side of Chicago where Sam Cooke grew up. The *Chicago Defender*, an African American newspaper that traveled South with railroad porters and entertainers, enticing southern Blacks to move north, reported in 1937 that Glaser gave Ed Fox a long-term lease on the Grand Terrace Café that Fox had once owned and managed. The venue, which featured "the great Earl Hines and Fletcher Henderson bands" was located at 315 E. 35th Street in Bronzeville.⁷⁵ The Cooke family arrived in Bronzeville in 1933, and Sam spent his teenage years living at 724 E. 36th Street, less than a mile from the Grand

⁷⁴ Reginald Hudlin, "The Black Godfather," (United States: Netflix, June 7, 2019), 6:45–8:19.

⁷⁵ "Old Sunset Cafe Site To Be New Home Of Fox's Grand Terrace Cafe," *The Chicago Defender (National edition) (1921-1967)* (Chicago, Ill.), 02/27/1937 1937, <https://www.proquest.com/hnpchicagotribune1/historical-newspapers/old-sunset-cafe-site-be-new-home-foxs-grand/docview/492522006/sem-2?accountid=14512>.

Terrace Café. The Cook family was still living there when, at the tender age of 19, Sam began touring with The Soul Stirrers, the nation's most successful gospel group. But he understood that to survive in Bronzeville he also needed a gang affiliation. He joined the Junior Destroyers, a 'club' that he claimed "used to fight quite a bit" because children in his neighborhood "had to belong to a club to go to school."⁷⁶

Cooke, a savvy Chicagoan, undoubtedly knew that organized crime operated in the entertainment industry and the Big Apple. One of the most notorious mob-affiliated music industry moguls was Morris Levy. In 1949, a nineteen-year-old Levy, his brother, and several other associates opened the jazz club Birdland in the basement of 1678 Broadway, bought, allegedly, with Genovese crime family funding, from loan shark and drug dealer Joseph Cataldo (aka "Joe the Wop"), who had operated the Clique Club at the same address. Levy eventually expanded his music industry income streams to include a record label (Roulette Records), music publishing, and songwriting, as well as retailing and distribution. Levy garnered writer's royalties by paying struggling musician-songwriters a pittance for their original songs that they then were forced to play in his club, earning Levy performance royalties.⁷⁷ The presence of unsavory characters in the music business did not deter Cooke from pursuing his goal to cross over and establish a fandom that defied racial boundaries. According to his older brother Charles, "Sam wasn't no gangster, but he knew how to take care of himself."⁷⁸ At nine, he told his younger

⁷⁶ Peter Guralnick, *Dream boogie: the triumph of Sam Cooke* (New York: Back Bay Books/ Little, Brown and Company, 2005), Biography, 23.

⁷⁷ Philip Clark, "Underworld," in *Dave Brubeck: A Life in Time* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2020).

⁷⁸ Guralnick, *Dream boogie: the triumph of Sam Cooke*, 622.

brother L.C. that he had “figured out my life” and was “never gonna have a nine-to-five job.” He was determined to be a singer because he believed that “the system” was “designed, if you work, to keep you working” living “from payday to payday – at the end of the week you broke again.”⁷⁹ His first step was to build a fan base in the world of gospel.

Traveling the gospel circuit, Cooke confronted regional patterns of American racism, especially in the South. He began travelling with The Highway QC's as their lead singer during his teenage years. When the group performed in Memphis in 1949 he and two fellow members of the group drove three local girls to a park, even though the girls told the northerners that the space was “white-only”. The boys ignored the warning and parked. Police arrived and made all six youngsters get out of the car and line up for questioning. The white officers asked each person where they lived. When Sam answered, casually holding his hands in his pockets, an angry officer slapped him and called him a “nigger”.⁸⁰

Travelling often for performances gave Cooke the opportunity to build a network of national business connections. According to guitarist Leroy Crume, Sam networked in clubs, bars, and after-hours joints every night after his performances. Because pervasive nationwide segregation prevented traveling Black entertainers from occupying the vast majority of White-only accommodations, Cooke met a wide range of African American artists in the small hotels black entertainers patronized during the 1950s. Stops on the gospel circuit often coincided with those on the chitlin' circuit where early rhythm and

⁷⁹ Guralnick, *Dream boogie: the triumph of Sam Cooke*, 7.

⁸⁰ Guralnick, *Dream boogie: the triumph of Sam Cooke*, 52.

blues performers played to Black audiences.⁸¹ Already working toward a pop music career, he was performing religious music and simultaneously building connections in the secular music industry. Before he was certain that he could succeed in pop music, his interest in crossing over was supported by New Yorkers who were influential in the music industry. When Cooke performed gospel music at the famous Apollo Theater in August 1956, Bobby Schiffman, whose father owned the venue, encouraged the young gospel singer to cross over to secular music if he wanted to increase his earnings. Bobby Robinson, owner of Bobby's Happy House, a longstanding record shop and Harlem landmark, owned two record labels and was an advisor to Atlantic Records' owners Ahmet Ertegun and Jerry Wexler. Robinson recognized Cooke's charismatic control of the audience and urged him to switch to pop music.⁸² Although Cooke initially demurred and indicated he was concerned about failing as a pop singer, in truth, he had already, furtively, recorded his first secular song.

From the Church to the Club

Cooke knew that some former gospel artists had achieved real success on the Billboard "race," chart which industry insiders were still learning to refer to as "rhythm & blues." In 1956, the former lead vocalist of Georgia's Ever-Ready Gospel Singers, James Brown, hit the #6 position on *Billboard's* tally of "Rhythm & Blues Most Played by Jockeys"

⁸¹ Edward Komara, *Encyclopedia of the blues* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 205–06.
<https://ccle.ucla.edu/course/view/mudili>.

⁸² Guralnick, *Dream boogie: the triumph of Sam Cooke*, 148–49.

with “Please, Please, Please,” a simple framework for sanctified singing he co-wrote with background vocalist Johnny Terry. As a singer, Cooke occupied the potentially lucrative position between the intimate crooning of Johnny Mathis and the impassioned screams of James Brown. Cooke more than once outlined an essentialist position on singing style to his protégé Bobby Womack. “Bobby, you could listen to a person talk and know what they sound like. They sound the same way they talk ... When you are born a certain way you can’t even think about tryin’ to sound like somebody else.”⁸³ He appreciated the beauty of Mathis’ sweet tenor and the romantic charisma it conveyed. He also recognized the gospel-inspired grit of Brown’s raspy, vibrant top range. Understanding that an entertainer must meet his audience where its musical preferences lie, Cooke used his musical talent to code-switch between the sonic extremes of Mathis and Brown. He recorded and performed in Mathis mode on television and in venues with a predominantly White demographic, and saved soulful, gritty, Brown-like performances for appearances in front of majority Black audiences. Cooke understood that African Americans were familiar with the cadences of Black Sunday-morning rhetoricians, preachers who understood and employed the power of the groove to captivate churchgoers from the pulpit. His good friend, Reverend C. L. Franklin (Aretha Franklin’s father) broadcast sermons on the radio and sold recordings of his preaching performances on the JVB record label. Franklin’s preaching style was unparalleled. (When his new sermons were broadcast to passersby on Detroit’s sidewalks, crowds often gathered.)⁸⁴ Himself the son

⁸³ Harvey Kubernik, “Sam Cooke,” *Sports Stories*, 2021, <https://www.sportsstoriesdl.com/sam-cooke>.

⁸⁴ Nick Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and The Transformation of America* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2005), Location 2646.

of a preacher, Cooke had acquired the feel of Franklin's rhythm and pacing through careful study of his father and the clergymen he heard singing in churches from Chicago to North Carolina. The whiteness of national television shows ensured that viewers – Black as well as White – were familiar with, and had the opportunity to admire, the vocal stylings of White singers. As a result of this immersion in the artistry of the dominant race, Blacks like Cooke were acquainted with and appreciated White stars and enjoyed mainstream pop music; Cooke possessed the understanding, the talent, and the skills to excel at musical expressions associated with both Black and White culture.

As he developed his own crossover strategy, Cooke started from the proposition that Mathis's saccharin-sweet singing style could be effective across racial boundaries. Still, he chose to build a Black fanbase – one including, or influenced by, his gospel fans – with a hybrid of gospel and pop singing styles. This mixed vocal style did not come without risk: Devout gospel fans would likely be repulsed by his embrace of the secular; even more tolerant gospel lovers might respond tentatively. Would his pop recordings move fans as powerfully as did his gospel recordings and live shows with The Soul Stirrers? Could he even maintain the emotional power of gospel in a secular pop repertoire? The combination of gospel's innate drive with pop's ubiquitousness – it was all over the radio and increasingly seen on television - might be enough for some of his followers. Younger gospel fans did not associate secular pop music with the unsavory and unlicensed "juke joints" where Black folk went to forget their troubles in an "unholy" atmosphere of drink and pleasure and would not find Cooke's crossover to secular music as hard to accept. They might even wonder why there was so much fuss about this

handsome, clean-cut young man singing songs that the mainstream White culture rushed to embrace.

Although Cooke appreciated James Brown's ability to enthrall an audience, he chose to avoid emulating Brown's stage theatrics and his direct imitation of Black Pentecostal musical practices. The guttural grunts and screams that galvanized a Black congregation were rarely heard in Cooke's public performances because he was an artist whose intent was to charm a White or at least racially mixed audience. Two years before Cooke's debut hit, St. Louis' Chuck Berry demonstrated one approach to crossover popularity by blending genres. Initially Berry played rhythm and blues in St. Louis clubs. In 1955 he became a nationally known singer/songwriter with his hit, "Maybellene." Berry's single was an adaptation of "Ida Red," a Western swing hit recorded by Bob Wills & his Texas Playboys in 1938. Berry established his White fanbase by winning them over with this familiar tune and by following up with several other hit singles – "Roll Over Beethoven" (later to be covered by The Beatles) in 1956, "School Day," and "Rock and Roll Music" in 1957. If Cooke needed an example of how to engage White audiences as an African American singer and songwriter, he had an effective one in this fellow Midwesterner. Many of Cooke's album tracks were covers of hits by White artists to which he applied his soulful styling. In the late 1950s, there was another cohort in the group of midwestern, Black, male, solo singers whose music crossed over and played a significant role in popular music history.

Cooke may have been inspired by the equally hybrid style of a contemporary from Detroit, Jackie Wilson *aka* "Mr. Excitement." In August 1957, one month before "You Send Me" hit the charts, Wilson, who had done a three-year apprenticeship with Billy Ward and

the Dominos, made his solo debut with a song written by a former boxer and record store owner, Berry Gordy with his sister Gwen Gordy and her childhood friend Roquel “Billy” Davis. Although “Reet Petite (The Finest Girl You Ever Want to Meet)” did not match the chart success of Cooke’s Pop/R&B #1 hit “You Send Me,” Cooke recognized Wilson’s strong effect on audiences. Cooke couldn’t dance like him, but Wilson, another church-trained singer, exuded a soulful energy that matched Cooke. They frequently shared a bill as they toured in 1958, 1959, and 1964. Sam witnessed the devastation in Wilson’s life caused by his predatory relationship with Nat Tarnapol who, despite the obvious conflict of interest, was simultaneously Wilson’s mob-affiliated manager and the president of Wilson’s label, Brunswick Records. In 1964 Wilson’s contract expired. When Quincy Jones stated that he witnessed Wilson being held outside a window by men who wanted to intimidate him as he renegotiated his management and recording contracts with Tarnapol and Brunswick, Avant replied “True story.”⁸⁵ Tarnapol was indicted for steal royalties from artists by surreptitiously selling singles and albums off the books. That practice was difficult, if not impossible, for an artist to prevent. But this treatment of artists convinced Cooke that it was critically important to maintain control of his business affairs – management, publishing, and ownership of master recordings.

⁸⁵ Hudlin, “The Black Godfather,” 7:50–8:13.

Chapter 2 Sam Cooke – Spiritual Soul

Between 1957 and his sudden, suspicious demise in 1964, Cooke released 29 Top 40 singles, 11 studio albums and one live album. Over twenty years after his death, RCA released Cooke's one other live album. After a brief discussion of three outstanding hit singles that contributed to his stardom, this project examines several significant albums, the influence of Los Angeles's music scene in the 1950s on his career and the dramatic contrast of his live performance styles for predominantly Black and White audiences through an analysis of his two live albums.

Stardom through Self-Penned Singles

Cooke was an accomplished songwriter who understood his own vocal talents well enough to write hit singles for his voice, his era, and for his two main audiences, Black and white. Cooke's singles were extremely simple. Lou Rawls recalled that Cooke wrote "Everybody Loves to Cha Cha Cha" with guitar in hand while sitting on the floor in Rawls's mother's home. The three songs that brought him the greatest chart success and longstanding admiration are based on the most elementary harmonic changes. His first hit, "You Send Me" employs the common I-vi7-ii7-V "turnaround" progression throughout most of the tune. In the bridge, he rearranges the order and customizes the chords a bit (ii7-VI7(b9)-Imaj7-I6) before introducing a new progression that includes another walkdown turnaround leading back to the verse (ii7-V7(b9)-Imaj7-VII7-VI7-V7/V-V7).

Cooke was familiar with the turnaround progression because it (or the more typical alternative I-vi-IV-V) was frequently used in jazz standards and doo-wop songs of the 1950s. Undoubtedly, Cooke knew songs based on a turnaround progression, like Billy Ward and his Dominos' cover of "These Foolish Things," which reached #5 on the National Best Sellers chart in 1953. Another instance of this progression, the McGuire Sisters' "Sincerely," was popular enough to catch Cooke's attention as well. This record, by the most successful 'girl group' of the 1950s, spent ten weeks on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart in 1955. The ubiquity of these changes in sacred and secular music neatly bridged the two audiences key to Cooke's crossover success: the gospel fans he already had and the pop listeners he was wooing. "Chain Gang," his first major label single and the one that most closely approached the crossover success of "You Send Me" was released in 1960. It stayed on the *Billboard* Top 40 for thirteen weeks, peaking at #2. "Chain Gang" employs the classic do-wop progression (I-vi-IV-I) in addition to I-IV-V-I, a blues-based chord progression common in all styles of popular music. "Chain Gang" used a familiar musical progression, but it focused on an unfamiliar (and unlikely) topic for a pop hit: the vocalizing of Black prisoners sentenced to hard labor in the Southern sun.

"Chain Gang" and "A Change is Gonna Come"

"Chain Gang" illustrates Cooke's ability to satisfy Black and white audiences in different ways. The inspiration for the song was a group of prisoners Cooke saw on the side of the road while he was travelling by car between gigs in the South. Daniel Wolff paints a colorful Georgia scene, with red clay providing a dramatic backdrop to dark-

skinned prisoners dressed in white, while Peter Guralnick locates the encounter somewhere in “the Carolinas.”⁸⁶ But both biographers agree that when the prisoners expressed a desire for cigarettes, Cooke instructed his brother Charles to buy several cartons at a nearby store. Charles remembered that they “carried them back to the dudes that was working in the gang.”⁸⁷ As their ancestors had for generations, these prisoners worked in synchrony, guided by melodic call and response, rhythmic grunts, and the sound of chains clanging. Cooke transformed his memory of them into a song that had two diametrically different messages. The lyrics relate a sad story of men separated from their loved ones, who longed to return home (“see my woman whom I love so dear”) and who worked so hard that they grunted as they strained to complete their task throughout the day (“that’s the sound of the men working on the chain gang,” “you hear them moaning their lives away,” “my work is so hard”). These somewhat dark lyrics are delivered over a sprightly orchestrated groove. Wolff credits Cooke with producing a song tactfully delivering serious message about a painful experience with “a strange arrangement, seemingly at odds with itself and the subject matter.”⁸⁸ Guitar riffs in the chorus section and smooth violins during the verse and the outro mask the desperation felt by the men who are toiling so relentlessly. Unquestionably, the lyrics tell a story all too familiar to residents of southern rural Black communities, a story to which they could relate. Conversely, the song incorporated elements – the musical arrangement, the

⁸⁶ Daniel Wolff et al., *You Send Me The Life and Times of Sam Cooke* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1995), 210.

⁸⁷ Guralnick, *Dream boogie: the triumph of Sam Cooke*, 319.

⁸⁸ Wolff et al., *You Send Me The Life and Times of Sam Cooke*, 212.

orchestration, and the liveliness of the sounds - that attracted the attention and interest of white pop music lovers. The lively groove of this Top Ten Cooke composition stands in stark contrast to the mood created by the music and lyrics of his most iconic work, "A Change Is Gonna Come."

The magic of this iconic song, "A Change Is Gonna Come," is its topic, change. Cooke was a keen observer of human nature who noted that an inexorable aspect of life is the act of change. All materials and living beings continually change. Because change can be a double-edged sword, at times it produces unwanted results and occasionally, it can generate welcome results. One thing that it can never do is stop. On the most fundamental level for human beings, each breath produces bodily changes. The chest rises and falls; air enters and leaves. Each breath holds the opportunity to change the mood or emotional state of an individual. Change is ubiquitous and is a manifestation of life. Cooke truly opined on a singular topic when he decided to write about change.

Change is an essential prerequisite for hope, a powerful human quality associated with the first Black American president, Barack Obama. Obama first gained national attention when he delivered a speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention emphasizing "the audacity of hope." His presidential campaign focused on "hope and change" and his foundation's home page features an article entitled "18 Years of Hope: The Evolution of the Obama Legacy."⁸⁹ Fellow Chicagoan and President-elect Obama certainly pondered that connection between hope and change on November 5, 2008,

⁸⁹ Obama Foundation, "18 Years of Hope: The Evolution of the Obama Legacy," 2026, accessed 2026_03_01, 2026, <https://www.obama.org/stories/18-years-of-hope-the-evolution-of-the-obama-legacy/>.

when he paraphrased Cooke's lyrics in his victory speech after winning the presidential election. With a single sentence, he signaled the importance of Cooke's song. "It's been a long time coming, but tonight, because of what we did on this day, in this election, at this defining moment, change has come to America."⁹⁰ Both prominent African American men shared Chicago, their adopted hometown and returned to it. Obama moved back to the city after leaving the White House and established his Presidential Library there. Cooke spend the majority of his life in Chicago. Both men ruminated on the topics of hope and change. Both men were astute observers of human behavior. Cooke infused many of his songs with insights about his fellow human beings. "A Change is Gonna Come" may have been unique in his collection of compositions because it subtly contained details of his own biography.

Many of Cooke's compositions seem to have been based on experiences that were universally recognizable and relatable. He explained that "Another Saturday Night" was written on tour in England while he stayed at The Mayfair, an old-fashioned hotel that forbade female visitors.⁹¹ The lyrics tell the story of the loneliness that a travelling entertainer consistently confronts when miles away from family and friends. "Another Saturday night and I ain't got nobody. I got some money 'cause I just got paid. How I wish I had someone to talk to" outlines a simple, but relentless need when traveling for work.

⁹⁰ Christopher Trigg, "A Change Ain't Gonna Come: Sam Cooke and the Protest Song," (University of Toronto Press, Summer2010 2010), Essay.

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=53052051&site=ehost-live>.

⁹¹ Guralnick, *Dream boogie: the triumph of Sam Cooke*, 423.

Cooke's lyrics were simple and straightforward, yet they had universal appeal because they captured ubiquitous human experiences and emotions.

Cooke's albums

Although Cooke's singles appeared on the Billboard Top 40 Pop Singles chart twenty-nine times and the *Billboard's* Rhythm & Blues chart twenty times, of the eleven albums released during his lifetime, only four reached the Top 100. One of his two posthumous studio albums reached 44 in 1965. One of his two live albums, *Sam Cooke at the Copa*, was released in 1964 and rose to number 29 on the US Pop chart and number 1 on the R&B charts. The first live album he recorded, *Live at the Harlem Square Club, 1963*, was released posthumously in 1985. Why was this? Cooke usually wrote both music and lyrics for his singles, and his studio albums, which often did not include one of his own compositions, did not sell as well as would be expected from RCA's second-best (behind only Elvis Presley) singles artist.

Studio albums

EARLY ALBUMS ON KEEN

Before Sam Cooke signed with a major label like RCA Victor, he entered the secular music industry with Keen Records, a young, small, independent label in Los Angeles. Specialty Records owner Art Rupe, who had a lucrative relationship with the Soul Stirrers, had passed on the opportunity to release "You Send Me." He worried that

allowing his Black gospel star to front a single with a group of white women singing backing vocals - a Black man crooning about romance as white women sang lovingly in his support - would handicap the song's sales because of the racism common to white American music fans and the music industry.⁹² The backlash might even undermine the Soul Stirrers' connection with its Black gospel audience.

Cooke asked to be released from his contract with Specialty so that he could sign with Keen. *Sam Cooke*, his debut album for them was a mélange of standards – show tunes, old popular tunes, film themes – alongside “You Send Me,” the single that earned overnight success. For an initial effort by a vocalist of his era, the album is laudable but not spectacular. Cooke brought a gospel vibe to songs that had become American favorites and offered listeners a fresh perspective on the songs that succeeded, to greater and lesser degrees, on the various tracks. He changed the tempo as well as the rhythmic feel of some of the well-known tracks, routinely modified the melodies, and added his characteristic melismatic riffs. Whether a listener deems Cooke's versions an improvement, his stylistic approach is applied confidently and with a panache that exudes the self-assurance of an artist who understands his craft and his own abilities. He knows who he is and he knows what he is doing when he sings. The album was recorded in 1957 and released in early 1958, just a few months after “You Send Me” topped the charts. Bumps Blackwell produced, featuring a small ensemble of musicians and vocalists: Cooke as lead vocalist backed by Lee Gotch & The Pied Pipers and a rhythm

⁹² Wolff et al., *You Send Me The Life and Times of Sam Cooke*, 145–46.

section made up of Clifton White and René Hall (guitar); Earl Palmer (drums); Eddie Beal (piano) and Ted Brinson (bass).

Cooke quickly released three studio albums on Keen - two in 1958 (*Sam Cooke* and *Encore*) and *Tribute to the Lady* in 1959. *Tribute*'s track list includes a plurality of jazz standards mixed with a few songs from films. The album title refers to Billie Holiday, who died on July 17, 1959, about five months after the album was released. The album notes attributed to jazz saxophonist Benny Carter, who arranged for, and recorded with, Holiday praise Cooke as a "great talent," whose "soulful sincerity" reminded Carter of Holiday. This band included six brass and five reeds, in addition to the rhythm section of Rene Hall (guitar), Earl Palmer (drums) and Ernie Freeman (piano) and Red Callender (bass). The songs and instrumentation suggest that Cooke was appealing to an older audience than the teens and young adults who enjoyed his singles.

ALBUMS ON RCA VICTOR

In May 1960, the rising star released *Cooke's Tour*, his first of his ten studio albums on the RCA Victor label, produced by Hugo Peretti and Luigi Createore, cousins who formed a songwriting team and became partners with mob-affiliated Morris Levy when they bought into Roulette Records in 1957. They were A&R men at Roulette and produced hits for Jimmy Rodgers ("Honeycomb," "Kisses Sweeter Than Wine," "Oh-Oh, I'm Falling in Love Again") in 1957 and 1958. This theme album begins with a song that informs the listening audience that they are on a journey to "faraway places," then replicates a world tour that travels to Paris, Mexico, the fictional island Bali Ha'i, Brazil, Roma, London, Jamaica, Galway Bay, Hawaii, and Japan before returning home to a vision of the United

States. Guralnick contends that the album was designed to appeal to a mainstream audience and strangely opines that Cooke's voice was "almost drowned in the sludge of Glenn Osser's arrangements" which were tawdry. In most of the tracks, the mix places Cooke's voice in front of – almost to the point of being separate from – the orchestra. Wolff notes that the album was a 'safe' one that included "antique vehicles" on the tracks played by an orchestra comprised of fifteen strings, three guitars, a flute and a harp. The obvious goal of this album was to consolidate Cooke's standing with the dominant White market. There is little indication that the preferences of his young Black fans, conditioned by the American tradition of race-based segregated markets which developed tastes for different musical characteristics, were addressed at all.

One review of Cooke's next album release, *Hits of the '50s*, describes it as "mostly a missed opportunity" because, instead of offering songs that inspired the singer, Hugo and Luigi, the producers, chose to try to appeal to white listeners by having Cooke record hits released in the previous decade by Nat "King" Cole, Johnnie Ray, and the Platters. The liner notes contain a hard-sell pitch by the producers. They promote Cooke to readers noting that he is tall, slender, handsome, Black (like Belafonte and Poitier), and a former gospel singer, who works hard at his craft. It would be difficult to take issue with an allmusic.com user review that suggests Cooke "pushed" his "soul" aside but still did a good job.⁹³

⁹³ allmusic, "Hits of the 50s_Sam Cooke_User comment," 2017, accessed 2026_03_01, <https://www.allmusic.com/album/hits-of-the-fifties-mw0000372969#trackListing>.

Swing Low, Cooke's sixth studio album, and the third with producers Hugo & Luigi for the RCA Victor label, was released in February 1961. Oddly, the album cover gives the impression that the name of the album is *Sam Cooke* because the words "Swing Low" do not appear anywhere on the album cover except in the track list. In the liner notes, producers Hugo and Luigi promote the artist in two distinctly different ways: they complement Cooke's unique way with a song, and they highlight his commitment to his family. The album's theme is old or traditional songs, some from the spiritual genre, others from traditional American culture. The assertion that Cooke's treatments of these well-worn compositions is distinctive is essential because this claim affords listeners a reason for revisiting these familiar melodies. Clearly, the producing team is attempting to humanize Cooke in the minds of the White pop lovers who comprise the targeted demographic. Many of these listeners were unaccustomed to following Black artists and had been culturally conditioned to ignore or avoid them by pervasive stereotypical myths about African Americans. Hugo and Luigi, White men who were experienced at catering to this White demographic through their producing of Jimmy Rodgers and Little Peggy March, decided to relate a story about Cooke rushing from New York to Los Angeles to be at the bedside of his wife as she gave birth to their first child. Relating this type of personal episode in the artist's personal life in album notes was atypical and, in all probability, quite intentional. Cooke was being presented as a wholesome American – a good man, a loving husband, an excited new father – all in all, in the vernacular of that era, a "good Negro."

Night Beat, the final studio album in the Cooke discography, is a clear-cut outlier. Noticeably different from all his previous albums, the tracks consist of down-home, soulful tunes performed by Cooke with musicians who are well-versed in playing the blues. His performance unmistakably demonstrates that Cooke *feels* this music and these stories. He resonates with this combination of musicians more successfully than in his previous RCA album releases. His attunement with these musicians is intimate and the result of the performers' rapport creates impactful music. In this line-up of simple songs comprised of basic chord progressions and uncomplicated melodies, Cooke's presentation is simply impeccable. Soulful melismas express his feelings in a style that African American audiences often witnessed in live performances. Although his television performances and earlier studio work were lauded, this level of vocal freedom and interpretive fluidity was consistently absent from those efforts. By comparison they seemed calculated. This album is different. He seems at home, comfortable, genuine, and natural. And it is perceptible.

Cooke's arsenal includes several vocal timbres, and he frequently alternates in their employment. On *Night Beat*, he uses segments of his upper register much more liberally than in his prior studio work. His styling is bluesy; he incorporates more blues notes and bent notes than usual. He explores the scale in multi-pitched riffs, creating atypical melodic phrases before consistently landing at a harmonious pitch. When emphasizing an emotional moment, he allows vibrato to make his point. This is particularly evident in his treatment of the lament, "Lost and Lookin'".

Not only is *Night Beat* a unique album in the Cooke discography, but it is also a watershed moment for Cooke's crossover career. Abandoning the tactic of selecting material from the pop canon and using to win over the White audience Cooke chose songs exclusively from gospel and blues, the two genres that had traditionally most appealed to Black listeners. He rejected the thick orchestral accompaniments Hugo and Luigi used on his previous albums and employed a small group of improvising musicians whose experience guaranteed the authenticity that follows race and place. Four African Americans who hailed from Louisiana and East Texas, traditional jumping off points for the western migration route along Route 66 to Southern California, take us back to their Southern blues and gospel roots. Robert Christgau once described Cooke as a "puzzling soul singer" because of the various musical personae he embodied: "His voice wasn't just smooth and gritty at the same time; it was also infinitely relaxed." Comparing his earlier albums with *Night Beat* and its sequel, *Ain't That Good News*, may have resulted in puzzlement for a rock critic not privy to Cooke's crossover strategy and disappointed with his reluctance to divulge the depth of his soulfulness while wooing White fans. But the arc of Cooke's vocal expression, from relatively straight vocal stylings that sounded similar to the stylings of White vocalists like Ricky Nelson in the early years of his secular career to the heavily African-American sound of his last two studio albums, is not difficult to understand for those who actually worked in the pop music world of the 1960s. Cooke had finally achieved enough financial success that he could risk sharing his "Black" voice with fans across the racial spectrum. He had won over a sufficient following across the racial spectrum and no longer had to demonstrate *at every moment* that he understood the preferences of White audiences and could earn their attention. At this point in his

musical life, he seemed confident that the material and musical treatments that appeared on these final two studio albums would not alienate mainstream fans. Even Robert Christgau allowed that *Night Beat* “gets points for conceiving pop as lounge R&B rather than violin schlock.”⁹⁴

The album’s track list is an eclectic mélange of selections that showcase Cooke’s Southern gospel and blues roots and provide a metaphor for the arc of his journey through several African American musical genres. The opening number is a bluesy, midtempo swing rendition of the well-known traditional spiritual “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen.” Cooke switches to rhythm & blues for “Lost and Lookin’,” a soulful ballad presented with a spare walking bass and ride cymbal accompaniment, and “Mean Old World,” which begins with an attention-getting stride piano introduction in New Orleans style. Cooke moves into the blues with “Please Don’t Drive Me Away,” a mid-tempo track that toys with the traditional twelve-bar blues by adding a four-bar hook that repeats the title phrase. Over the next seven tracks Cooke continues exploring the space between the blues and rhythm & blues, concluding the album with an homage to the White love of northern band rock ‘n’ roll by performing Big Joe Turner’s “Shake Rattle and Roll,” made famous by Bill Haley and the Comets when it crossed over in the summer of 1954.

The success of this journey through African American genres is predicated on the talents of a small group of studio musicians who created a relaxed, familiar atmosphere that Cooke had not experienced in his major label album sessions before. Billy Preston,

⁹⁴ Robert Christgau, “The Best of Sam Cooke,” 2005, accessed 2022_05_05, 2022, <https://www.robertchristgau.com/xg/cdrev/cooke-ble.php> (Brief review note on three Cooke albums).

the child prodigy who appeared on the Nat 'King' Cole Show when he was eleven years old, was only sixteen when he took on the role of organist for the *Night Beat* sessions. Cooke and his business partner, J. W. Alexander, were so impressed by Preston's talent that they signed the Dorsey High School sophomore to Cooke's Derby Records to produce his debut album *16 Year Old Soul*, released just a month after the *Night Beat* sessions. Preston's debut demonstrated that the youngster was well acquainted with a broad range of musical styles. On "Little Red Rooster," Preston's Hammond B-3 imitated the sound of Cooke's rooster and participated in call and response with pianist Ray Johnson. Preston was from Houston, Texas and his southwestern style complemented Johnson's New Orleans-based playing style. Johnson, who had played on several of Ricky Nelson's hit singles ("Traveling Man," "Hello Mary Lou," "Fools Rush In"), and his brother, Plas, a saxophonist, were by the early 1960s two of the most sought-after studio session players in Los Angeles. Fellow Louisiana native René Hall scored the ensemble and played rhythm guitar on *Night Beat*. Although Hall had worked with Cooke's production team, Hugo & Luigi, on *Tribute to the Lady* (the last album recorded on the Keen label in 1959), once Cooke signed with RCA Victor other arrangers – all White – worked on his first five albums for the new label. *Mr. Soul*, released in February 1963, just prior to *Night Beat*, changed that, with African American composer Horace Ott arranging and conducting everything except "Nothing Can Change This Love," a Cooke original arranged and conducted by Hall. This return to predominantly African American studio players on *Mr. Soul* (two black arranger/conductors, guitarist Clifton White, drummer Earl Palmer, pianists Ernie Freeman and Ray Johnson, and sax player Plas Johnson) may have inspired the personnel choices on the *Night Beat* album. More than likely Cooke felt

comfortable with some of the repertoire and with the genre switch. In addition to the Cooke original ("Nothing Can Change This Love"), *Mr. Soul* contained a Cooke hit single by Black songwriters ("For Sentimental Reasons") and a classic moment of postwar rhythm & blues by Charles Brown ("Drifting Blues").

CHARLES BROWN'S INFLUENCE

Anthony Russell "Charles" Brown, one of the brightest, dignified, and genteel musical artists in Los Angeles in the early 1950s when Cooke and The Soul Stirrers recorded for Specialty Records (from 1951 throughout the decade) was undoubtedly a significant influence on Cooke's music. *Mr. Soul* and *Night Beat* include several songs ("Drifting Blues," "Please Don't Drive Me Away," and "Trouble Blues") associated with the legendary musician. Brown was an influential force in mid-century African American music whose significance was recognized with induction into the Blues Hall of Fame and receipt of the 1997 National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts for his lifetime achievement.⁹⁵ Bonnie Raitt considered Brown the bridge between the "cool sophistication" of jazz musicians Nat King Cole and Billie Holiday and the raw country blues of Son House and Muddy Waters.⁹⁶ Her description of Brown's voice as "like brandy and molasses dripping down (a) sultry laid-back groove" emphasizes the smooth coolness of his sound.⁹⁷ When Cooke first came to Los Angeles in 1951 to record

⁹⁵ Bill Graham, "Remembering Charles Brown On His Birthday," 2023, accessed 2026_03_04, 2026, <https://www.americanbluesscene.com/2023/09/remembering-charles-brown-on-his-birthday/>.

⁹⁶ Bonnie Raitt, "Charles Brown," (1999). https://rockhall25.wpenginpowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Charles_Brown_1999.pdf.

⁹⁷ Graham, "Remembering Charles Brown On His Birthday."

gospel music with The Soul Stirrers for Specialty Records, Brown was at the pinnacle of his career, releasing seven top-ten hits as a solo artist between 1949 and 1952. Brown's handsome, debonair appearance coupled with his polished, effortless but bluesy vocal sound clearly inspired Cooke's performance style in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Brown, already a performer when Cooke was still an infant, was born in Texas in 1920 or 1922. Brown's mother died when he was six months old and his father, an itinerant cotton picker, died in 1928. As his maternal grandparents raised him, his grandmother, a church choir director, provided Brown with a musical education that began with gospel music on the piano at age four and included classical piano lessons in Texas City and Galveston.⁹⁸ Brown played at church, at school and, to his grandmother's dismay, in jazz clubs during his high school and college years at Prairie View A&M, where he double majored in chemistry and math and minored in education. Graduating in 1939, he worked as a high school chemistry teacher at the segregated George Washington Carver High School in Baytown, Texas then took a civil service position as a junior chemist at the Pine Bluff Arsenal in Arkansas.

Racial discrimination in Arkansas motivated Brown's migration to Los Angeles in 1943. He hoped for a research position, but the job he sought was no longer available when he arrived, so he resurrected his music career. A lover of Art Tatum's musical approach, Brown accepted an offer by guitarist Johnny Moore to join his "California

⁹⁸ Moore Memorial Public Library, "Charles Brown," accessed 2026_03_04, <https://www.texascitytx.gov/350/Charles-Brown>.

fusion” trio, The Three Blazers.⁹⁹ Moore had been impressed by Brown’s piano playing at a local amateur hour where, instead of a blues tune, Brown performed “Clair de Lune” and “Rhapsody in Blue.”¹⁰⁰ Although Brown admired Tatum’s lightning fast runs and filigree technique, Nat “King” Cole’s cool piano trio style was more marketable for a piano player in a West Coast small combo. Cole, who had come to Los Angeles in 1937 when African American residents numbered approximately 63,000, understood that full orchestras were too expensive for the local Black community to support. After struggling as a solo pianist for months, Cole was offered an engagement requiring a jazz trio at the white-owned Swanee Inn nightclub on La Brea in Hollywood. His trio’s successful two-week gig was extended for six months and led to engagements at other clubs. Regular work as an ensemble led to the development of a popular style and format that was the model for Moore’s Three Blazers.¹⁰¹ Although they emulated some of the elements that made Cole’s trio popular in Los Angeles, Brown’s piano and vocal work pioneered a blues-based style called “club blues,” deploying cool jazz harmonies and techniques without sacrificing the emotional appeal of the blues. Akin to Midwestern jazz-based rhythm & blues, both Cole and Brown performed in what became known as rhythm & blues “ballad” style, marked by clear articulation of lyrics and the smooth texture of their vocal style.¹⁰² When Cole’s trio left Premier Records, his guitarist Oscar Moore

⁹⁹ National Endowment for the Arts, “Charles Brown,” National Endowment for the Arts, 1997, accessed 2026_03_04, 2026, <https://www.arts.gov/honors/heritage/charles-brown>.

¹⁰⁰ James Nadal, “Charles Brown,” *All About Jazz* (2023_07_12 2023). <https://www.allaboutjazz.com/musicians/charles-brown>; Nadal, “Charles Brown.”

¹⁰¹ Daniel Mark Epstein, *Nat King Cole* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 75.

¹⁰² Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje and Eddie S. Meadows, *California Soul : Music of African Americans in the West*, vol. 00001, Music of the African Diaspora, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 224.

recommended his older brother Johnny's band, featuring Charles Brown on piano and vocals and Eddie Williams on bass – to what was after Specialty owner Art Rupe became a partner in 1944, the Atlas label. Brown and Cooke now both worked for Rupe, and Cooke almost certainly met the elder secular musician well before the release of "You Send Me."

Brown wrote and sang lead on the Three Blazers's first hit record, 1945's "Drifting Blues," one of the defining rhythm & blues recordings of the decade. Jacqueline DjeDje credits Brown's song, which spent twenty-three weeks on the *Billboard* charts, with defining "a new direction in the rhythm & blues ballad style."¹⁰³ Brown explained that he was "more of a blues ballad singer, not a blues singer." Johnny Otis, the session drummer on the track, used soft brushes on each beat throughout most of the song. He understood that when "Charles Brown was singing, the audience was listening and enjoying it" so Otis adopted a Jo Jones jazz style.¹⁰⁴ Brown appears to have passed the California rhythm and blues ballad style on to Cooke, who adopted the same relaxed tempos and clear enunciation throughout his career.

Decades after Cooke's death, Brown discussed his role in the origin of Cooke's 1962 hit record, "Bring It on Home to Me." and the involvement of organized crime in the music industry. They both had performed at Frank "Screw" Andrews's (an alias for Frank Andriello) Sportsman's Club, a club catering to African Americans in the "sin city" area of

<https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=ae28556c-49d9-3b9a-8a4d-f6273b3443e8>; DjeDje and Meadows, *California Soul : Music of African Americans in the West*, 00001.

¹⁰³ DjeDje and Meadows, *California Soul : Music of African Americans in the West*, 00001, 226.

¹⁰⁴ DjeDje and Meadows, *California Soul : Music of African Americans in the West*, 00001, 227.

Newport, Kentucky and also at Andrews's larger venue, the 1,000-seat Copa Club where rhythm & blues and jazz headliners like Miles Davis, Stan Kenton, Dinah Washington, Jackie Wilson, Fats Domino, and Sam Cooke headlined. Brown remembered that when his band accepted a one-night engagement at Andrews's venue, their road manager stole, gambled, and lost all their earnings, leaving the musicians without money to pay for their hotel across the river in Cincinnati. Since Brown had told the venue not to give the money to Carpenter until they finished playing, he surmised that Andrews's men expected Carpenter, a known gambler, to lose the money back to them before anyone left the premises. Andrews offered to pay the hotel bill and provide lodging if the band would continue working for him. They stayed and Andrews asked Brown to be his music director. Brown eventually wanted to leave Newport,

but I was scared to...to say anything because they killed everybody if you bucked against the boss. You know, so I said Well. the best thing I can do is sing, 'I want to go home' and so when I did this number Sam Cooke came there to work cause he [Andrews] ... was getting ready to sell his club to the city of Newport. They were going to get a good price so they brought any major acts they could there. So, Sam Cooke came.¹⁰⁵

In 1961, Cooke heard Brown perform that homesick lament, and Brown contended that Cooke's hit, "Bring it on Home to Me" (1962) was written "off my Want to Go Home." The two songs are similar in several respects. They both begin with an eight-bar bluesy piano solo that are almost identical in the last two bars. Both are duets sung by two male vocalists in harmony with melodies that employ the same rhythmic pattern. Although Cooke's hit, sung with his old friend, Lou Rawls, is performed at a slightly faster tempo,

¹⁰⁵ Peter Guralnick, "Charles Brown Interview," in *Peter Guralnick Collection, 1935-2021*, ed. Howard Begle, Interview. Diplomatically transcribed for this text.

the connection of the two tunes is unmistakable. Brown remembered that Sam was “very fair about it even though I didn’t get on the record” and offered Brown the pianist job on his *Night Beat* album¹⁰⁶ and assistance when Brown’s grandfather passed in 1962. “So, Sam Cooke was very good to me.”¹⁰⁷

Cooke faced considerable risks as he interacted with dangerous organized crime figures who operated in the music industry. Just as Capone and Glaser controlled the careers Earl ‘Fatha’ Hines and Louis Armstrong, for a couple years “Screw” Andrews controlled Brown through a well-founded fear for his life if he crossed the man who ran gambling, alcohol, and entertainment in Newport, Kentucky. Before Las Vegas, Newport was known as “Sin City” – a place run by a powerful organized crime syndicate called The Cleveland Four that included Moe Dalitz, one of the founders of the second “Sin City” in Nevada. Celebrities like Frank Sinatra and Marilyn Monroe visited Newport casinos boosting tourism and Dean Martin performed at Andrews’ home.¹⁰⁸ Although he associated with celebrities, Andrews was a violent, dangerous man. He ran the Alibi Club after its owner was murdered. An employee who was accused of stealing from Andrews was found dead. Andrews was the prime suspect in those two murders. And though he confessed to killing a rival club operator, a claim of self-defense was upheld by the judge. Brown had every right to be afraid of Andrews. That Cooke performed at Andrews’s club

¹⁰⁶ Glenn Cook, "Loose Ends: Charles Brown's Legacy," *glenncook.substack.com*, 2021_11_28, 2021, <https://glenncook.substack.com/p/charles-browns-legacy>.

¹⁰⁷ Guralnick, "Charles Brown Interview."

¹⁰⁸ Rachel Smith, "The original 'Sin City': exploring Newport's past of mobs, crimes and more," *The Northerner* (2019_10_25 2019). <https://www.thenortherner.com/feature-on-homepage/2019/10/25/the-original-sin-city-exploring-newports-past-of-mobs-crimes-and-more/>.

in 1959 several times provides evidence of his exposure to organized crime through his musical career.

Ain't That Good News was the last studio album released before Cooke's death. Most of the songs (all except "Another Saturday Night") were recorded months after his 18-month-old son, Vincent, died by drowning in the family swimming pool. Lenne Ailik, who wrote the liner notes for the ABKCO 2003 reissue of this album, reports that Sam Sharp, a violinist who performed on the album, made a claim that arouses sympathy for Cooke. According to Ailik, Cooke cried during the recording session after singing, "I gave my love a baby with no crying" supposedly the final line of "The Riddle Song," which is the final song on the album. This scenario frames Cooke's last studio album before his own demise with an eerie death-related ending, but the claim is odd, since the last line of the song as sung by Cooke is "A baby when it's sleeping, there's no crying" indicating a mistake either in Sharp's recollection or in Ailik's reporting.

Compared to previous albums produced by Hugo & Luigi, Cooke exerted more control of the content and style of this album. In 1962, Ray Charles had released his groundbreaking *Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music* album. Hugo & Luigi (Cooke's RCA producers) wanted to use a similar theme for *Ain't That Good News*. But after Cooke's previous album, *Night Beat*, opened the door to an expansion of his artistic freedom, he dedicated one side of the album to the soul music he was pioneering and the other side to ballads and the traditional "Riddle Song." The instrumentations and arrangements also seem like a compromise between Cooke and his producers. Two New Orleans-born pianists (Battiste and Ray Johnson), Rene Hall as arranger/conductor, and The Soul Stirrers on backing vocals rooted their tracks in the soul tradition. Other tracks,

with Joe Hooven as arranger/conductor, employed lush strings, timpani and brass sections, and white-sounding backing vocals. This is a hybrid album that suggests that Cooke was moving away from Hugo & Luigi's crossover strategy toward releases that more authentically represented Cooke's artistry. Cooke was exercising his increasing power and confidence as a successful music industry entrepreneur as well as an extremely talented and skilled artist.

Live albums

The two live albums recorded by Cooke in 1963 and 1964 demonstrate two quite different crossover strategies. In 1963 he appeared at the Harlem Square Club in Overton, an African American suburb of Miami, Florida with King Curtis, the popular rhythm & blues saxophonist. Cooke's repertoire and performance style at this primarily African American venue differ dramatically from his other live album, recorded the following year at the Copacabana in New York City, the pinnacle of the white nightclub circuit. Only one of these albums was actually released during Cooke's lifetime. RCA Victor decided that his performance in front of an African American audience was too raw, gritty, and *Black* for his White fans to hear. It was also more sexy and less controlled than Cooke's television appearances and pop-oriented hit singles portrayed him to be. The Copa appearance fit the carefully designed image Cooke had displayed to the nation.

SAM COOKE AT THE COPA

Like any musical entertainer, Cooke wanted to be successful at the most elite venue in the nation, the Copacabana, the go-to place for a glamorous evening out in the

Big Apple. Cooke had already performed at the Copa in 1958, shortly after his first big hit, “You Send Me,” took America by storm. Certainly, he was “green” in 1958, new to performing for White secular audiences after years of singing as part of Black gospel groups. He was also new to the challenges of a solo artist who must carry the weight of the performance alone. The recording of “You Send Me” used background vocalists to support and frame his lead vocals. But he could not have the white, female vocalists who sang on the record backing him, a Black man, on stage in the segregated America of 1958, eliciting the humiliating experience of overt racist responses or even violence. Usually, Black musical artists performed in what was known as the ‘chitlin’ circuit’ which included venues that paid at a much lower rate than those clubs that had a white clientele. When they were allowed to work in “White” venues, Black performers still earned much less than White performers. Cooke’s income dictated how many musicians he could afford to hire for his traveling engagements. So, in 1958 when he was new, still learning the ropes of popular entertainment, and financially limited, when he needed as much support built into his act as possible to help him win over a new fan base, his optimism – or overconfidence – him to show up at the Copa with a bare bones band, unsophisticated arrangements, and no supporting vocalists.

Several of the people working with Cooke were uncertain about his readiness for this venue. But he was undeterred and stayed confident even as deficiencies in his preparation became evident. His musical arrangements, lead sheets written for a small combo, were inadequate for the Copa’s full stage band. Evidently Bumps Blackwell, Cooke’s record producer, (whose credits included work as co-writer and producer of hit recordings for Elvis and Little Richard) not provide the type of detailed arrangements

required, and at the last minute, horn parts were hurriedly added and copied. On the night the reviewer from *Variety* watched the show, Cooke could not be heard over the sixteen-piece orchestra that accompanied him when singing up-tempo numbers.¹⁰⁹

Cooke was not properly prepared as an entertainer for this type of venue. Elite nightclub audiences reacted quite differently from the audiences in the segregated venues Cooke had played up to that point. That was one reason he wanted to perform at the Copa: to open a new market for his live performance bookings. A successful engagement at the Copa could lead to nightclub and hotel ballroom gigs throughout the nation and perhaps even a residency in Las Vegas. Cooke needed to win over this demographic, but he was ill-prepared for the practical aspects of performing in a nightclub. The art of winning over a sophisticated club audience still depends, to a large extent, on what a performer does before, between, and after songs as well as how they sell themselves while singing. How to quickly capture an audience's attention and charm them into willingly going along on a musical journey is critical. Cooke had to know just what to say and how to deliver rehearsed lines in a convincingly authentic way that would impress even a jaded New York City audience. But according to reviews and reports from his friends, Cooke had not yet developed the ability to banter with the mature Copa audience, who saw him as a pop teen idol. The coldness of the audience prompted Cooke to lean on techniques that had worked for his gospel audiences. He clapped and added gospel grit to his vocalizations. But his attempt to work harder for the listeners only earned

¹⁰⁹ Holl, "Night Club Reviews: Copacabana, N. Y.," *Variety (Archive: 1905-2000)*, 1958 Mar 12, 1958, <https://www.proquest.com/magazines/night-club-reviews-copacabana-n-y/docview/962823051/se-2?accountid=14512>.

a warning from the club's Mob-affiliated manager that he would be fired if he repeated that behavior. Chastened, he understood that he was 'not ready' for the (White) bigtime yet. But he vowed that he would return triumphant. His comeback took six years.

By the time of his second engagement at the Copa, a two-week stand in 1964, Cooke had done his homework. Over the intervening six years he had traveled widely and performed frequently for both White and Black audiences. The experience educated him from the stage by allowing him to do something he valued highly, which was to observe. He mentions "observation" in his banter with the Copa audience, cautioning the men in the audience to pay attention to their women as he introduces the pop standard "Try a Little Tenderness." Tellingly, he notes he verified the advice given in the song by observing others. Cooke often attributed his songwriting success to his habit of observation. He watched people and wrote about the things he thought mattered to most of them, simple things like "Having a Party" or "Twistin' the Night Away."

Although he had been singing since childhood and traveling since he was a teenager, until "You Send Me" transformed his career he really only knew what worked when performing gospel music for Black audiences. In 1958, he had not had the opportunity to observe from the stage what worked to move predominantly White audiences. Which songs in the repertoire had the best recognition value and were better received? Which vocal techniques worked with this audiences and which were too unfamiliar or threatening to be successful? How much "soul" could he put into his vocal timbre? When would the rasp that so often thrilled Black audiences work for white listeners? How often? How much was too much? All these details are part of the education that work experience on stage offers those artists who are determined to observe and

learn. And Cooke was known to his contemporaries as a man who valued learning. He had been chosen “Most Likely to Succeed” in his high school graduating class. He was a voracious reader. He was determined to learn how to conquer the Copa.

In terms of repertoire, he was better prepared in his second go-round. Born in 1931, Cooke grew up during the Depression listening to music on the radio. He had heard the same hit pop songs that White audiences enjoyed. Like other African American of his generation, he was familiar with many songs that were favorites of White listeners and had his own favorites among them. Early in their careers, inexperienced vocalists choose to perform songs they enjoy singing. It’s a natural decision based upon familiarity with the material. If a singer likes a song, he has repeatedly listened to it just like any other fan. In addition, he has also learned the song by this repeated listening and has sung along with the recording for his or her own pleasure. This type of listening for one’s personal entertainment is also vocational preparation for the work of singing. The songs that a singer loves become the songs that he can most easily cover in the early stages of his professional career as a vocalist.

But personal preference is not the best criterion for choosing repertoire to fit a particular audience. Cooke learned that lesson between his first and second Copa appearances. In the interim, he had released nine studio albums that included many songs familiar to white audiences. He performed these tunes in live and televised concerts, learning which were effective vehicles for connecting with white audiences. When he opened at the Copa on July 1, 1964, his Wednesday set included several songs that were eventually dropped by the time his show was recorded over two nights on July 7-8. His original opening number was the early Motown hit “Money (That’s What I Want),”

written by Berry Gordy and Jamie Bradford and freshly covered by the Beatles in 1963. Perhaps the brash materialistic bent of the lyrics and its raucous blues character clashed with the wholesome self-image that Cooke had consistently crafted; anyway, the song was dropped. Between opening night and the recording dates, Cooke, probably with advice from his arranger Rene Hall and possibly the Copa's orchestra leader, Joe Mele, dropped four songs and compressed three more ("Try A Little Tenderness," "For Sentimental Reasons," and "You Send Me") into a medley.

The experience of being a nationally known pop-music star during years between 1958 and 1964 who performed for Black, white, and mixed-race audiences had seasoned Cooke. From the beginning of his secular career, Cooke understood the importance of "correct" diction in forming his artistic image. He avoided even small pronunciation choices that were coded as African American, assiduously articulating final consonants often dropped in Black vernacular. Cooke was more careful than most White singers about dropping the "g" in "darling," the "t" in "honest," and the "d" in "find" whenever the music allowed. He was also careful about vocal stylings that early-1960s White audiences were not accustomed to hearing in "their" music. Trained in the world of sanctified gospel, his vocal toolbox included many techniques not normally used at the Copa. Deliberate applications of vocal "grit" in the right place could garner great rewards from the gospel audience, but quick changes of vocal timbre within a single phrase were unusual in mainstream pop. As a matter of fact, grit and gravel of any kind were rarely heard in the *Billboard* Top Twenty during the early years of Cooke's secular career.

Tempering the urge to employ this vocal ammunition after years of perfecting it required an effort of will on Cooke's part, demonstrating occupational intelligence that

only experience can provide. Another technique that Cooke had to manage was the incorporation of multi-pitched melismas using blue notes as passing tones. Gospel music performances are typically peppered with these “soulful” runs. But such unscripted verbal outpourings, which are usually authentic expressions of the vocalist’s emotional fervor in the moment, are also a demonstration of virtuosity and improvisatory skill. But this kind of vocal riffing was absent from the mainstream pop music enjoyed by many White Americans in the late 1950s. The lack of familiarity Cooke’s expanded audience of White fans had with this auditory stimulus meant that he had to find the balance of usage that would be most effective in producing the desired result without provoking confusion (where’s the melody?) or listener fatigue.

Cooke arrived at the Copa in 1964 with orchestrations that were a better fit for the audience than the ones he used in 1958. A rhythm and blues or rock and roll artist of the late 50s usually worked with a rhythm section (piano, bass, guitar, and drums) and might have travelled with two or three horn players. At the Black clubs where Cooke spent most of his time, he worked with a core unit of drums, bass, guitar, and piano, with, at most, a saxophone. His “arrangements” were constructed with this small combo in mind. The Copacabana had a house orchestra that included a full horn section, and audience members were accustomed to hearing complex arrangements that took advantage of the whole band, adding flashes of color, rhythm and harmony. By 1964, Cooke and his arranger, Rene Hall, were well prepared with virtuosic arrangements that the Copa orchestra could use to Cooke’s advantage.

Having disciplined his own sound and made sure that his backing ensemble was well taken care of, Cooke needed to choose the right repertoire for the Copa audience.

Smart pop singers have two goals in the construction of their set list: pleasing the audience and pleasing themselves. Successful professional vocalists understand that the perception of sincerity is an essential part of their job of connecting with the audience. One of the most direct routes to this perception is performing songs that please both the audience and the artist. If the artist is manifestly enjoying the experience, it is much more likely that the audience will enjoy the performance. Emotions are contagious when experienced in a live performance situation. The audience wants to relax and enjoy the music. The artist understands that he oversees this musical journey and has a responsibility to take them to mutually enjoyable musical places and that he must pace himself energetically and emotionally to be able to lead this coterie of music lovers. This task requires a cognizance of his capabilities as well as an understanding of human responses. To accomplish this goal, an artist must care for himself as well as the audience. Choosing songs to include in the set list that will please both the artist and their audience is an important step in the creation of a successful engagement.

A strong performance is based upon carefully planned deployment of carefully selected music. Phil Moore, Jr., one of the most respected vocal coaches, jazz musicians, songwriters, band leaders, and arrangers of American popular music in the twentieth century, emphasized the importance of understanding how to construct an act. In the 1940s he coached Hollywood actors like Lena Horne and Marilyn Monroe who sang onscreen. Eventually he mentored a brace of great pop divas - Lena Horne, Dorothy Dandridge, Diahann Carroll, and Dianne Reeves, to name a few – who performed live in nightclubs and on stage. In the 1980s, he conducted a workshop for singers in West Hollywood and passed along the fruits of his over four-decade-long musical experiences

to a younger generation of performers, including the current author. Moore counseled his clients and workshop students to consider an club act as like a suspension bridge. There needed to be three strong spans supporting the act: one built around an attention-getting, usually up-tempo, opening number; another, built around a sturdy, dependable tune in the middle of the act to sustain the energetic impact; and a final span leading to a powerful closing number that makes the audience want to return and advise their friends to catch a performance.¹¹⁰ Cooke's 1964 set list, which we can watch evolve over time in advance of his high-stakes gig at the Copa, demonstrates that he understood Moore's concept well.

Cooke intended to capture a new audience demographic by appearing at the famous nightclub. He told Ray Coleman, a reporter for the British pop music magazine *Melody Maker*, that he wanted to appeal to an audience older than his original fans, some of whom had supported him from their teenage years into young adulthood. This engagement was part of a plan to create a one-man show that he could perform internationally. Cooke knew that this project required "a very careful blend of songs which I am working on."¹¹¹ A successful stint at the Copa required a careful selection of "ammunition" (as Moore would call it) to capture the audience. To test whether his selections would work, Cooke did what any savvy White performer would do before performing for a sophisticated New York audience. As with Broadway musicals that stage out of town tryouts before coming to New York, nightclub performers often played in one

¹¹⁰ Phil Moore Jr., "Building An Act," (West Hollywood, CA: For Singers Only Workshop, 1980), Academic talk.

¹¹¹ Guralnick, *Dream boogie: the triumph of Sam Cooke*, 573.

of the resort venues of the Catskills before heading to Manhattan. The audiences in the Catskills overlap with those in New York, and the reputational stakes are not as high. If the performer succeeds in the Catskills, he has a good chance of pleasing the New Yorkers. If his act falters, he has an opportunity to try out other strategies before heading to the metropolis.

Cooke tried out his set at the Laurels Hotel and Country Club in Monticello, NY, a resort that welcomed over half a million people, mostly upper-middle class Jewish New Yorkers, each year. Even though he employed a high-powered arranger who regularly worked with Sammy Davis, Jr. to ensure that he was well prepared, Cooke realized that the material he had planned to perform and the arrangements were not working well for him in the Catskills. He quickly sent for his longstanding arranger, Rene Hall, and they worked out a new set list and new orchestral arrangements before he set foot on the Copa stage.

At the Laurels, Sam opened with “The Girl from Ipanema,” a Brazilian-inflected song in the bossa nova style all the rage at the time. Bossa nova is an intimate music, characterized by a gentle, syncopated rhythmic feel which, under normal conditions, will not carry the punch necessary to captivate a cold audience. This song was replaced by “The Best Things in Life Are Free,” from the 1927 Broadway musical *Good News*, a jazz standard much covered from the 1940s through the early 1960s. At the Copa, an upbeat Broadway show tune would be a much more relevant opening choice than a trendy but recessive tune from Brazil. Hall’s arrangement comes out of the blocks assertively, with strong horn punches and an up-tempo pace impossible to ignore. Seconds in, Cooke’s vocal preaches that “the moon belongs to everyone, the best things in life, they’re free”

over a swinging, syncopated accompaniment by the twenty-one piece Copa orchestra that never lets up. A simple, well-known proverb is delivered by the lyrics – stars, flowers, birds, sunbeams, and most importantly, love – all belong to “you and me” The first pillar of the act is constructed, set in place, and completed in less than two minutes. Attention captured; connection with the audience established. No need to linger on this song. It did its job, time to move on.

Between the first and second pillars of the act, Cooke establishes himself as a friendly storyteller, a man whose stories are entertaining and whose gospel-influenced vocal style emanates from an intelligence that understands human behavior and how to lead an audience where he wants them to go. Jerry Brandt (Cooke’s agent) witnessed Cooke’s ability to captivate a crowd and claimed that the singer had “sex appeal that women loved and men did not resent.”¹¹² He addresses the men in the audience first to earn their support quickly. If he allows them to be indifferent or, even worse, bored, his battle will be uphill for the balance of his time on stage. So, using the editorial “we” (implying a communal suggestion) he addresses the men as a group. Rewriting the lyrics of a song written for a woman to sing to her man, he tells Bill Bailey “It’s time you went home, Bill Bailey.” Cooke’s appropriation of a woman’s plea to the man she banished from the home may have surprised some listeners familiar with the lyrics of the song. Cooke demonstrates his song doctoring skills liberally during the set, editing lyrics at will. But setting himself up as a “good buddy” by choosing this song as the first to perform after the show opener was an excellent strategy. The lyrics, as Cooke sings them, are

¹¹² Wolff et al., *You Send Me The Life and Times of Sam Cooke*, 264.

music to the ears of any man who has had relationship problems. Cooke begins his counsel by telling Bill that his lover misses him so much before gently suggesting that Bill forget that bad night that she “drove him out.” Cooke reminds Bill that she made him take his comb when he left to suggest that, as she was evicting him, she still was concerned about him. Cooke builds vocal intensity over an orchestral crescendo that signals the whole point of this song is about to be unveiled. He commiserates with Bill but administers a soft admonishment that Bill may have had some responsibility for the dispute, (“I know it’s a shame, Bill but maybe you’re the blame, Bill”). Sounding the tone of a concerned friend, Cooke delivers the point of his argument and urges Bill to “go on home.” What man, listening in the audience that night, would not understand and appreciate Cooke’s effort to befriend a man in relationship trouble? With an application of the “bro code,” – 1964 style - step one in winning over the men is accomplished.

Cooke treats other topics of interest to men – economics, status, cautionary tales, and advice for winning the heart of one’s lady fair – in the balance of the first section of his act. The lyrics of his third song relate a story as if it is Cooke’s personal experience of hardship and tough lessons about human nature. “Nobody Wants You When You’re Down and Out” advises that people who you thought were friends, who you treated generously when you were flush with cash, turn their backs on you when your economic condition deteriorates. Even more troubling is the fact that if you regain your financial strength, they come back as if they had never shunned you during your time of financial struggle. In the era of the early 1960s, this type of message would be more relevant to the lives of the men in the audience than to the lives of the women. Cooke personalizes the tale with ad libs lines like “this I want to tell you” and “oh, I gotta say it for me this

time.” The fourth tune, a turn of the century American standard sometimes attributed to St. Louis’s Mama Lou called “Frankie and Johnnie,” warns of the dire consequences of selfish behavior by telling the tale of a man who accepted the support and generosity of his lover and, nonetheless, betrayed her trust with his infidelity. Frankie, the woman who paid for Johnnie’s clothes and Cadillac, saw him holding another woman after a friend told her that he was seen in public with Nelly Bly. Frankie shot Johnnie who died while protesting his innocence. This song is like “Bill Bailey” because in both tunes, the fellow makes his lady fair feel as though he does not respect her and she, in turn, rejects him. After setting up a couple examples of this type of relationship problem, Cooke provides a solution in the form of a medley of love songs.

Any tension induced by the three troublesome tunes Cooke had just performed is released by his adlibbing over the vamp that opens the love medley. He transitions from the murderous tale of Frankie and Johnny with an aside vowing “I ain’t gonna do it, I will never treat you wrong, darlin’ and sings “it’s time to sing something sweet and soft like something sort of sentimental” offering a clue to the title of one of the songs. He works the words “I know, I know ... and I know you know that I know ...” rhythmically and humorously before telling the men that observation has taught him that men sometimes “neglect the ladies” and that by observation he has learned these simple, but helpful, truths. Sounding like a preacher at the pulpit he tells the gentlemen to “take heed” and launches into a gently rhythmic rendition of “Try a Little Tenderness,” a song recorded by several artists in the 1930s. Bing Crosby released a rendition in 1933, and Frank Sinatra covered the tune in 1946. Otis Redding’s 1966 recording reached a ranking of 136 on the 2021 iteration of *Rolling Stone’s* 500 greatest songs of all-time list. Emily J. Lordi

differentiates Redding's rendition from Cooke's noting that Cooke's medley in this album retains the "ballad structure whereas Redding transformed it into a raucous emotional manifesto."¹¹³ However, she neglects to comment on the similarities between the two recordings of the tune. Redding admired Cooke's vocal style and adopted some of Cooke's musical choices.¹¹⁴ Like Cooke's rendition, Redding's hit also begins as a ballad and uses the same alteration of the melody that Cooke employs on the words "wearing" and "love," an adjustment that reaches a higher pitch than the original melody before landing back on the original melody's pitch. This vocal innovation by the artist emphasizes these critical words in the advice he offers. Both renditions also rely on rhythmic elements that change the feel or groove of the song from that of a standard ballad to that of a swing or soul genre.

Cooke advises the men in the audience that "every now and then you have to tell her ..." and begins singing "I love you for sentimental reasons" transitioning to a song he released as a single that reached the top twenty on both pop and R&B charts in 1957. "For Sentimental Reasons," published in 1945, was written by a pair of Black singer/songwriters. It had been a hit for many artists including Nat King Cole and Dinah Shore by the time Cooke sang it at the Copa for a predominantly White but integrated audience. He concluded the medley with the song that made him a star. Stating "You also

¹¹³ Emily J. Lordi, *The Meaning of Soul* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 135.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv14t48fd>.

¹¹⁴ Otis Rundgren, "Legend Sam Cooke: The Cooke Report," *Vox (Archive: 1990-1999)*, 1991 Aug 01, 1991, <https://www.proquest.com/eimashell/magazines/legend-sam-cooke-report/docview/1776852075/sem-2?accountid=14512>.

have to tell her that ...” he sings “you send me” and the audience applause signals their recognition of his megahit.

Although Cooke addressed the men in the audience throughout the six songs that followed his opening number, he surreptitiously targeted the women in the audience with messages to which they would be receptive. What wife had not experienced a time when she would like to have been rid of her partner as was the case in “Bill Bailey?” Certainly, a woman who supported a man financially would be emotionally devastated by seeing the man who took so much from her openly treating their relationship disrespectfully by showing affection to another woman in public. Although most would not shoot her lover as Frankie did, hearing Frankie’s story after the message song that advised nobody wants you when you don’t have money (which is what Frankie seemingly was to Johnnie, a provider of financial support) could garner at least a vicarious feeling of retribution for the wrongdoing Johnnie had perpetrated against his patron. After stirring their emotions with these troublesome tales, Cooke smoothed over the betrayed women’s ignominy and distress by teaching the fellows how to make up with their ladies after realizing their missteps. A tawdry journey through the blues manosphere would always be fraught with disappointment for women who wanted romance from this attractive young vocalist. But Cooke brought them safely to a place where they could once again feel loved and respected. So much for part one of the act – a tour of love and its attendant twists and turns.

Cooke built the second pillar of his Copa set on an experience he understood completely and had been familiar with since his childhood, which was audience participation. In churches throughout the Midwest and parts of the South, he had

performed in gospel groups and had observed the eagerness of church members and audiences to participate in the excitement of music. Whether or not he knew that in West African cultures that influence African American musical genres, music was more often a participatory event than an entertainment event, Cooke understood that conventions practiced in white popular culture tended to inhibit a “sophisticated” audience from singing, clapping, or moving their bodies along with the performer. This inhibition had to be removed before attempting to invite the audience to join in the fun of singing, and getting enthusiastic participation from an audience that hadn’t been carefully warmed up would be a real challenge. Cooke understood that he needed to connect with the audience members – old and young, male, and female – before embarking upon the attempt to share the joy of singing with the audience. He intentionally established the requisite connection with his audience in the first section of the set as he sang about love and money.

He also understood that the song used for a sing-along had to be the perfect choice. It had to be one that most, if not all, of the audience knew well enough to sing on their own. A recent hit song, especially one that was also a popular folk song written by a nationally known singer/songwriter like Pete Seeger and been in the top twenty twice in the previous two years (by Peter, Paul and Mary in 1962 and by Trini Lopez in 1963) was a stellar candidate. For this significant moment in his gig, *Variety* reported that Cooke “scores his strongest impact with his long community-sing version of “If I Had a

Hammer.”¹¹⁵ Earning the audience’s participation in the elite Copacabana was a signal of success and of his acceptance by the elite, older, night club set that he wanted to incorporate into his fan base. The song begins with a mid-tempo vamp. Hand claps emphasize the backbeat and add a human participation feeling to the scaled-down orchestration that features a rhythm section groove from the very beginning of the song, surreptitiously laying the groundwork for Cooke’s eventual request that the audience join in the fun and sing along. Cooke brings the audience along slyly and slowly. After singing three verses, he and the musicians engage in a call and response over a simple vamp in the center of the song, reinforcing the notion that this song is not Cooke’s alone but is one that is easily shared with others. After singing two more verses covering all the lyrics of the song, Cooke returns to the call and response vamp then makes a request that is easy for the audience to perform. He asks that they “clap for me tonight” along with the song, something that has already been done at the beginning of the song. He lets them know that it “makes me feel good” acknowledging the agency of everyone who participates and empowering the audience members to return some of the positive feelings they have received from his performance.

A small digression is needed here to explain the importance of what Cooke accomplishes here. During a performance, multiple types of energy exchanges occur¹¹⁶. One type of energy exchange happens among the musicians, listening carefully to one

¹¹⁵ Herm, "Night Club Reviews: Copacabana, N. Y.," *Variety (Archive: 1905-2000)*, 1964 Jul 01, 1964, <https://www.proquest.com/magazines/night-club-reviews-copacabana-n-y/docview/1014829996/se-2?accountid=14512>; Herm, "Night Club Reviews: Copacabana, N. Y."

¹¹⁶ Personal experience growing up in a family of professional musicians and working as a vocalist in the United States and abroad 1964-2008.

another and responding to any emotional or intellectual shadings and fine tunings performed by the musicians or the vocalists. These extemporaneous variations from the way the song is normally performed trigger (hopefully) skilled, musical responses in other musicians that have the potential to lift the performance to a previously unachieved level. They are small moments of spiritual uplift that musicians and singers eagerly anticipate, especially when performing sets of songs that they have played for audiences many times before. Another type of energy exchange occurs between the performers and the audience. The audience provides aural signals of engagement to those on the stage, listening attentively and quietly to tender or emotional songs, responding vociferously to the more frenetic ones. Silence from the audience at the appropriate times signals that they are enraptured by the performance. Shouts, singing along, and exclamations from the audience during an up tempo, energetic song demonstrate the elation engaging an audience when the performance is working. Professional musicians of any race who are experienced understand these signals and receive emotional and spiritual uplift from them. Soulful, spiritual energy is circulating at these times. Back to Cooke's masterful audience engagement strategy.

Before asking the audience to participate, Cooke prepares them well so that by the time he asks "I wonder do you feel like singing? Would you sing with me?" and predicts, "We will have one of those hootenannies" after requesting that they clap and make him "feel good," the members of the audience are ready. Like a schoolteacher leading his students in a performance, he feeds the audience each line - one by one - through the last line of the verse. By the end of the verse, the singing of the audience is established well enough to let them sing the last line on their own, allowing them to focus on hearing

themselves and, thereby, helping them feel that they were an integral part of the joyful experience. The audience participated enthusiastically, singing the first three verses of the tune with Cooke in this extended (over-six-minute) performance of Pete Seeger's musical request for the American ideals of justice and equality. An apt description of Cooke's second, more successful Copa engagement is wholesome Americana delivered with a bit of soul. Consistent with the racial divide in America during the 1960s, this engagement differed dramatically from the successful performance that took place in front of a predominantly Black audience at the Harlem Square Club in Miami on January 12, 1963.

ONE NIGHT STAND - LIVE AT THE HARLEM SQUARE CLUB, 1963

In June 1985, more than two decades after Cooke's death, RCA Records released the recording of his live performance at the Harlem Square Club in Miami. Although it was his first recorded concert, it was his second, and final, live album release. The Sam Cooke *Live at the Copa* album that documents his engagement at the prestigious New York nightclub in July 1964 had been released only months after it was recorded. Why did it take so long for RCA to offer the Miami recording to Cooke's listening public? The answer is as simple as the difference between black and white. The motive for this withholding of an obviously superb album by RCA had to do with power – power over Cooke's career. Who had it? Who exercised it? And what was the result of the exercise of this power?

Power is always accompanied by struggle. In a venture like a recording contract, the determination of who exercises power in various ways are points of contention between the artist and the label's executives. What songs will be performed on the album? What musical style or genre will be the focus of the material? How will the songs be

arranged and by whom? Which songwriters will contribute to the project? How will the album be marketed and promoted? These questions have to be negotiated between the creative and the business sides of any recording project. In the case of *One Night Stand*, the power to control an artist's image is at the crux of the negotiations that resulted in the album being withheld from Cooke's audience and shelved for two decades. This was an instance of the power of the artist versus the power of the industry. It occurred at a remarkable period in the history of American race relations when the growing momentum of the Civil Rights Movement integrated with Cooke's intelligence, ambition, and *amor de soi* to steel his determination to own his work and control his legacy.

Cooke's vocal power was the genesis of the project. In 1963, he had been a national singing star for six years but had not unleashed the full impact of his extraordinary voice on the mainstream American public. His faithful African American fans and music industry professionals who worked with him knew he was blessed with impeccable control, strength, and variety of timbre. Four decades after his death no less a vocal genius than Ray Charles raved about Cooke's unique voice and his musical virtuosity. "Nobody sounds like Sam Cooke. Nobody. I mean absolutely. I mean nobody even comes close. He was the cat, man. I mean, he was the man. He brought something new with his sound into the gospel field I feel. It was almost like he was sent from up high. He was so different. He had so much control. I never heard him sing a note out of tune."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Peter Guralnick Collection, Ray Charles Interview, 2008, Interview, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC.

Black audiences who had seen him perform live were familiar with a different version of Sam Cooke than the one most Americans heard on the radio, listened to on their recordings, or watched on their television screens. The polished, refined Sam who performed for a mixed-race public was restrained, cautiously confident, and seemingly controllable. Similarly, the Cooke who performed on stages throughout the nation was self-assured. But the version of Cooke who performed for Black audiences in live settings, at home with his people, was a force of nature. In this setting he exuded power, confidence, mastery and control.

Live at the Harlem Square Club, 1963 thus packs a powerful punch, one that could have dislodged the carefully constructed image of Cooke fed to White America between 1957 and 1963. This was still an era in which African Americans were expected to step off the sidewalk to allow a White person to pass in parts of the Jim Crow South and was just a few years after fourteen-year-old Emmett Till, a Black boy from Chicago, was murdered over a false accusation that he offended a White woman. This was an era when activists for the Black civil rights in America were repeatedly advised to ‘go slow’ in seeking equality in their home country. To RCA Records executives, the Harlem Square Club album could have been an explosive release, and not in a good way.

Peter Guralnick, one of Cooke’s biographers, wrote the liner notes for *Live at the Harlem Square Club, 1963* when Allen Klein’s ABKCO finally released the album in 1983. Klein also hired Guralnick to write the liner notes for reissues of *Night Beat* and Cooke’s brother’s compilation album *L. C. Cooke: The Complete SAR Recordings*. In his liner notes for the live album, Guralnick pointed out that a radical reassessment of an artist who has been dead for two decades rarely occurs as the result of an album release. But

Live at the Harlem Square Club, 1963 presents an artist who does not fit the image many Americans held of Cooke. Instead of the singer of sweet soul, soft sentiments, and swinging songs that make you tap your feet, in this album Cooke is a different type of vocalist - commanding, coarse, and convincing as he performs a set of selections comprised primarily of his own compositions. Seemingly feeling at home with this repertoire, he is free to express emotions energetically and immediately connect with the packed audience from the moment he stepped on stage until he finished his encore.

A well-constructed act in a dance club setting uses three up tempo tunes as pillars that set the pace for dancing and permeate the bodies of the listeners. Cooke's live album demonstrates that he did just that. He opens the set by addressing the audience forcefully, at first simply asking how they are doing then repeating the question twice, indicating that the show will not continue until they respond. He firmly establishes that he is in control and will continue to be the leader of this gathering throughout the show. Once they have answered with sufficient enthusiasm, Cooke opens with his first pillar - a tune called "Feel It (Don't Fight It)" in which he instructs the audience members to open themselves up to the music ("don't fight the feelin'") and allow it to make them "feel the feeling" because "it make you groove right when you feel the feelin'." Slyly seductive lyrics ("baby, when you're dancin' near me with your cheek close to mine and you begin to feel a funny thrill movin' up your spine" "go on, move your hips") create an intimacy between the artist and the audience. Although the set will be filled with Cooke's hits, this opening number is fresh, new, and attention-getting and easy for the Black audience to enjoy.

The second pillar is a tune about dancing, a pastime that was extremely popular with American youth in the mid-1960s. "Twistin' the Night Away" sends the message 'let's

have fun' and be a part of "the in crowd" by doing the dance that became a worldwide craze when it was introduced by Hank Ballard and the Midnighters in 1958 and covered by Chubby Checker in 1959. The twist was associated with the exciting, new music called rock and roll and was distinctive because it allowed partners to dance separately, without touching each other's bodies, for the first time in recent popular dance history. There were many variations of the twist and each dancer was free to customize his or her performance of the dance. The twist was so popular that in 1962, the year prior to Cooke's January 1963 gig at the Harlem Square Club, there were over forty recordings of songs with some variation of the word "twist" in the title. So, besides this choice of repertoire being a familiar Cooke hit, it describes a trendy phenomenon that enjoyed remarkable popularity across generations ("Here's a man in evening clothes" "dancing with a chick in slacks") and racial lines. Cooke wanted to win over a similarly broad fandom.

The last pillar of the act is another Cooke original that relates a simple story - "Having a Party," which was released as the flip side of the hit single, "Bring It on Home to Me." Both songs reached the top twenty of the *Billboard* Hot 100 and the top ten of the Hot R&B Sides charts in 1962. Cooke, the storyteller, is once again at work, describing a simple get-together of friends - "the cokes are in the icebox, popcorn's on the table, me and my baby are out here on the floor" – who are dancing the night away and having fun. This song demonstrates an atmosphere that Cooke enjoyed creating for himself, his friends and loved ones. Guralnick describes the recording session itself as a party that included musicians, singers, friends, and a couple family members. At the Harlem Square Club gig in 1963, Cooke tells the audience "I want you to remember this. You gotta remember this song for me. Tell everybody we're down here ..." before launching into his

recent hit tune. Changing the “popcorn on the table” to “everything’s on the table,” he slyly suggests to the audience that the party is providing more than just snacks, intimating that he trusts them with this confidential detail. Once again, he engages the audience in a call and response during the chorus, feeding them the lines they already know, and tells them that he feels “all right now” after their participation. In keeping with the wisdom of leaving the audience wanting more, the band “is cooking – *really* cooking” as the saxophonist and two guitarists braid supportive motifs with Cooke’s voice.¹¹⁸ Interspersed with well-timed screams, he admits to them “I don’t want to quit” because the party has “that groove” as he explains that it is time for him to go. But Cooke encourages them to “keep on having that party.” He names several different circumstances – “when you go home,” “no matter where you’re at,” “if you’re with your loved one,” during which the party should continue. In essence, Cooke advises that they keep the party spirit going throughout their lives which is an uplifting message.

SINGING SEDUCTION

Cooke’s allure, a blend of wholesomeness and sex appeal, combined with expertise earned over decades of performing music were foundational to his success at the Harlem Square Club. There is a magic, a mystique, a mystery, and hopeful anticipation about the nighttime hours. In most working class lives, the daytimes are

¹¹⁸ Wade Fulton Dean, ““Shouting the People”: The Aesthetics of Live Performance and Soul” (PhD Dissertation, University of California, 2024), 190, <https://escholarship.org/content/qt2873030p/qt2873030p.pdf>.

routine and often perfunctory as people tend to their jobs and family duties. A different quality exists after dark when working people are unconstrained by their responsibilities and are free to choose ways of relaxing or recuperating from the daily grind. A musical performance in a nightclub often is a prelude to a night of romance where alcohol or other intoxicating substances loosen social inhibitions. The energy exchange that happens in a venue where live music is being performed opens up the performers and the listeners to engaging with others: hearing the sounds they are making, seeing the visual experience of their bodies moving, and experiencing the intangible, seductive flow of a spiritual energy that circulates in the musical space.

Music enters the ears and transforms the minds of the listeners. It incites an irresistible alchemical metamorphosis. In 1960s rhythm and blues concerts, musicians emoted in an organized rhythmic blitz, the banging of drums, the plucking of electric basses, the picking of guitars, the rhythmic chording on keyboards and the eclectic riffing of saxophones and punching of trumpets. A singer conveys his internal experiences through the choice of songs and the interpretation of, and editing of, their lyrics as well as through the choice of vocal timbres, the extemporaneous revision of melody lines, the incorporation of variations in amplitude. He breathes his sound out to the audience and his fellow performers – giving them a sense of what is internal to him. Music involves opening one's being to others with a similar type of intimacy as that which occurs between two human beings during lovemaking. A musical artist shares the most protected aspects of his being with a trusted entourage of performers, intimacy facilitated by hours of rehearsals and previous performances. But he also opens himself up to a room typically filled with passive listeners he has never met and will probably never see again. If the

performance works, he can share aspects of his heart and soul with a room of strangers and make them privy to his internal workings, how he feels, what he thinks, how he *breathes*. This intimate interchange requires courage, strength, optimism, and skill.

The visual aspect of a musical performance reinforces the energy exchange carried by the sounds that circulate in the venue. Watching the bouncing of a drummer as he sets the groove establishes an ocular rhythm in the eyes of the beholder that enters the body through the eyes and adjusts her internal rhythms. The shifting back and forth of the bass player as he locks into the drummer's beat complements and enhances the trance-like rhythm. The guitarist alternates between a steady incorporation of the beat in his body and moments of emotional emphasis in the music when he interrupts the steady movement to the beat and punctuates the sound with a singular riff. The upper body of the keyboard player may sway or rock as the crowd watches his hands deliver harmonic and rhythmic syncopated energy. The front man, the singer who is out in front of this visually rhythmic scene may choose many ways to move his body. Rarely does he stand still, immobile, with all this rhythmic energy circulating around him. He may tap his foot, shift his weight from side to side, snap his fingers, walk the width of the stage, move his head, and do a dance. He shows that he feels this beat. By the visual evidence of this coordinated connection with the rhythm, the audience experiences the beat through their eyes as well as their ears.

As all these visual and aural cues circulate, another type of connection is being made. There is an ethereal exchange that is as difficult to capture with words as it is to physically touch. Despite the intangibility of the transaction, it is palpable and commanding. It is the underlying essence of the musical experience because it is the

connection between the spirits in the room, the souls in the room, the insides of the people in the room. From the internal being of the performers who give their internal workings to their audience, the people perceive a primordial harmonization that is so intimate that it moves the listeners from the inside out. At once being stimulated by externalities and by internal sensations, the listeners become magically entranced and are rapturously carried away. This is what happens at a fine musical performance. This is the alchemical process Cooke was expert at organizing and producing. This is what happened at the Harlem Square Club in the predominantly African American community of Overtown in Miami, Florida on January 12, 1963.

How does a male vocalist billed as the star of the show entice the women in the audience without infuriating the men? Of course, experience is an important ingredient in the formula for the singer's seduction of a mixed-gender audience. But experience alone does not guarantee success in this endeavor. There are many professional performers who have logged sufficient hours on stage to be considered experienced, but who lack that extra 'something' that allows them the seductive stage success of Sam Cooke. Yes, he was handsome and charismatic off stage as well as on. That was a supporting factor in his triumph over audiences in person and in televised appearances. Still, there were other elements that contributed to his rise to fame and his sustained popularity.

As we noted above, Cooke often told audiences and journalists that a penchant for observation was an essential part of his character. He mentioned it in the introduction to a song he addressed to the "gentlemen" in the audience at the Copa. He told them part of the recipe for his secret sauce of seduction with women was to observe what works and then to use those observations in planning a successful strategy. It worked for him in

relationships, whether romantic, friendly, or business connections. He observed people to inspire his songwriting. He wrote about the things that everyone does on a routine basis: enjoying the companionship of friends (“Having a Party”, “Twisting the Night Away”); loving (“You Send Me”, “For Sentimental Reasons”); missing out on things one yearns for (“Another Saturday Night”). Cooke paid attention. He was completely present when he was with someone he wanted to charm and get to know. He knew the secret – what is love but attention? Love is never expressed without paying attention to the object of love. Cooke paid attention and he observed those he wanted to reach. In 1957, he decided to embrace secular audiences and released a string of singles that paved the way for the recording contract with the RCA Victor label that was responsible for these two live albums.

Cooke’s Crossing

When Sam Cooke decided to venture into the pop market in 1956, he was executing a risky double cross: from gospel to secular music and from an almost exclusively black audience to an integrated one. His career until then had been that of a rising young luminary of religious music: he was secure as the popular lead singer of the Soul Stirrers, one of the nation’s most acclaimed and best-selling black gospel groups. The transition to secular music risked igniting the wrath of religious fans who would feel abandoned by their beloved musical evangelist. Cooke knew he needed to maintain his gospel-built fan base as he built a mainstream following. He understood that the most fervent fans could morph into serious decriers of his actions and that their defection could

damage his career. He was not the only gospel singer to be concerned about this risk. As late as 1968, in a Chicago newspaper article, Pervis Staples (of the gospel-tinged Staple Singers) still felt the need to argue the case that singers of secular music could be “good Christians too.”¹¹⁹ In 1957 when Cook decided to make that change, he took a leap of faith – one that white executives like Art Rupe, whose Specialty label managed the Soul Stirrers, refused to take with him – betting that setting aside his position as a major gospel star would not leave him just another aspiring pop musician on the Los Angeles scene.¹²⁰

Cooke’s second release confirmed that he had made the right decision – one that would help him become an artist who could reach a broad multi-ethnic audience and reap the resulting economic benefits. He had written a simple love song with the goal of adding the white teen market to his record-buying customer base. Soon after its release on September 7, 1957, by the small indie label Keen Records, “You Send Me” was atop both the Pop and R&B charts. But, when Cooke had first shared the tune with his experienced guitarist, Cliff White, the more seasoned musician just heard some “ice-cream changes” that one would be hard pressed to call a song.¹²¹ White was perplexed and asked “When is the song going to start?”¹²² The lyrics seemed a little half-baked too. “Darling, you

¹¹⁹ Larry Casey, “Rock Singers Can Be Good Christians, Too’,” *Chicago Daily Defender (Big Weekend Edition) (1966-1973)* (Chicago, Ill.), 11/16 1968, <https://www.proquest.com/bsc/newspapers/rock-singers-can-be-good-christians-too/docview/493445128/sem-2?accountid=14512>; Casey, “Rock Singers Can Be Good Christians, Too’.”

¹²⁰ Wolff et al., *You Send Me The Life and Times of Sam Cooke*, 152.

¹²¹ Wolff et al., *You Send Me The Life and Times of Sam Cooke*, 147. The “ice cream” changes, so named because they are “as easy as ice cream,” tend to outline one of the most basic chord progressions in major. “You Send Me” uses one of the most common such loops, written in Nashville chord notation as 1 6- 2- 5 1.

¹²² Guralnick, *Dream boogie: the triumph of Sam Cooke*, 173.

send me, honest you do.” Despite what seemed to be shortcomings in the song, what both arranger Harold Batiste and White recognized immediately was that the magic of the recording was in Cooke’s performance – his ability to tell such a simple story in a universally appealing way.

A solid effort was put forth to make this song, performed by a Black artist, attractive to white listeners. No gospel shouting or rasp is heard. The timbre of Cooke’s voice is sweet, soft, and soothing. Most importantly, it sounds safe. Accompanied from the beginning by the downy white “oos” of female background singers behind his lightly melismatic “you”, Cooke’s gospel-inspired rhythmic looseness was easy to accept as an unexpected treat rather than an assertive symbol of racial difference.

Clear enunciation (a career-long habit) delivered a clean-cut affirmation of wholesome caring in simple, but up-to-date language. (The tinge of hipster slang in the title phrase just makes the whole thing cuter.) The second verse changes one word, as the slight coolness of “you send me” heats up into a sexier “you thrill me.” Nothing special, just a basic, universally understandable expression of ardor followed by a bit of explanation in the melodically different bridge. What proper young lady wouldn’t want to hear that after thinking “it was infatuation” and realizing that “it’s lasted so long” her special fellow wants to...marry her “and take her home”?

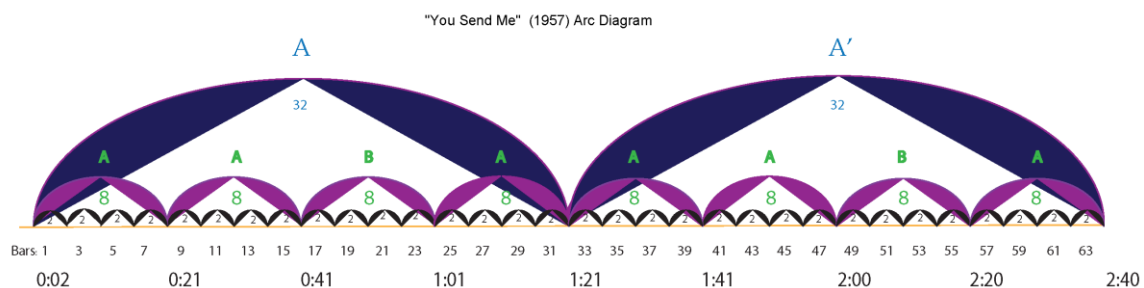


Figure 9 Arc diagram for "You Send Me"

The whole AABA form is repeated with the background singers' angelic "you send me" and "you thrill me" at the fore, allowing Cooke to spice the "A" section with new rhythmic and melodic asides that have a slightly gospel flavor.

How did Cooke manage to appeal to both Black and white audiences – markets that had been held apart and that had decisively different appetites for musical elements? Like a person who speaks several languages, Sam was multi-lingual – or, multi-vocal. His secular recordings definitely appealed musically and in vocal style to the mainstream. But in his live performances, Sam was able to pull from different vocal skill sets to please his audiences. This is evident when a comparison is made between two live albums – one that documents his performance for a largely African American audience at the Harlem Square Club in Miami, Florida and the other that was recorded at New York's Copa, the nation's most prestigious night club.

"Different strokes for different folks"

Cooke altered his performance strategy to maximize his ability to cross over the racial line in the music industry and appeal to his more recently acquired fan base in white America while maintaining his core constituency of African American fans. This is exemplified by the way Cooke performed his classic hit "You Send Me" for a black audience which differed from the way he performed it for a white or mixed audience. He performed two different medleys that include "You Send Me" on his live albums and the

difference between the medleys dramatically demonstrate the different approaches he utilized for the two, racially divided markets. The repertoire choice that was blended with this song differs for the two audiences. Furthermore, the context in which the song appears differs. And, most importantly, the sound of the song – musical arrangements and his vocal approach – is totally different in these two albums. Let's take these differences one by one.

At the Copa, Cooke chose a romantic medley (including "Try a Little Tenderness" and "(I Love You) For Sentimental Reasons") to contextualize his hit "You Send Me" as an appeal to the predominantly white audience that patronized the elite night spot. By 1963, Cooke had been a recording star for seven eventful years. "You Send Me" was his first national hit, and by the time he recorded his two live albums, it became something of a nostalgic item in his repertoire. Cooke's version of "(I Love You For Sentimental Reasons" became a Top 20 single in 1957-58, just a few months after "You Send Me," so it, too had been in the public arena for several years. The song itself, written by African American singer-songwriter Pat Best, was published in 1945. The first recording of the song was by Best himself, but it was Nat King Cole's rendition, released the following year, which reached the number one position on the Billboard Best Seller chart. During the late 1940s, the tune became a standard ballad, well-known on both sides of the color line, recorded by white pop singers (Dinah Shore, Patti Page, and Eddy Howard) and big bands (Charlie Spivak, Art Kessel). When Cooke released an innovative rendition of the song in 1957, he featured a groovy triplet shuffle, soulful vocal riffs, and swung backing vocals that pointed squarely at rock and roll crossover. The track's success on pop and rhythm and blues charts was evidence that taking a familiar tune and gently "rocking it

up” with soulful inflections was an effective crossover approach. Cooke balanced this innovation with pop conservatism at the Copa by starting his medley with what anybody in New York City would have considered an old chestnut: “Try a Little Tenderness,” written in 1932 by the English songwriting team of Campbell and Connolly. This standard had been recorded by two of the most popular white male singers in mid-century America, Bing Crosby (1933) and Frank Sinatra (1946). Cooke revised elements of the older songs to match his characteristic, gospel-influenced vocal style. But his alterations were gentle, measured, and designed to sound “race neutral,” so that his unique musical perspective did not have a jarring impact on the audience. Thus, when the Copa medley transitioned into a familiar rendition of Cooke’s own “You Send Me,” another “standard” that was, by this time, so well-known as to be part of the white pop canon, the audience responded with the applause that signals recognition, appreciation – and acceptance.

His subtle inclusion of this song at the Copa contrasts markedly with his strongly dialectical use of the song in front of the Black audience at the Harlem Square Club, where “You Send Me” was strategically placed as the first half of a two-song medley with “Bring It on Home to Me,” a hit single from 1962. The introduction of this arrangement was tailor-made for African Americans in that it started with a gospel-style “preaching break.” Although the topic of the medley is secular love, a church-y ambience is already set by Cooke’s transition from the preceding song, “Somebody Have Mercy on Me.” The band quietly hovers in the background, playing chords from the upcoming song, as Cooke repeats the phrase “somebody have mercy” using the kind of “tuning up” from speech to half-singing that always captured churchgoers’ attention when a preacher began to narrate a personal story about his relationship to – well, it would have been Jesus, but at

the Harlem Square it was about his relationship with his lady love, or as he referred to her, his “baby.”

In this spoken preface to what would be a distinctly raw, rather than refined, rendition of his biggest crossover hit, Cooke lays out a much less idealized relationship than the one he had dreamily sketched out over “ice cream” chord changes back in 1957. Positioning his audience as grown adults whom rhythm & blues had taught about love and sex, he hails them as people he can “confide in” because they are in a “mood” ready for the telling of an honest story. He confesses that he and his baby “sometimes fuss and fight” and that sometimes she leaves him “cause things ain’t right.” When that happens, he feels so “all alone” that he places a long-distance call to his love. He indicates that it often takes a while to “get somebody on the telephone” and learns that he is talking to the operator. His frustration and emotion burst forth in an exclamation – “I want my baby! Oh, operator, I want my baby!” He sings the first “baby” with a gritty melismatic utterance that seems to emanate from inside a man who is experiencing a dramatic depth of feeling, and his cry of “Oh, operator” is desperate and urgent. This preacher-on-Sunday vamping would have read perfectly to a Black Southern audience, who would have uniquely felt the surprise, and subsequent delight, when they heard those familiar three words, “You Send Me.” The recording captures the excited sound emanating from the audience when they finally recognize the trick; Cooke’s clever misdirection, using a totally Black performance style to introduce his big crossover hit, effectively diffused any anxiety about who Cooke was really singing for.

By the time Cooke recorded his two live albums, he had a six-year chart record that gave him data about the preferences of his R&B (Black) and his Pop (mostly White)

audiences. He could compare how a single performed in both markets to see what worked best for each demographic, tailoring a live performance to include the types of sounds that would work with that audience in that town that night. More than likely, he considered these insights when designing his productions for the Harlem Square Club and for the Copa. Of course, he also had years of experience on the 'chitlin circuit' that not only made him an expert on Black audiences but also fostered confidence in his ability to win any of them over that supported a bold, even cheeky approach at the Harlem Square Club – confidence that his painful failure at the Copa in 1958 would not support. Is it any wonder that when he went back to the Copa he played it conspicuously safe? Or that he was able to toy with audience expectations so much more adroitly when singing to his own people?

The Costs of the Double Cross

During his career as a professional vocalist, Sam Cooke successfully crossed over from gospel to secular music and simultaneously crossed over from an almost exclusively Black audience to a diverse, multiracial fan base as soon as he released his first self-penned hit, "You Send Me," in 1957. But this brilliant double cross was to be followed by one of the more traditional, tragic kind, the double cross of betrayal. Just before his untimely demise, people close to Cooke have claimed that he believed that Allen Klein, his business manager, had tricked him and that Cooke intended to fire Klein and expose

his deceptive and illegal business practices.¹²³ Cooke's business partner, J. W. Alexander, who filed corporate documents signed by Klein that removed Sam and his father from the Board of Directors of Sam's Tracey Limited Corporation and listed Klein as the only director, may well have colluded in this betrayal. Johnny Morissette, a singer Cooke took under his wing and produced, was responsible for luring Cooke to a local nightclub on the night he was gunned down.¹²⁴ Although Morissette did not actually force Cooke to walk into a dangerous situation, the guilt he felt over misleading his friend welled up during Cooke's funeral. Morissette jumped up from the pew and cried "I'm so sorry, Sam" in such a tormented fashion that the mortuary staff had to physically remove him from the room.¹²⁵ Morissette was disowned by Cooke's close friends Lou Rawls and Bobby Womack, and suffered a ten-year period of alcoholism and depression.¹²⁶ Finally, Cooke's wife Barbara, with whom he had a fractured marriage after the death of their 18-month-old son Vincent in a swimming pool accident, was matching him in consensual extramarital affairs. What had long been a marriage of convenience had finally devolved, and Sam was planning to divorce her.¹²⁷ Soon after his death, she began dating, and then married, Cooke's protégé, singer Bobby Womack, fifteen years her junior. Womack wore her husband's clothes and jewelry, and the grieving widow offered him the use of Sam's

¹²³ Wolff et al., *You Send Me The Life and Times of Sam Cooke*, 315–16.

¹²⁴ B. G. Rhule, *Sam Cooke: The Truth*, ed. Donna H. Richards and Joanna Katsune (Cincinnati, OH: B. G. Rhule, 2021, 2021), 208.

¹²⁵ Wolff et al., *You Send Me The Life and Times of Sam Cooke*, 332.

¹²⁶ Opal Louis Nations, "'Superman' The Johnnie Morissette Story," *Rock & Blues News*, no. Oct-Nov 1999 (1999): 18. https://www.opalnations.com/files/Johnny_Morissette_Rock_Blues_News_Oct-Nov.1999.pdf.

¹²⁷ Guralnick, *Dream boogie: the triumph of Sam Cooke*, 644.

office. Cooke's family considered this yet another betrayal. Cooke's brother, Charles, physically attacked Womack in a Chicago hotel room, breaking his jaw and knocking Barbara down when she tried to shoot him.¹²⁸

Although Klein has since portrayed himself as a man "in awe of" Sam Cooke, his words and actions at the time suggest that his relationship with the singer had a very dark side.¹²⁹ In his biography of Allen Klein, Fred Goodman quotes Klein telling Sam that his record company was treating him "like a nigger."¹³⁰ This ugly statement, if truly said to Sam, seem to be intended to insult him as Klein pitched his accounting services. The differences between Klein and Cooke were glaring. Cooke read voraciously and was articulate. Klein was blunt and brash. Cooke was attractive; Klein was ordinary. Klein presents as a man who attempted to cover his jealousy of Cooke by commissioning two books – by Goodman and Guralnick - that would uplift him and diminish Cooke.

The Guralnick biography of Cooke, *Dream Boogie*, was written with Klein's permission and assistance, with Guralnick the only writer given access to ABKCO's extensive collection of archival materials. Klein also hired Guralnick to write liner notes for a Cooke compilation album and the script for the documentary on Cooke's life that was produced by ABKCO, so his editorial independence may be seen as compromised by his status as an employee. I believe that *Dream Boogie* is biased toward Klein: Guralnick, who majored in, and teaches creative writing, puts words into Cooke's mouth

¹²⁸ Guralnick, *Dream boogie: the triumph of Sam Cooke*, 648.

¹²⁹ Fred Goodman, *Allen Klein: the man who bailed out The Beatles, made The Stones, and transformed rock & roll* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015), 38.

¹³⁰ Goodman, *Allen Klein: the man who bailed out The Beatles, made The Stones, and transformed rock & roll*, 39.

and thoughts that he could not have evidence of Cooke saying or thinking. While Guralnick acknowledges Cooke's widely recognized positive qualities, the author's jabs at Cooke's character are malicious and repetitive. As I read the biography, I began to dislike Cooke until I detected the author's campaign to belittle the singer which would induce readers to believe the incredulous official story of his ignominious death.

Another Hit Job?

On the first page of the book, the reader is greeted with the headline "Praise for Peter Guralnick's *Dream Boogie: The Triumph of Sam Cooke*." This pitch to sell the book and its arguments begin here with five pages of edited comments from reviews of the book from thirty-one sources. Most are newspaper and media reviews. One is from a celebrity trusted by most Americans to tell the stories of our nation's history - Ken Burns, who is described as the producer/director of three films in which African Americans play a significant role and one of which is about jazz, the musical genre generally attributed to black roots. A respected scholar of black music, Gerald Early, comments that in these pages, Cooke's life is depicted as built on "a certain kind of moral and artistic strength built on a sense of pride that was simultaneously sinful and glorious." Before the text by Guralnick begins, the reader is confronted with the idea that Cooke may have been wonderful, but he had a "bad side." Just before Early, we hear from Cooke's brother, L.C., his nearest sibling and the other Cooke who was a professional singer. L.C. unequivocally delivers the message that the book's promoters want us to believe: "Peter Guralnick tells the story like it really is. *Dream Boogie* is the truth."

Why is *Dream Boogie* being sold in this way? One reason may be that it is endorsed by the man some people suspect as being involved in Cooke's death, Allen Klein. Klein profited immensely from Cooke's death and thereby established a foundational stake in the music business, one that allowed him to move on to even more lucrative opportunities as the American business representative of a who's who of British rock bands up to and including the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. Profiting from the British Invasion of the mid-1960s was Klein's goal and he achieved much of it due to his reputation as having managed Cooke. But many of the same artists eventually broke with Klein. By 1969, Klein had been sued over 40 times and formally investigated by the SEC.¹³¹ In 1979, he was prosecuted by the US Attorney for the Southern District of New York, convicted, and sentenced to prison for income tax evasion.¹³² While making their case against Klein, the prosecutors filed a document with the court that indicated they wanted to place their key witness, ABKCO's promotion manager, Peter Bennett (born Pietro Benedetto), and his family in witness protection because they feared violence from individuals in the employ of Klein or his attorney. Men had been observed in Bennett's neighborhood asking about the schools, the whereabouts and the daily routines of his

¹³¹ John McMillian, "You Never Give me Your Money: How Allen Klein Played the Beatles and the Stones," *Newsweek* (2013_12_17 2013). <https://www.newsweek.com/sympathy-devil-how-alan-klein-played-beatles-and-stones-224703>.

¹³² New York Times, "Allen Klein Loses Tax Appeal," *New York Times* (1923-) (New York, N.Y.), 12/18/1979 Dec 18 1979, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/allen-klein-loses-tax-appeal/docview/123874324/se-2?accountid=14512>

ProQuest.

children.¹³³ Klein established Tracey Ltd., a company set up to own Cooke's music and to receive payments from Cooke's record label, RCA Records for distribution rights. Sam thought he owned and ran Tracey. The first Articles of Incorporation filed in Nevada listed Cooke as President of the Board, and J. W. Alexander (Cooke's business partner) as Vice President, and S.R. Crain and Sam's father Rev. Charles S. Cooke as the directors of the corporation. Later in October 1963, the Directors are Sam Cooke, President, J.W. Alexander Vice President, and Allen Klein, Secretary. Two of Cooke's allies (Crain and Cooke's father) no longer are listed. At the next filing on May 5, 1964 (mere months before Cooke's demise), the only director is Allen Klein, Secretary and Cooke is listed as Chairman of the Board, an officer and no longer a director.¹³⁴ Not evident from these filings was the ownership of Tracey. Cooke thought he owned it but the owner of the company named after Sam Cooke's daughter was Allen Klein.¹³⁵ Several associates stated that Cooke was concerned that Klein deceived him when he claimed the record company (RCA) was paying for ads for which Cooke's royalties were paying. Cooke's former manager, Jess Rand, stated that on Thursday afternoon, December 10, 1964, Cooke asked him to find a New York lawyer because he was going to New York on Monday to fire Klein.¹³⁶ Instead, Cooke was beaten and killed in the wee hours of the

¹³³ Jerry Knight, "Tax Trial Centers on Former Beatles' Manager and Aide," *The Washington Post*, 1977_10_11 1977, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/business/1977/10/11/tax-trial-centers-on-former-beatles-manager-and-aide/304f4f33-46de-49c7-9269-9b615c61e080/>.

¹³⁴ David Czarnetzki, "Lady You Shot Me," (Germany, 2017), 1:11:42. <https://youtu.be/n6FEFy30o3o?si=m1uSW9iBWYZsQXS8>.

¹³⁵ Goodman, *Allen Klein: the man who bailed out The Beatles, made The Stones, and transformed rock & roll*, 57–58.

¹³⁶ Wolff et al., *You Send Me The Life and Times of Sam Cooke*, 316.

morning on Friday, December 11, 1964. When Cooke died, Klein owned Tracey Limited. Within a few years, he owned everything: Cooke's publishing rights, his performance and recording royalties, and his likeness. And after Cooke's killing, which provoked substantial controversy at the time – Doc Young ran a five-installment series of articles called “The Mysterious Death of Sam Cooke” in the *Chicago Daily Defender* – Klein shut down the Cooke story for decades. The greatest black pop artist of the late 50s and early 60s, second in sales for RCA Victor only to Elvis Presley, went radio silent.

Cooke navigated a dangerous profession when he chose to be a pop singer. Reaching stardom in the music industry is an improbable task but Cooke had been determined, motivated, and confident of his eventual success since his childhood years. Unlike Gladys Knight's description of her lover in “Midnight Train to Georgia,” who moved to LA in search of stardom but found it was “too much for the man” and that “dreams don't always come true,” Cook reached the pinnacle of show business success. Organized crime created a dangerous environment for artists, yet he was undeterred by the serious risk he faced by maintaining ownership and control of his work and resisting attempts by criminals to assume control of his career. Undoubtedly his upbringing in a family so centered on religious faith strengthened his resolve and his faith that he could succeed as a singer. But many other vocalists shared similar experiences and were gifted with exceptional talent. Cooke's success is an exemplar of *amour de soi* in action.

Chapter 3 Aretha Franklin - The Queen of Soul

The King & The Queen of Soul

Sam Cooke, who eventually was dubbed the King of Soul for the body of musical work he produced during a secular music career that spanned the end of the Fifties and the beginning of the Sixties, did not have a recognized consort – a Queen of Soul - until the late Sixties. In our traditionally patriarchal society, it is common for men to precede women in being recognized for accomplishments in any field. In the popular music scene of the Sixties, despite the success of Motown's Supremes and a handful of other girl groups and female solo artists, males dominated the charts. Hence, the acceptance of an artist whose vocal style, popularity, and domination of the African American music scene would establish her as the bona fide Queen of Soul did not occur until Aretha Franklin made her mark during the late Sixties. In contrast to Cooke's rapid success after crossing over from gospel to secular music, Franklin struggled for seven years before reaching national acclaim.

Franklin knew and admired Cooke who, although eleven years older than his Queen, shared a similar musical trajectory with her. They both were born in the South to a family that migrated north and settled in a Midwestern metropolis. The Cooke and Franklin families were headed by fathers who were preachers and community leaders – fathers who wanted their children to prosper. Both vocalists honed their vocal skills in churches – their fathers' houses of worship and various churches on the gospel circuit. Cooke and Franklin were ambitious. They yearned to share their musical talents with a broader audience than the church congregations and visitors who admired their

performances. In addition to the uplifting gospel songs they performed regularly, they also loved secular music. They enjoyed the same music that mainstream white audiences appreciated – music performed by a diverse spectrum of artists from Sinatra to Dylan - and they wanted to perform for the enjoyment of an integrated musical audience. However great his aspirations for a career as a pop vocalist, Cooke entered the world of secular music in the late 1950s, before the simmering beginnings of the counterculture movement of the 1960s that preached “free love,” “power to the people,” and “live and let live.” This countercultural campaign, which developed just after the climax of the Civil Rights Movement, marked a significant change in the ideas American youth held about race and created a space in which African American music was more broadly accepted. Franklin’s star ascended in the late 1960s, as the counterculture movement was maturing and proliferating into mainstream consciousness. So, Cooke and Franklin, who began their music careers in an environment steeped in religion and crossed over to secular music, faced differing circumstances because of the cultural shift in racial views that took place between 1958 when Cooke became a pop star and the late 1960s when Franklin rose to fame. Although Cooke believed he had to restrain and soften his gospel style to make the leap into a multiracial market, by the time Franklin’s rise to fame occurred, a diminution of gospel-based African American vocal techniques was no longer necessary to attract a diverse fandom. During the denouement of the Civil Rights era and a period of expanding New Age sensibility that represented “the historically innovative phenomenon of a secular type of religion based upon a radically private symbolism,”¹³⁷

Guralnick, *Dream boogie: the triumph of Sam Cooke*.¹³⁷Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "New Age Spiritualities as Secular Religion: a Historian's Perspective," *Social Compass* 46, no. 2 (1999): 145,

the mainstream popular music market welcomed a creative vocalist who sang from a unique, deeply personal source - who sang from her soul.

Why did Franklin, an artist whose 'gift' for musical excellence was recognized by so many seasoned music industry veterans, take so long to achieve commercial success in the popular music industry? The changing socio-political context in which Franklin lived and worked in the late 1960s was a significant factor in producing the string of award-winning releases Franklin enjoyed from 1968 through 1975 – recordings that earned Grammys each year during that period. But what took her so long to ascend the top of her field is the enigma of her early career. At the outset of her secular career in 1960, she was recognized by jazz historian Ira Gitler, who explained that although he did not nominate several celebrated musicians (Quincy Jones, Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins) for the 1960 *Downbeat* Critics Choice Awards because he had not heard enough of their new work, he nominated an ingenue named Aretha and explained his unconventional choice:

One exception I made was in voting for Abetha [Aretha] Franklin. I heard only a tape of this 18-year-old girl. It contained several numbers done impromptu in a recording studio with her piano the only accompaniment. She is a startling talent."

Similarly, many music industry professionals who heard Aretha were immediately impressed by her extraordinary talent. This chapter explores the hypothesis that, as a woman blessed with considerable potential for commercial viability, she encountered an obstacle that was endemic in the music industry. She suffered through, and her career efforts were supported and impeded by, challenging familial relationships. Her mother's

departure from the family home and her death during Aretha's childhood and the influence of two authoritarian, and possibly narcissistic men - her father, C. L. Franklin and her first husband, Ted White – are investigated herein as components of the range of personal obstacles Franklin had to overcome. These emotional challenges complicated her rise to stardom – an ascent that was already no easy task for any African American of her era. Her religious faith, *amour propre*, commitment to, and love for, music, and her unconquerable resilience fueled her ascendancy to the role of Queen of Soul.

Biography - “It’s a Family Affair”

Aretha Franklin was born in Memphis and raised in Detroit nestled in a family whose various members lent her critical support as she labored assiduously to craft a successful career in the music industry. Her father, C. L. Franklin, supported her interest in music throughout her childhood, often asking her to perform a song or two at his parties when she was still in elementary school. Often his guests included well-known musicians and vocalists who encouraged the young girl to continue to develop her talent. Franklin's father was a prominent preacher in African American religious circles. He traveled and preached throughout the Midwest. In 1956, at age fourteen, Aretha began traveling with her father on the gospel circuit and singing as a solo performer at gospel events.¹³⁸ Her freedom to travel was facilitated by C. L.'s mother, Rachel Franklin, who was called “Big Mama” by her grandchildren. Her support was of significant assistance to Aretha. When the young singer gave birth to her first two children, Big Mama took care of them so that

¹³⁸ Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and The Transformation of America*, Location 3465.

Aretha could continue to travel and sing. Although she had five siblings, only three grew up with her in Detroit. Her older brother, Cecil graduated *cum laude* from Morehouse College and worked as assistant pastor at their father's church before supporting Aretha's career as her manager. Assistance from Aretha's older sister, Erma, and younger sister, Carolyn had a significant impact on her musical career.

Spending her childhood surrounded by people who had significant musical talent and creativity to share with her was beneficial to Aretha's growth as an artist. Erma and Carolyn were also professional singers who provided ongoing support for their middle sister's artistic efforts. The three sisters often rehearsed songs and exercised their vocal arrangement skills by creating harmonies and background parts for Aretha's repertoire. Both of her sisters sang background vocals with Aretha on recordings and in live concerts and both also pursued solo careers as recording artists. At age fourteen, Erma's vocal group released their first recording on JVB, the label that recorded and released her father's sermons. Epic, a subsidiary of Columbia Records, signed Erma in 1962, two years after Aretha signed with Columbia. Although she had no major successes with Epic, Erma eventually reached an international audience with her single "Piece of My Heart" in 1967. Although Erma's recording only reached number 62 on the US Hot 100, it peaked at number 10 on the R&B charts and broke into the top ten in the UK, Ireland, Denmark,

and The Netherlands.¹³⁹¹⁴⁰ A year later, Erma's rendition was nominated for a Grammy Award and Janis Joplin enjoyed rave reviews enhancing her status as a 'soulful' vocalist when Big Brother and the Holding Company covered the song.

In addition to Erma's support, Aretha benefitted from the assistance of her younger sister Carolyn, who provided background vocals on recordings and in live performances. She led the trio of background vocalists who performed in concerts and, with Aretha's oversight, created their choreography. Carolyn was a talented songwriter who provided Aretha with two compositions that were major hits for her sister. Carolyn's composition, "Ain't No Way," ranked in the top twenty of the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart and in the top ten of the R&B Singles chart in 1968 and has been covered by other artists in every decade since its release. Five years after the success of "Ain't No Way," Quincy Jones and Aretha arranged and co-produced "Angel," a song written by Carolyn and Sonny Sanders. The recording was another Franklin family project as it included background vocals by both of Aretha's singing sisters. The song headed the R&B Singles chart for two weeks of a thirteen-week run in 1973 – topped only, at that point, by another Franklin hit, "Until You Come Back To Me" - and peaked at number twenty on the Pop chart.¹⁴¹ Like Carolyn's first hit for Aretha, "Ain't No Way," was an enduring success, "Angel" also stood the test of time. It was covered by the British pop/soul band Simply Red in 1996, twenty-nine

¹³⁹ Dutch Charts, "Erma Franklin - (Take A Little) Piece of My Heart," [https://dutchcharts.nl/showitem.asp?interpret=Erma+Franklin&titel=\(Take+a+Little\)+Piece+of+My+Heart&cat=s](https://dutchcharts.nl/showitem.asp?interpret=Erma+Franklin&titel=(Take+a+Little)+Piece+of+My+Heart&cat=s).

¹⁴⁰ swedishcharts.com, "Erma Franklin - (Take A Little) Piece of My Heart," [https://swedishcharts.com/showitem.asp?interpret=Erma+Franklin&titel=\(Take+a+Little\)+Piece+of+My+Heart&cat=s](https://swedishcharts.com/showitem.asp?interpret=Erma+Franklin&titel=(Take+a+Little)+Piece+of+My+Heart&cat=s).

¹⁴¹ Billboard, "Hot 100 Chart History Aretha Franklin," accessed 2022_08_09, 2022, <https://www.billboard.com/artist/aretha-franklin/chart-history/hsi/>.

years after Aretha's single rendition was released. Simply Red's single which featured the hip-hop group, The Fugees, hit the number four position on the UK charts near the dawn of the twenty-first century.

Aretha's Secular Music Scene

Aretha Franklin's arrival as a member of that rare coterie of artists whose records reached the top position in the pop charts occurred on June 3, 1967, with her cover version of "Respect," a song written by singer Otis Redding. The original release of this song appeared on Redding's *Blue/Otis Redding Sings Soul* album and was a hit single in 1965. Redding crossed over to the pop charts for the first time two years prior to the release of "Respect" when his soul ballad, "These Arms of Mine," climbed to the number 85 position on the *Billboard* Hot 100 and spent three weeks on the chart in 1963. Redding was a significant soul singer whose music had begun to cross over; his recordings appeared on the *Billboard* pop chart twenty-eight times during a brief career that was ended by his untimely death in a plane crash when he was twenty-six years old. Redding's rendition of "Respect," the song that was to become a Franklin classic, peaked at number 4 on *Billboard's* R&B Singles chart and number 35 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 in 1965. Redding subsequently reached the number one position on the pop charts with "Sittin' on the Dock of the Bay" which spent four weeks in that position and sixteen weeks on the chart in early 1968. Despite the better chart ranking of Redding's "Dock of the Bay," "Respect" may be considered the songwriter's most significant and long-reaching creation.

The chart success of Franklin's "Respect" was an anomaly in the white male-dominated pop music industry of the time. It interrupted the chart reign of "Groovin'" by The Young Rascals, which became the top single on May 20, 1967, and recaptured that position from Franklin on June 17, 1967. In the middle of The Young Rascals' four weeks topping the chart, Franklin's "Respect" assumed the top position for a short two weeks. But in those two weeks, Franklin made history with a song that became one of her biggest hits. Her revision of Redding's lyrics was received as an anthem for women whose struggle for equal status with men expanded during the second wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Songs performed by Black female artists held the number one position for only three weeks in 1967. This release was the third, and final, song by a Black female artist to reach the top of the charts in 1967. The Supremes' "Love is Here, and Now You're Gone" and "The Happening" had each spent one week at number one before "Groovin'" ascended to the top in May. White female singers fared slightly better than Black females in 1967. Nancy Sinatra shared the top spot with her father, Frank, during the spring with their alliteratively titled release, "Somethin' Stupid." Two other female artists reached the top later in the year with songs that did not deliver a cutting-edge feminist message: Bobby Gentry's "Ode to Billy Joe" spent four weeks at number one in late summer and Lulu's "To Sir with Love" was at the top in October as Halloween initiated the holiday season. Lulu's performance earned the coveted position of *Billboard* top single of the year. But with these few exceptions, 1967 was dominated by bands of white males. Strikingly, not a single solo male vocalist, nor *any* Black male soloists or groups - hit the top of the pop chart in 1967. Still, Franklin was eventually able to earn a

measure of respect in this heavily leveraged environment. But reaching the top of the charts had not been easy.

The Queen's Cohort

In the male dominated music industry, a small minority of solo Black female singers were heard on mainstream popular music stations in the 1950s and 1960s. Even though the Civil Rights Movement had made tremendous advances toward leveling the playing field for Black Americans, and the rise of the counterculture increased the number of non-African Americans who listened to Black-created music, during the 1960s most African American artists were still heard on radio stations that targeted a Black audience. One of this tiny cohort of Black artists, Nina Simone, closed the decade of the fifties with the release of "I Loves You Porgy," a single that peaked at number 6 on the *Billboard* Hot R&B and number 18 on the Hot 100. The presence of Simone's rendition of "I Loves You, Porgy" on the *Billboard* Hot 100 in 1959 was an anomaly. On the first Hot 100 chart, which was published on August 4, 1958, African American vocalists and female artists both represented a vanishingly small percentage of the entries, and there were *no* songs by African American female singers on this first chart. Solo female singers were represented by an exclusively white group that included Patti Page, Doris Day, Peggy Lee, Eydie Gormé, and Connie Francis. When Simone recorded "I Loves You, Porgy" as a track on *Little Girl Blue* (1959), her first jazz album female singers were a small percentage of the artists on the year-end charts compiled by *Billboard*. Simone was one of only five female solo artists (LaVerne Baker, Dinah Washington, Della

Reese, and Sarah Vaughan) who occupied six positions (12% of the entries) on *Billboard* "year-end top 50 R&B singles of 1959" chart. The magazine's "Year-End Hot 100 Singles of 1959," a summary chart that reflected the preferences of a predominantly white market, contained only ten entries by female solo artists - Dodie Stevens, Connie Francis (3), Connie Stevens, Della Reese, Dinah Washington, Sarah Vaughan, Annette Funicello, and Kathy Linden. Simone's career-making rendition of "I Loves You, Porgy" - a crossover success for the young performer - was not on the list.

At the dawn of the sixties, black female vocalists remained an underrepresented demographic in the American recording industry. Although Kitty Kallen's "Little Things Mean a Lot" broke a glass ceiling for female singers as the top pop single of 1954, it took thirteen years for the next recording by a woman - "To Sir with Love" by Lulu - to achieve that distinction again. On the country scene, the bias favoring male vocalists in the number one position lingered until Patsy Cline hit with "I Fall to Pieces" in 1961 for a top country single for the year and until 1979 for the return of a song by a woman (Anne Murray's "I Just Fall in Love Again") to the top. Ruth Brown's "Mama He Treats Your Daughter Mean" broke the ice by reaching the number one position on the R&B single year-end chart in 1953, a year before Kallen's "Little Things" topped the pop charts. But no other woman made it to the top of the R&B year-end chart until 1967 when Aretha Franklin's "Respect" led the field.

When Franklin began her professional career in popular music in 1960 by signing a deal with Columbia Records, she joined a small group of female singers who consistently released singles that earned a position on the *Billboard* charts. Former Mouseketeer Annette Funicello ended the fifties ("Tall Paul," #7 1959 Hot 100) and began

the sixties (“O Dio Mio,” #10 1960 Hot 100) with top ten hits, but her record sales waned thereafter. Like Funicello, former Miss Oklahoma Anita Bryant seemed poised to sustain a successful career as a recording artist when, one year after her first entry on the charts, she hit the top ten twice with “Paper Roses” and “My Little Corner of the World” in 1960. Although Funicello and Bryant faded from the charts during the sixties, other female pop singers achieved stability on the charts. In 1957 Connie Francis began a five-year stint of singles in the Hot 100 top ten and a ten-year run on the Hot 100. In her wake, Brenda Lee released singles that reached the top ten every year from 1959 through 1963 and made the top 100 throughout the decade. African American vocalist Dinah Washington had an exemplary run on the R&B charts. She first broke the top ten in 1944 and consistently was represented in that group of successful R&B singles until 1956 when her top sellers climbed to the number thirteen position. After a two-year break, she reclaimed her top ten status in 1959 with her classic rendition of “What a Difference a Day Makes” and her singles reached the *Billboard* R&B top ten for two more years. Washington, a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee who performed in several styles (jazz, blues, R&B, and pop) far outpaced other female recording artists of the two decades in terms of chart success. The career of this self-proclaimed “Queen of the Blues” served as part of the template that shaped Franklin’s vision of her own professional career. Few Black female artists could compete with Aretha in the arenas of crossover success and rhythm & blues dominance between 1968 and 1975.

Emotional Struggles and Gender Issues

As Franklin's star ascended in the popular music industry, she was not immune to the typical challenges American working women had to face. Prior to the second wave feminist revolution, women who attempted to balance a career with a healthy family life faced burdens that men did not encounter. Expectations that women are more emotional than men increased the likelihood of an ambitious female being accused of inappropriate, irrational behavior. In Franklin's case, her struggles with emotional distress were a matter of contemporaneous public knowledge as she became an international singing star. Stories describing her emotional health were reported in many publications - from popular magazines like *Time* to newspapers, especially ones targeting African American communities in major US cities.¹⁴² Franklin married twice and later shared a home with a long-term partner.¹⁴³ But her romantic partnerships ended in separation and were topics of public discussion.¹⁴⁴ Gender bias that influenced news coverage was conspicuous in reports detailing her arrest in 1969 that were riddled with descriptions of Franklin being "totally exhausted" and "on the verge of hysteria."¹⁴⁵ The implications that she was not

¹⁴² Time, "Music: Lady Soul Singing It Like It Is," 06/28/1968, 1968, <https://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,841340,00.html>.

¹⁴³ Gertrude Gipson, "GERTRUDE GIPSON CANDID COMMENTS: ARETHA AND GLYNN DO THEIR THING," *Los Angeles Sentinel* (1934-) (Los Angeles, Calif.), 04/20/1978 Apr 20 1978, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/gertrude-gipson-candid-comments/docview/565232657/se-2?accountid=14512>; Gipson, "GERTRUDE GIPSON CANDID COMMENTS: ARETHA AND GLYNN DO THEIR THING."

¹⁴⁴ Magda Ibrahim, "Who was Aretha Franklin's tour manager Ken Cunningham?," *The U.S. Sun* (2021_03_24 2021). <https://www.the-sun.com/entertainment/2570637/aretha-franklin-tour-manager-ken-cunningham/>.

¹⁴⁵ Philadelphia Tribune, "Aretha Franklin Under Care Of Her Physician After Arrest: Singer Beats Drunk Driving Rap, Is Fined for Disorderly Conduct," *Philadelphia Tribune* (1912-) (Philadelphia, Penn.),

strong and was nearly out of control are ones that women have often faced, even when these criticisms were not valid.

Although her family members played significant positive roles throughout Franklin's life, marriage was one arena in which the Queen of Soul did not reign comfortably. Her parents, Barbara and C. L., experienced serious marital difficulties as early as four years after their 1936 wedding. On November 17, 1940, while C.L. was serving as a pastor at New Salem Baptist Church in Memphis, Mildred Jennings, a 12 year old member of his church, gave birth to his child. Jennings, who was much younger than eighteen, the age of consent in Tennessee at the time, was sent to live with out-of-town relatives. Their daughter, Carl Ellan, whose name was seemingly inspired by her father's initials, was raised in Memphis by her grandparents. This scandal was a topic of discussion among adult congregants at Reverend Franklin's church. So were rumors of his other romantic affairs.

These improprieties undoubtedly caused Barbara, mother to Vaughn, Erma, Cecil and Aretha at the time, considerable pain and social humiliation. Still, she bore C.L. one more child after his affair with Jennings.¹⁴⁶ Aretha was two years old when the Franklin family moved from Memphis to Buffalo in 1944 and four when the Franklins arrived in Detroit in 1946. Although they never divorced, Barbara left C.L. in 1948, returning with Vaughn, her child from a previous marriage to live with her parents in Buffalo. Barbara

08/05/1969 1969, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/aretha-franklin-under-care-her-physician-after/docview/532510353/se-2?accountid=14512>, UCLA.

¹⁴⁶ Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and The Transformation of America*, Location 1040.

and C.L.'s other four children remained in his Detroit home, purportedly because he could provide for them better than his former wife could because of the disparity between his income and that of his estranged wife. Aretha repeatedly defended her mother's decision to leave four of her children in Detroit. She thought that because her mother moved into Aretha's maternal grandparents' home and worked as a nurse in Buffalo, she did not have the resources necessary to provide for all her children. Still, in the 1940s and 1950s, when Black parents separated, children usually continued to reside with their mothers.¹⁴⁷ So this Franklin family living arrangement differed from the norm.

Why did C. L. want his children to live with him? Surely, he had a complex of reasons. His love for his children is the most obvious motivation. However, a less palatable impetus may have been a factor in this arrangement. C.L. was a community leader who had to cope with the stigma of being abandoned by his wife. Losing his children may have been more than the ambitious preacher would bear. His self-centered behavior, identifiable by years of openly flaunting the sanctity of his marriage and by engaging in a sexual affair with a child in Memphis, may have influenced this decision to keep his biological children (who are, at times, viewed by a narcissist as an extension of his ego) and agree to allow his stepson to leave with Barbara. C. L.'s only memory of his biological father was a single encounter when the young boy was taught to salute by Willie Walker, a uniformed World War I veteran.¹⁴⁸ The absence of his own father during

¹⁴⁷ Steve Ruggles, "The Origins of African-American Family Structure," *American Sociological Review* 59, no. 1 (1994): 140, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2096137>, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2096137>.

¹⁴⁸ Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and The Transformation of America*, Location 155.

C.L.'s childhood may have created his determination. that his biological children would not suffer the same fate. However, another ramification of his early loss of a parent may have also influenced the Franklin patriarch.

Academic literature addressing the correlation between narcissism and the clergy affords insight into Reverend C.L. Franklin's personality.¹⁴⁹ The hypothesis that members of the clergy are predisposed to narcissistic behavior because their profession exacerbates inclinations toward self-involvement and vainglorious ideations has been addressed by psychologists and academicians.¹⁵⁰ When congregants decide to seek counseling in the African American community, they often turn to preachers instead of mental health professionals.¹⁵¹ The importance of this mentoring role can foster a sense of self-importance in some members of the Black clergy that strengthens narcissistic tendencies. Reports addressing C.L.'s behavior indicate he exhibited more than five of the eight personality traits of narcissism listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.¹⁵²

The specific reason that Barbara and Vaughn left Detroit may never be known. But, a mother, described by her children as loving and responsible, was unlikely to leave four children with a troubled father unless she felt that her marriage was intolerable. Due

¹⁴⁹ Brad D. Strawn and Jonathan Doctrian, "The Unknown Vocational Motivations of Seminary Students," in *Vocation, Formation, and Theological Education: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Fuller Theological Seminary*, ed. David J. Downs, Tina Houston-Armstrong, and Amos Yong (Claremont Press, 2021), 220.

¹⁵⁰ J. Reid Meloy, "Narcissistic psychopathology and the clergy," *Pastoral Psychology* 35, no. 1 (1986/09/01 1986): 50, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01761334>, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01761334>.

¹⁵¹ S. JaNine Hyman, "Narcissism and authoritarianism among African American seminarians" (Ph.D., Walden University, 2009), 4, <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/narcissism-authoritarianism-among-african/docview/305079364/se-2?accountid=14512> (3359883).

¹⁵² Hyman, "Narcissism and authoritarianism among African American seminarians," 23.show

to the patriarchal nature of American society, if Barbara mounted a legal challenge to

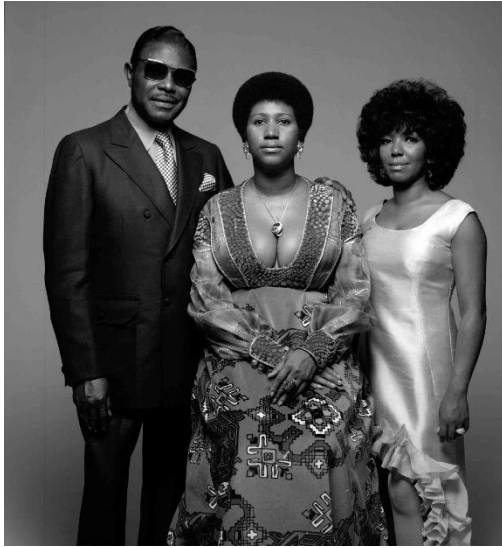


Figure 10 C.L., Aretha, and Erma Franklin

take her children from their home over C.L.'s objections, he was better positioned to prevail because of his advantageous economic condition. An ominous motivation for C.L.'s custody was suggested by Jerry Wexler, who was close to Aretha for many years. He recalled that C. L. may have "used his children, especially the precocious Aretha, as props and pawns."¹⁵³The notion that

C.L. may have had pecuniary interests in keeping

his children with him as he built his church and his income in Detroit has support in a memory Aretha shared in her biography. She recalled seeing food stamps in her Detroit home. Without the presence of the children, it is unlikely that C.L. Franklin would have received food stamps. Aretha also reported that C.L. received a loan from Household Finance, a company whose financial services were available to those who could not qualify for less expensive loans from banks.¹⁵⁴Hence, there were indications that C.L. needed financial assistance to raise his family.

Aretha was deeply affected by the absence of a mother in her daily life. She was only six years old when Barbara left Detroit and was devastated by her mother's departure. Her sister and roommate, Carolyn, reported that Aretha was "especially close"

¹⁵³ Jerry Wexler and David Ritz, *Rhythm and the blues: a life in American Music* (New York: Random House, 1993), 295.

¹⁵⁴ Aretha Franklin and David Ritz, *Aretha, From These Roots* (New York: Villard, 1999), 5.

to her mother and responded to her mother's absence by crying "her eyes out for days at a time."¹⁵⁵ Aretha visited her mother in Buffalo during summer breaks until 1952 when, at the young age of 34, Barbara suffered a fatal heart attack.¹⁵⁶ Over the following years, the mothering received by young Aretha was provided by her grandmother and a succession of C.L.'s close female friends. A woman Aretha called "Daddy's special friend," Lola Moore, moved into the Franklin home after Barbara died.¹⁵⁷ She lived with the family for several years and, according to Erma, became a "second mother" to the four Franklin children. Although the children hoped C.L. would marry Lola, instead he began a romantic relationship with acclaimed gospel vocalist Clara Ward. Carolyn surmised that this affair may have been the reason Lola left C.L. after living with the family for several years. Once again feeling the loss of "motherly love", Aretha was "inconsolable" and spent days in her room when Lola left.¹⁵⁸ Aretha remembered that all the Franklin children cried that day and wanted Lola to change her mind and stay. However, she also recalled that she knew better than to question her father.¹⁵⁹ Within two years of her mother's death, in January 1955, several months before her thirteenth birthday, Aretha gave birth to her first child and named him Clarence after her father.¹⁶⁰ Aretha was the second pre-teen in C.L.'s life to give birth; Jennings was reported to have been twelve when she gave birth to C.L.'s daughter, Carl Ellan, in Memphis. The loss of

¹⁵⁵ David Ritz, *Respect: The Life of Aretha Franklin* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2014), 24.

¹⁵⁶ Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and The Transformation of America*, Location 2102.

¹⁵⁷ Mark Bego, *Aretha Franklin: The Queen of Soul*, Kindle ed. (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2012), 9.

¹⁵⁸ Ritz, *Respect: The Life of Aretha Franklin*, 34.

¹⁵⁹ Franklin and Ritz, *Aretha, From These Roots*, 27.

¹⁶⁰ Ritz, *Respect: The Life of Aretha Franklin*, 59.

endeared mother figures at an early age, and the experience of a succession of people who temporarily fulfilled that role and rotated in and out of the Franklin household undoubtedly influenced Aretha's behavior as a mother to her four children. This repeated childhood experience of having to accept deep emotional loss influenced her personality and conduct in personal and professional relationships. However, the darker side of celebrity also posed challenges that had to be negotiated to sustain a decades long career in the entertainment business.

In addition to the exigencies of family life, celebrities are confronted by consequential dangers that present potentially debilitating emotional challenges. Threats from outside the family are a routine stressor in the life of a famous entertainer. The public posed threats that were additional sources of stress that Franklin was forced to manage because of her status as a celebrity and a civil rights activist. On one occasion, when she had a "violent argument" with her husband, Ted White, before a concert at Kiel Auditorium in Saint Louis and was so upset that she could not perform, members of the audience demonstrated their extreme disappointment. Some of the 5,500 members of the crowd, who saw a "dazed and incoherent" Franklin carried from the stage, responded to her incapacity by throwing bottles and debris onto the stage. Police accompanied her through a basement exit so that she could escape the city on an airplane bound for New York.¹⁶¹ FBI files contain details about threats by specific individuals that Franklin had to weather.

¹⁶¹ Philadelphia Tribune, "Aretha Franklin Flees From Angry crowd of 5,500: Police Lead Sick Singer to Safety Thru Cellar Door," *Philadelphia Tribune* (1912-) (Philadelphia, Penn.), 07/07/1970 Jul 07 1970, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/aretha-franklin-flees-angry-crowd-5-500/docview/532542887/se-2?accountid=14512>.

In 1968, A Cook County jail inmate asked Franklin for one million dollars. His implied threat by requesting that “she take good care of herself as he wants nothing to happen to her” ended with “What a Friend We Have in Jesus. Is there trouble anywhere?” – his revision of the famous hymn’s lyrics.¹⁶² Another threat materialized when Erma received a letter in 1974 from a man who was believed to have called Aretha’s booking agent, Ruth Bowen, on more than one occasion. His letter claims that Erma’s “entire estate” belonged to him, and that Aretha could tell her “why and how I came about winning all your money.” He addresses Aretha, stating “I’m still in charge of you and everything else” and warns that he “is not to be crossed.”¹⁶³ A Philadelphia man, who repeatedly called Aretha’s Detroit home in 1979, claimed to have been married to Aretha in 1958 and threatened to “blow up” her family if he could not speak with her.¹⁶⁴ Most of the FBI files on Franklin indicate that she was under their surveillance because of her civil rights activities. Being watched by a government agency in the 1970s was a worrisome threat of a different nature that troubled many well-known African American entertainers and political activist. But one of the more chilling types of threats encountered by Franklin and other Black entertainment industry stars is detailed in a 1984 FBI interoffice memo. “Information received from reliable sources indicates Nicodemo Scarfo, AKA Nicky, boss of the Philadelphia family is planning to gain control of the entertainment industry in the Atlantic City/Philadelphia area.”¹⁶⁵ Sources in Newark and Philadelphia provided the information.

¹⁶² Federal Bureau of Investigation, Aretha Franklin Part 01, 44–54 (Washington, D.C. 2).

¹⁶³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Short Aretha Franklin Part 01, 23–33.

¹⁶⁴ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Short Aretha Franklin Part 01, 10–22.

¹⁶⁵ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Short Aretha Franklin Part 01, 89.

The memo explains that “many oc [organized crime] figures own or control entertainers or groups.”¹⁶⁶ Two performers that the memo states are controlled by organized crime are “Michael Jackson by Frank Di Leo and Aretha Franklin by Stan Hoffman.”¹⁶⁷ Hoffman was still a member of Aretha’s inner circle thirty years later in 2014 when he was part of her 72nd birthday celebration at the New York Ritz Carlton with Denzel Washington, Clive Davis, and Congressman Charles Rangel.¹⁶⁸ The FBI relied on a cooperative witness who explained two economic threats posed by organized crime: “ownership” of these artists and the double contract dupe. In one scam, a manager signs a contract with one figure for the entertainer and another contract for a larger figure with the promoter. “The promoter, the manager and oc [organized crime] figures thereafter split the difference” between the amounts in the two contracts. Another scam outlined by the witness involved ticket scalping that would reduce payments to the artists that were based on earnings derived from ticket sales.¹⁶⁹ Negotiating risks presented by the public or by members of organized crime who worked in the industry unbound by the constraints of the law was an ongoing chore for any artist who pursued a successful career. The artist had to exercise incessant diligence to ensure her own safety and that of her loved ones. Franklin struggled with her emotional responses to these challenges but remained committed to

¹⁶⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Short Aretha Franklin Part 01, 90.

¹⁶⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Short Aretha Franklin Part 01, 90.

¹⁶⁸ Florence Anthony, "Detroit judge withdraws warrant for Anita Baker's arrest," Column, Go With The-Flo, *Philadelphia Sun*, 2014_03_30 2014, <https://www.philasun.com/go-with-the-flo/detroit-judge-withdraws-warrant-for-anita-bakers-arrest/>.

¹⁶⁹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Short Aretha Franklin Part 01, 90.

her professional career over several decades, exhibiting resilience, courage, and faith in her future.

A Father's Foundation

For all his many flaws as a father figure, C. L. Franklin supported and encouraged the four of his five children who lived in his 6,000 square foot, six-bedroom Detroit mansion at 7415 La Salle Street to nurture their love of singing.¹⁷⁰ Although Aretha has claimed she started touring at age thirteen, travelling with her father on the road and learning from great gospel singers on the tour, other reports indicate that her touring began even earlier.¹⁷¹ In junior high school, her brother Cecil formed a quartet with a good friend, William “Smokey” Robinson. The Motown star later recalled that he attended the celebration – on a school night – when pre-teen Aretha and her father arrived home from touring. She told him that the tour had performed in Chicago, Memphis, and St. Louis, and that she had met Fats Domino. When a surprised Robinson asked what a secular artist was doing in a gospel show, Aretha replied that she met “all kinds of people” and there was “a lot of stuff happening out there on the road” some of which she did not want to see.¹⁷² According to Robinson, this encounter occurred after he and Cecil had performed that day at school. Aretha’s father prioritized her performing career over attendance at school.

¹⁷⁰ Brendel Clark, "Aretha Franklin's childhood home in Detroit for sale," *Detroit Free Press* (2023). <https://www.freep.com/story/entertainment/music/aretha-franklin/2023/05/08/aretha-franklins-childhood-home-for-sale-detroit/70195499007/>.

¹⁷¹ Bego, *Aretha Franklin: The Queen of Soul*, 13.

¹⁷² Smokey Robinson and David Ritz, *Smokey Inside My Life* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1989), 47.

When her father decided to allow Aretha to embark upon a career singing secular music, his personal taste for jazz influenced his plans for her future in popular music. A native of Mississippi born in 1915, the Reverend Franklin grew up during the rapid post WWI expansion of the segregated record industry, when the sale of so-called “race records” to a modestly prosperous black community increased to over ten million per annum. His family owned both religious and blues records during his youth and he firmly believed that a gospel loving Christian could enjoy secular music.¹⁷³ In the early 1920s, major labels like RCA Victor, Paramount, and Columbia recorded and marketed sermons by African American preachers, usually working with gospel singers.¹⁷⁴ In the late 1920s, the new style of “gospel blues” invented by Thomas A. Dorsey (previously famous as the very secular blues artist “Georgia Tom”) led to the proliferation of all-male gospel quartets who sang uplifting lyrics to what Nina Simone once described as a heretofore forbidden “boogie-woogie beat.”¹⁷⁵ C.L. was a pastor at New Salem in Memphis from 1936 to 1944 and counted W. H. Brewster, a fellow pastor and composer of gospel blues music, as a friend and mentor. Combining his responsibility as a pastor with his interest in the civil rights of his Black congregants, Brewster wrote lyrics that inspired religious faith with the urge to improve the education and working lives of African Americans. Franklin later quoted his friend Brewster in a pro-music sermon he called “Without A Song”: “Some

¹⁷³ Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and The Transformation of America*, Chapter 2.

¹⁷⁴ Horace Clarence Boyer, *How Sweet the Sound* (Washington, D.C.: Elliott & Clark Publishing, 1995), 41.

¹⁷⁵ Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and The Transformation of America*, Location 1183.

things you can't say, you can sing.”¹⁷⁶ For Reverend Franklin, leadership in the church and in the struggle for civil rights went along with an interest in jazz, blues, and the professional musicians who performed these genres. In the Franklin home, jazz represented uplift, the kind of cultural significance Ralph Ellison described when he reminded readers that jazz musicians practiced discipline and devotion to their craft to achieve “the most eloquent expression of idea-emotions” through “mastery of their instruments” and compared their commitment to that of a “priest” who wears “the cross.”¹⁷⁷ Many great jazz talents visited the Franklin home in Detroit during Aretha’s childhood. In the early fifties, she met the renowned jazz pianist Art Tatum in her living room. During this period, C.L. sported a “conk,” a hairstyle popular with “cool” black men from Nat King Cole and Sugar Ray Robinson to rebellious young African American men of the Fifties. The processed hairstyle was often worn by black entertainers, people in the “fast” life (drug users, gamblers, and criminals) but not so much by pastors. C.L.’s love of jazz and its world brought musicians and non-church members to many of the gatherings he hosted. He refrained from inviting more than a few of his congregation to these festivities because he understood that he risked falling into disrepute with those members who might connect his evident enjoyment of secular music with his unconventional participation in sex outside of marriage.¹⁷⁸ As the family patriarch, C.L. assumed he would plan his children’s careers, so when Aretha was ready to sing secular music for a living,

¹⁷⁶ Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and The Transformation of America*, Location 1229.

¹⁷⁷ Ralph Ellison, “Living with music,” (New York: Random House, 2002), 5–6.

¹⁷⁸ Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and The Transformation of America*, Chapter 7.

he took an active role in guiding her despite the criticism she encountered from many Baptists who knew, and loved, her as a gospel singer.

The Record Business – “A Man’s World”

The midcentury music business was dominated by male vocalists, male record producers, male songwriters, male distributors, male record shop owners, and male label executives, so it was difficult and sometimes dangerous for a woman to participate in that world. In 1966, when James Brown proclaimed that “This is a man’s world,” he perfectly described both the music industry and his way of inhabiting it. The “casting couch” regularly threatened a female artist’s dignity, and sexual harassment on the road was an inevitability which had to be carefully managed. When a female singer travelled, typically with a group of male instrumentalists and road crew, performing in male-owned clubs and theaters where drugs and alcohol were omnipresent, the ongoing risk of sexual assault was real. Sometimes the threats came from outsiders, but often they came from men working in, or in support of, the show. In her autobiography, vocalist Gloria Lynne recalls several such incidents. One night she and a friend were kidnapped from New York’s Apollo Theater where she had just performed. They were taken to an apartment for several hours by two “big and rough guys” sent by Frank Sinatra, who held Lynne hostage to a business deal.¹⁷⁹ After a club performance in Philadelphia, the agent who booked the job and several of her previous engagements came to her hotel room and

¹⁷⁹ Gloria Lynne and Karen Chilton, *I Wish You Love A Memoir* (New York: Forge Book, 2000), 102.

raped her.¹⁸⁰ A routine risk musicians encountered was due to their working hours. Leaving a performance in the wee hours of the morning exposed performers to the risk of falling victim to street crime.¹⁸¹ To combat the danger (and the loneliness) of continual travel, female professional singers frequently travelled with boyfriends or husbands who also assumed the role of road manager. These needed to be (or at least appear to be) “tough guys” who knew the streets, expertise needed to manage “their” woman’s exposure to underground culture and organized crime. Club owners regularly attempted to withhold earnings at the end of an engagement if they believed they could get away with it, and an unchaperoned woman was an easy mark for this type of double cross. She also faced constant risk of harassment by misogynistic comments and insensitive behavior because men drastically outnumbered women. Add the consumption of chemical stimulants to maintain the stamina required for long, difficult, physically, and emotionally draining performance circuits and the concomitant use of alcohol and marijuana to release creativity and to unwind after the show, and you have a recipe for the most hostile working environment imaginable for a young, attractive woman. This is the man’s world that Aretha Franklin entered in 1960, leaving the church, where female participation and women’s agency were ever present. Still, her rise to fame and fortune in this treacherous, exciting environment was relatively swift. Although her recordings

¹⁸⁰ Lynne and Chilton, *I Wish You Love A Memoir*, 155.

¹⁸¹ Newspaper accounts of attacks against vocalists Sarah Vaughan and Pearl Bailey attest to the danger of traveling city streets at night. New York Amsterdam News, “Sarah Vaughan Mobbed in Village: Hoodlums Hit Cafe Society Singing Star Gang of 15 Attack Her With Two Friends When They Enter Subway,” *New York Amsterdam News* (New York), August 17, 1946 1946, City, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/226014319?accountid=14512>, UCLA. New York Times, “Pearl Bailey Beaten in Jersey Night Club,” *New York Times* (New York), September 16, 1952 1952, UCLA.

had not reached the top of the charts yet, in 1964, *Ebony* magazine reported that Franklin was earning a six-figure income from her nightclub and theater performances.¹⁸² Jack Hamilton notes that by the end of the decade, she was “probably the most famous solo artist on earth.”¹⁸³

This achievement is all the more impressive when one realizes that the danger was even greater for a young female vocalist who was also Black. The stereotype of Black women as sexually voracious “Jezebels” that had infected White American society since the nineteenth century, and was reinforced and widely disseminated by the 1915 release of *Birth of a Nation*, the first blockbuster movie of the twentieth century, was still prevalent fifty years later on both sides of the color line, although less openly during an era of Civil Rights. This popular mischaracterization was fortified by academic literature of the post-World War I era. Edward B. Reuter, who served as president of the American Sociological Association and wrote extensively about race, defended male White masters who engaged in sexual relations with enslaved Black women. In the monograph based upon his dissertation (for which he earned the *magna cum laude* honor) Reuter argued that these acts were “not in any sense a forced relation on the part of the Negress” and that, for the “girl it was, in the great majority of cases, a matter of being honored by a

¹⁸² *Ebony*, “The Swingin’ Aretha,” *Ebony*, March 1964, 1964, https://books.google.com/books?id=RAVI_KwcBuAC&q=swingin+aretha#v=snippet&q=swingin%20aretha&f=false.

¹⁸³ Jack Hamilton, “Aretha Franklin Was the Defining Voice of the 20th Century,” *Slate* (2018_08_16 2018). <https://slate.com/culture/2018/08/aretha-franklin-dead-the-singer-was-the-defining-voice-of-the-20th-century.html>.

white man.”¹⁸⁴ All through the twentieth century African American women were considered to be naturally promiscuous and therefore available for value-free sexual exploitation. The double-edged burden of gendered racism has never gone away.¹⁸⁵ Female artists still must shoulder the burden of this racist stereotype, manage the fear it can engender during encounters with the White male strangers they meet as they ply their trade, and devise ways to protect themselves from harassment and attacks that the trope might trigger.

Indeed, sexism itself is a potent contributing factor to the way young Black female singers were mistreated. For most of the twentieth century, and with renewed force after the social upheavals of depression and world war, traditional sexist attitudes dictated that a woman's place was in the home. The father as breadwinner and the mother as housekeeper were cultural ideals if not the reality for most working-class Americans. The perspectives and stories of women who were single mothers or divorcées were often ignored by the mainstream, establishment-owned media. Women whose lives conflicted with this norm were perceived as threats to social stability. Wives married to a husband with a wandering eye (and who wasn't?) were liable to perceive a single working woman as a threat to their marriages. Women who chose a singing career could find themselves on the losing end of encounters with a married man in more ways than one.

¹⁸⁴Edward Byron Reuter, *The Mulatto in the United States* (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1918), Sociological study, 140.

¹⁸⁵ Danice L. Brown, Rhonda L. White-Johnson, and Felicia D. Griffin-Fennell, "Breaking the chains: examining the endorsement of modern Jezebel images and racial-ethnic esteem among African American women," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 15, no. 5/6 (May–June 2013 2013): 525, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23524698>.

The inherent sexism of the music industry was magnified for *Black* female vocalists. A racist “jezebel” stereotype of the lascivious Black woman (imagined as irresistibly attracted to White men) permeated segregated American society and was reinforced and widely disseminated by mass media in the twentieth century. Working singers like Aretha were victimized in two ways: sexually harassed on the road and deceived by their partners who sought sexual assignations while back at home. In her memoir, singer Etta James recalls the seamy amorality enabled by the ‘jezebel’ trope. One of her single female friends was involved with a well-to-do married man who lived in a beautiful, upscale home in New Jersey. When his wife was away for work, he invited James and her boyfriend to join him and his girlfriend at home for a week of drug-fueled partying. James later felt remorse for accepting the invitation because the home she visited belonged to Sarah Vaughan, a person she admired and viewed as a role model, who was fending for herself out on the road while her husband and his mistress enjoyed the comforts of her newly remodeled home. She guiltily notes that “we stayed high for days, eating and partying” while Faye, the other woman, wore Vaughan’s robes and slippers.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Etta James and David Ritz, *The Etta James Story Rage to Survive* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1995), 144.

Aretha's Arrival – "The Big Apple"

C. L. planned eighteen-year-old Aretha's crossover to a pop singing career with military precision. Given his acquaintance with popular music stars, their lifestyles, and the dangers of the entertainment industry, his determination to micromanage his teenage daughter's entry into the secular world is understandable. Their friend (and Aretha's idol), Sam Cooke recorded for RCA and wanted his label to offer Aretha a contract, but C. L. had other ideas. According to her brother Cecil, their father wanted her to record for Columbia Records – the label that he had known since his own childhood - because it was the largest and "best" label.¹⁸⁷ But he may have wanted to keep a distance between Cooke and his daughter because of an incident that occurred in Atlanta in 1957 before Cooke crossed over from gospel to pop. When Cooke heard his recorded voice coming out of Aretha's hotel room one night and knocked on the door, they talked as she stood in her doorway. The following day, she went to his room to continue their talk. As the twenty-five-year-old gospel world singing sensation sat on the bed with the fifteen-year-old up-and-coming vocalist and talked, a loud knock on the door and C.L.'s voice barking, "Aretha, I know you're in there" brought whatever was about to occur to a halt. In her autobiography, Aretha implies that her encounter with Cooke might have taken a romantic turn if her father had not spoiled the moment and intimidated her into running back to her room as soon as the coast was clear.¹⁸⁸ C.L. may not have wanted Aretha to compete with Cooke in 1960 as he rode the crest of success and stardom at RCA where he was

¹⁸⁷ Ritz, *Respect: The Life of Aretha Franklin*, 77.

¹⁸⁸ Franklin and Ritz, *Aretha, From These Roots*, 67.

second in record sales to only Elvis, the King of Rock and Roll. The fact that Columbia was headquartered in New York, far from Cooke's California home may have tipped the scales for C.L. who was accustomed to running Aretha's show.

Franklin, a man who had often faced down adversaries and prevailed, seemed determined to maintain control over his daughter's career. When she objected to the man he chose as her manager, C.L. slapped her face and reminded her that he was in charge. Since intimate partner violence in adulthood is linked with corporal punishment by a father, his violent behavior may have influenced Aretha's to accept her first husband's abuse.¹⁸⁹ C.L. understood how important it was for Aretha to move to Los Angeles or New York to launch her career. She chose New York over Los Angeles because it was easier to return to the safety of her family from the East Coast. Columbia had signed some of the finest African American recording artists in gospel, jazz, and pop alongside their roster of high-profile pop artists. Still, C.L. wanted confirmation that he was on the right track. He took Aretha to New York in 1960 to meet Phil Moore at his Carnegie Hall studio for an assessment of her potential.

¹⁸⁹ Angelika Poulsen et al., "Childhood Experiences of Corporal Punishment and Associated Intimate Partner Violence Perpetration and Victimization in Adulthood: Results from a Longitudinal Twin Study," *Journal of Family Violence* (2025/04/03 2025): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-025-00864-7>, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-025-00864-7>.

Who was Phil Moore and why was his expertise so strategic to the Reverend? Like



Figure 11 Marilyn Monroe and Phil Moore

many other talented Black musicians, Moore had crossed over behind the scenes and without fanfare early in the twentieth century. He was an acclaimed musician, composer, songwriter, arranger, vocal coach, and manager well acquainted with crossing racial barriers in the music industry. In 1960 he was not a household name

but was well known to artists with solid careers in the music industry and actors who sang in movies from Frank Sinatra to Marilyn Monroe. He was also an influential force in the careers of Lena Horne, Dorothy Dandridge, and Diahann Carroll, three of the most successful examples of Black women crossing over in the previous two decades. C.L.'s own experience in the record industry and friendship with working jazz musicians and popular recording artists led him to Moore, who later recalled that the "future he [Rev. Franklin] saw for his daughter" was based on the careers of Dandridge and Horne. "He wanted to know how I might help her find the kind of audience Lena Horne had found." But Moore declined to coach Aretha. He considered her style unique and thought that the key to her success would be in finding the right material.¹⁹⁰ C.L.'s decision to consult Moore whose success at guiding Black women who crossed over racial lines in their music careers is evidence of Aretha's interest in crossing over.

¹⁹⁰ Ritz, *Respect: The Life of Aretha Franklin*, 78.

Altered Soul - The Columbia Records Deal

Moore was right: the key to Aretha Franklin's career would be finding the right material with which to build a distinctive vocal persona. At Columbia Records Franklin worked with White producers who did not understand how to craft a successful crossover identity for such a singular voice. Her early albums include songs at odds with her gospel-based, soulful sound. Songs like "It Ain't Necessarily So" on *Aretha with the Ray Bryant Combo* in 1961, or "You Made Me Love You" and "Rock-a-Bye Your Baby with a Dixie Melody" on *The Electrifying Aretha Franklin* in 1962, were well-known hits for White artists who were emphatically not soul singers. Aretha's interpretation included soulful melismas that seem unmotivated and gospel phrasing that often undermines the power in cleverly constructed pop lyrics. Some of her styling choices – inserting exclamations, repetition, changing vocal timbre, and improvised lyrics – could seem out of place in old standards that had a history of being performed "straight," with close attention to the original melodies. If the White popular music audience of the early 1960s were not ready to accept such a marked deviation from the familiar sounds of these tunes, the Black pop audience may have found that the tunes (and especially lyrics) rendered Aretha's soulful embellishments inauthentic. (How was she to redeem something like "Rock-a-bye Your Baby with a Dixie Melody," with its exaltation of the Jim Crow South and demeaning use of the word "mammy"?)¹⁹¹ It is unlikely that she did not understand the stories she was to

¹⁹¹ Even during the early seventies when "Black is beautiful" was an oft-heard mantra, this aversion to the alteration of musical 'classics' was widespread. The all-Black production of *The Wiz* was a soul-inspired reworking of the classic film, *The Wizard of Oz*. In his review of *The Wiz* published in the *New York Daily News* (and their syndicated partners' newspapers) on January 12, 1975, critic Rex Reed reported that audience members were "electric with indignation". He included some of their comments: "I thought I

tell by singing these songs. It is more likely that she was uncomfortable with the parameters set by producers, and possibly by her father and her husband-manager, Ted White, who believed they knew better what would please a White audience. Were her artistic sensibilities ignored or overruled? Was she less than assertive in expressing her artistic choices and did she trust that her producers knew best ... at least until she heard the recordings and judged for herself?

John Hammond produced the first two albums Franklin recorded for Columbia. Hammond, a scion of New York aristocracy, was the great-great-grandson of steamship and railroad magnate Cornelius Vanderbilt and great-grandson of William Henry Vanderbilt. Hammond, who was born in 1910, was three decades older than Franklin and had been a record producer since the early 1930s. Hammond, an amateur musician at Yale, had had his interest in African American music piqued by a 1923 performance by clarinetist Sidney Bechet he happened onto in London. Hammond left university because of illness in 1930 and never returned. He became a music critic, record producer, disc jockey, talent scout, concert promoter, and networker who connected musicians across the color line. He supported racial integration in music and was associated with the careers of gospel, blues, and jazz artists of great renown.

Hammond was involved in many significant moments in African American music. He produced Bessie Smith's last recording session in 1933. Over the next four years, he worked with Billie Holiday, often featuring another of his discoveries, Teddy Wilson, on

would vomit;" and "How dare they demolish the greatest American fairy tale?" Reed added his own opinion, "Next to bombing the white House, I can't imagine a better way to start a race war than to denigrate "The Wizard of Oz" and everything it stands for ..."

piano, and assisted in the promotion of the Count Basie Orchestra. Hammond demonstrated an early awareness of the connection between gospel and secular music when he organized “From Spirituals to Swing” at Carnegie Hall in 1938.¹⁹² The concert introduced White audiences to Black music genres and is even credited with encouraging Bennie Goodman to hire Wilson and create what is often erroneously referred to as America’s first racially mixed band.¹⁹³

C. L. wanted to be sure that having Aretha sign with Columbia was the best option for her budding career. When Phil Moore did not accept the “considerable fee” offered by Rev. Franklin for vocal coaching and thereby seemed trustworthy, Franklin asked Moore if signing a deal with Columbia Records would be a good move. Moore had known Hammond for many years as a man who had earned the confidence of many Black musicians so he assured the Franklins that he was a serious music producer who would “understand Aretha’s talent.”¹⁹⁴ With the support of her family, the endorsement of the preeminent Black female vocalist star-maker, the biggest record company, the ‘serious,’ experienced music producer, the stars seemed to be falling in alignment for Aretha’s career. So, what happened at Columbia Records?

¹⁹² Songwriters Hall of Fame, “John Hammond,” 2022, 2022, https://www.songhall.org/awards/winner/John_Hammond (Bio of award winner).

¹⁹³ Wendy Smith, “Recording: The Man Who Got His Way: John Hammond, scion of white privilege, helped integrate popular music,” *The American Scholar* 75, no. 3 (2006), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41222623>. However-charming this story is, Goodman’s was not the first integrated band in the land. As early as 1907, Black pianist, Kentuckian Fate Marable performed with white violinist Emil Flindt on a Streckfus excursion steamer cruising on the Mississippi River. By 1909, Marable led a four-piece band of white musicians, possibly the first interracial band in the U.S.. Another Kentucky native, Benny Starks, was the Black leader of an otherwise all-white orchestra in Winnipeg when he opened at the Roseland Gardens in 1932. Starks’ orchestra was featured on Canadian radio stations CJRC and CKY-.

¹⁹⁴ Ritz, *Respect: The Life of Aretha Franklin*, 78.

Aretha's Debut

Although Aretha was only seventeen years old when she recorded her first album for Columbia Records, she exuded confidence in her musical abilities. She shaped the arrangements of the songs and functioned as an uncredited co-producer. Her producer Hammond, a Songwriters Hall of Fame Sammy Cahn Lifetime Achievement Award recipient, had an impressive resume and history working with Black artists. In 1959, when Hammond resumed working for Columbia and was tasked with recruiting new talent for the label, he reviewed a demo of four songs and was impressed by Aretha, the singer and pianist of the last tune, "Today I Sing the Blues." He signed four artists: Aretha, Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger, and jazz pianist Ray Bryant and arranged for Bryant's experienced jazz combo to support teenaged Aretha on her first album. From her first album on, the novice songstress, who has been described as shy and introverted, displayed musical expertise and was assertive in her communications.

In the studio recording of a rehearsal for the song "Are You Sure," a cut from her debut album, Aretha speaks authoritatively in the session. When the first take of the song is stopped a few bars in, she notes that the tempo was "a little fast." Heeding her admonition, the next attempt was slower. But when the next attempt was aborted because the timing of a guitar riff was questioned by one of the session musicians, Aretha spoke up definitively and defended the guitarist's understanding of his part. "No, that was good right there." The third take ended just as quickly over the same dispute. Aretha, now sounding slightly annoyed by the confusion, stood her ground and advocated on behalf

of the guitarist, “He got it ... no, this is what I told him. He was playing it!” She huffed slightly, displaying the impatience she seemed to feel as the next take began. When the producer, who had agreed with Aretha about the timing of the lick, botched an attempt to clear up the confusion, Aretha exclaimed, “No!” and explained why the confusion was taking place “See, you’re telling him [to come in] right after that and he’s telling him right after I sing, and he can’t come in both places.” She took over and told the confused guitarist where to put his lick. This example of confidence and authority would not be surprising coming from a successful recording artist. But Aretha was a teenager working on her first album surrounded by professionals much older than her who had years, if not decades, more experience in recording sessions than she had. Given the patriarchal nature of the industry and the times, the boldness of this young woman in challenging and correcting her coworkers on an expensive project like this was striking, proving that Aretha believed in herself, her musical understanding, and her future success. *Amour de soi* in action!

Aretha had ample justification for the confidence she displayed in the studio when recording her first album for Columbia Records. As a child, she learned to sing from some of the most experienced and acclaimed gospel performers of her childhood years. Reverend James Cleveland, who won four Grammy Awards for his work with gospel choirs between 1970 and 1990 was a Chicago native who, as a boy, attended Pilgrim Baptist Church where he performed with gospel originators Thomas A. Dorsey and Roberta Martin. In Detroit, Aretha’s father hired Cleveland to serve as New Bethel’s minister of music and invited him to live in the Franklin home, where young Aretha spent many instructive hours with him at the living room piano. Another lineage holder from the

gospel world was Clara Ward, the singer, pianist, composer, and arranger who led the family singing group founded by her mother in 1931. Born in 1924, Ward was just ten years old when Dorsey, Sallie Martin, and Ruth Jones (aka Dinah Washington, later known as the “Queen of the Blues”) performed at a concert in her native Philadelphia. Ward’s mother organized the event so that her daughters could learn directly from these venerable Baptist gospel performers.¹⁹⁵ While Clara was still in her teens, the Ward Trio, Clara and two of her sisters, were the talk of the National Baptist Convention. The group expanded to five members and was renamed the Ward Singers. In 1949, they recorded “Surely, God is Able,” a song written by C.L. Franklin’s old friend, the Rev. W. Herbert Brewster. Clara’s innovative arrangement of the tune began with her singing the chorus and was laced through with vocal strategies that transformed gospel singing, mostly notably cumulative repetition of the same musical elements to different words as a “vamp.” Ward understood the importance of repetition in African American music and employed this tactic so effectively that it became a basic technique of gospel performance.¹⁹⁶ Her father’s close relationship with Ward through Brewster gave Aretha direct access to the vocal and performance techniques of the leading Black female vocalist of her era.

Although Franklin’s vocal arrangements in her debut album, *Aretha with the Ray Bryant Combo*, displayed great confidence in her talent and skills as a Black musician, her stylistic choices demonstrated a lack of experience in performing mainstream popular

¹⁹⁵ Boyer, *How Sweet the Sound*, 105.

¹⁹⁶ Boyer, *How Sweet the Sound*, 110.

music effectively. To be sure, the album begins well, with a swinging, bluesy rendition of John McFarland's composition "Won't Be Long." McFarland was a Brill Building regular who wrote hit songs for Black (Louis Jordan, Memphis Slim) and White (Elvis Presley, Pat Boone) singers. McFarland's piano performance on the recording created a gospel feel, making Aretha feel right at home. He incorporated an up-tempo rhythmic approach in the verses similar to the rhythms employed by Ray Charles in his 1959 hit, "What'd I Say." Adding to the gospel flavor, McFarland also engaged in a call and response with Franklin's shouting during the second half of the break. Bassist Bill Lee (Spike Lee's father) and drummer Sticks Evans lent their considerable experience in jazz and blues, producing a sound more attractive to adult audiences than youthful lovers of rock and roll.

The second track, "Over the Rainbow" is less effective. The song was a familiar classic even then, and it made sense to assign it to a girl precisely the same age as Judy Garland had been when she recorded it, but an anemic orchestration robs the album of energy. Somewhat out of her element, Franklin chose to "gospelize" the tune in ways that undermine its simple beauty. In addition to forfeiting the impact of a carefully balanced melody, key phrases are altered so significantly that, despite being musically sound, they clash with the detailed memory of the song as it appeared in the soundtrack to *The Wizard of Oz*. Even her careful diction is a problem: Franklin's pronunciation of some lyrics ("sky") seems contrived and stilted. The overall effect is one of inauthentic musical strategies that miss the mark and defeat the essential nature of Aretha's gift. If the intention was to showcase Franklin's versatility and crossover potential, this was not the way.

From the outset of her recording career, Franklin's vocal work and album releases contained musical elements that appealed primarily to older Black listeners. The albums released between 1961 and 1963 often included standards from the previous three decades that older listeners were likely to recognize. Her second album, *The Electrifying Aretha Franklin* (1962), included "Exactly Like You," a tune by Jimmy McHugh and Dorothy Fields recorded by Louis Armstrong in 1930; and two somewhat corny hits by Al Jolson, "You Made Me Love You" (released in 1913), and "Rock-a-Bye Your Baby with a Dixie Melody" (1918), that had both been covered in the late 1950s by Nat "King" Cole and Sonny Rollins respectively. Six new songs were written by Black male songwriters: four by J. Leslie McFarland, one by James Cleveland, and one by the songwriting team of Willie Denson and Luther Dixon, who had penned the crossover hit "Mama Said" for the Shirelles in 1961. The inclusion of these younger songwriters suggests that producer John Hammond intended for the album to reach a young audience, but the ploy did not work. "Rock-A-Bye Your Baby with a Dixie Melody" struggled to a mediocre #37 in October 1961, remaining on the chart for nine weeks, while the follow-up, McFarland's "Rough Lover," just scraped the bottom of the Hot 100 for one week in February 1962.

It's clear that the mélange of musical genres presented in Aretha's Columbia releases confused both White and Black listening publics. In the liner notes, Pete Welding, a journalist for the jazz magazine *Down Beat* who founded the blues label Testament, describes Franklin sitting at the piano in a "dimly lit, smoke-filled jazz club" performing, strangely enough, like a preacher in front of his Sunday morning congregation, belting out secular lyrics as she played "gospel-tinged piano." Noting that her actual performance of "Won't Be Long" was show-stopping, Welding claims that

Franklin was “perhaps the most gripping and individual vocal stylist in some time” and dubs her the “New Queen of Blues.”¹⁹⁷ The mélange of styles referenced in close juxtaposition in his commentary – jazz, gospel, and blues – is an indication that her talent had such an effect on producer Hammond that he may have believed he could market her to three distinct target markets simultaneously. Her minor success with “Won’t Be Long,” the single from her first album that earned her first entry on the Billboard Hot 100, may have been facilitated by the fact that the song’s arrangement was reminiscent of Ray Charles’ 1959 hit single on the Atlantic label, “What’d I Say,” which had peaked at #1 on the R&B singles charts and #6 on the Hot 100. The next single released by Columbia was Franklin’s cover of Al Jolson’s hit “Rock-A-Bye Your Baby.” Franklin’s gospel-flavored piano accompaniment, melisma-laden vocals, syncopated horn punches, and shuffling drum groove transform the old standard rhythmically into a soulful version of the original. However, undermining the excitement of the rhythmic elements from the second verse are poorly mixed strings that can barely be heard until Franklin’s last utterance, the final “oh” that signals the end of the tune. At that point, the strings are the focus, playing the beginning of a relatively unimaginative descending line that would have been expected in a Patti Page or Perry Como arrangement. If the point was to soften the edges of Aretha’s blackness and meld musical genres together in an appeal to a broader audience, this moment of deflation should have been a clue that the strategy was no longer viable.

¹⁹⁷ Aretha Franklin, “The Electrifying Aretha Franklin,” (Columbia, 1962). <https://youtu.be/2nhCVGrHqO4>.

Back to Black

Franklin found commercial success when stopped altering her vocal style to accommodate older White audiences. It is a famous music industry tale. Abandoning the limitless resources of Columbia Records, she moved to a scrappier independent label, Atlantic, where she could explore a different, hipper kind of crossover success. Under the guidance of Jerry Wexler, an executive and producer well acquainted with rhythm & blues (he'd actually coined the name in 1949), Aretha changed strategy entirely. She had achieved moderate commercial success at Columbia, but her popularity grew by leaps and bounds when she moved to Atlantic, because her records began to target a youth demographic, the best crossover market for a Black female vocalist in her mid-twenties. The runaway success of Motown Records during the middle 1960s proved that the booming high school and college age market on both sides of the color line could absorb enormous numbers of singles. (Motown made a fortune purveying a race-neutral but age-sensitive catalog filled with what they called "The Sound of Young America.") These young Americans of all races preferred newer, younger artists who were more attractive and relatable to them than even the most seasoned stars of the past. At the direction of her father, Hammond and Columbia had produced sophisticated tracks for the eighteen-year-old Franklin in "adult" genres like blues and jazz. Even when they did not squelch her personality completely, the juxtaposition of her manifest youth and soul with the frankly old-fashioned repertoire, orchestration, and arrangements Columbia provided for her produced albums that appealed to nobody.

When Franklin began recording for Atlantic in January 1967, despite the domineering actions of her father and husband, she found enough artistic freedom to sing *as herself* and appeal to a newer, younger audience. Throughout her life, she had been managed and controlled by these two men. Many people who knew White during his marriage to Aretha recall that he cheated on her constantly and physically abused her when she questioned his authority.¹⁹⁸ Singer Betty LaVette claimed that White was “a gentleman pimp” who openly wooed her while married to Aretha and used money earned by “one of his working girls” to help finance Aretha’s career. Motown record executive Harvey Fuqua was brutally realistic about White’s character, stating that he was a “straight-up pimp” who “was proud of it.”¹⁹⁹ Both men demonstrated behavior consistent with narcissistic personality disorder: “[A] pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy which begins in early adulthood...”²⁰⁰ If, as reports suggest, these two men were pathologically narcissistic, their impact on Franklin was stultifying as well as protective. Were the pressures of accommodating these domineering figures factors at the root of some of Franklin’s odd behavior, the missed recording sessions, cancelled tours, and sporadic withdrawals of this obviously extraordinary artist? At the height of her career, an article in her hometown *Detroit Free Press* painted the stark difference between her on- and off-stage demeanor, noting that

¹⁹⁸ Bego, *Aretha Franklin: The Queen of Soul*, 54.

¹⁹⁹ Ritz, *Respect: The Life of Aretha Franklin*, 93, 96.

²⁰⁰ Hyman, “Narcissism and authoritarianism among African American seminarians.” An example of her father’s unrealistic sense of self-importance took place when he was charged with tax evasion in 1966. He wrote a letter to President Johnson to explain that he did not understand that cash gifts from his congregants should be reported as income. Franklin asked the President to intercede in his dispute with the IRS and support a settlement that would allow him to avoid a prison sentence. He did not receive a reply from the White House.

she “withdraws into a protective shell of silence that fends off the hurts, frustrations, and disappointments she doesn’t want to know again.”²⁰¹ Persistent narcissistic abuse seems to have made Aretha Franklin pathologically conflict-averse except when making music – a weakness that consistently derailed work partnerships later in her career, as she notes in her autobiography.²⁰²

An inquiry into what motivated Aretha’s mother, Barbara Franklin, to leave her husband and family in Detroit and move back to the shelter of her family in Buffalo is relevant to what Aretha was forced to reckon with in the Franklin household. From the beginning of his marriage to Barbara, C.L. Franklin chose to pursue his ambitions even when such a pursuit conflicted with his wife’s sensibilities. When they married in 1936, Barbara lived with her family in Mississippi while C.L. traveled, maintaining his “ministry and his efforts to broaden his mind.”²⁰³ The pedophilic fathering of Carl Ellan with a 12-year old child in his congregation was a shameful act that Barbara endured. Eventually, in Detroit, she left her family as she left her marriage to C.L.

²⁰¹ Bob Talbert, "Aretha Franklin As Her Father Knows Her," *Detroit Free Press* (1923-1999) (Detroit), 04/06/

1969 Apr 06 1969, General edition, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/april-6-1969-page-28-155/docview/1819584554/se-2?accountid=14512>.

²⁰² Franklin and Ritz, *Aretha, From These Roots*, 195, 232.

²⁰³ Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and The Transformation of America*, Location 745.

Motherless Children

What is the effect of a missing mother in the life of a child who chooses to become an entertainer? Other African American performers whose mothers were alive, but not present, during their childhoods also made the journey from rags to riches. Their individual journeys to stardom illustrate the deep-seated drive required to achieve star status and help identify the maternal lack at the heart of that drive. Musical theatre and television star Robert Guillaume was a two-time Emmy winner and a Tony nominee who entertained internationally for over five decades. Vocalist Lou Rawls, who began singing gospel in church as a child in Chicago and sustained a secular music career for sixty-four years, earned three Grammy awards for Best Male R&B Vocal Performance. Comedian and actor Richard Pryor, who early in his career aspired to be a singer, was the first recipient of the Kennedy Center Mark Twain Prize for American Humor, and won five Grammy Awards, an Emmy Award, a Writers Guild of America Award and, in 2017, over a decade after his death, was ranked as the top stand-up comedian of all time by *Rolling Stone*.²⁰⁴ Their recollected memories of their mothers and of life as a child without a mother's daily attention, comfort, and love provides insight into some of the psychological and emotional foundations that drove these music-loving performers to ascend to the top of their fields.

²⁰⁴ Matthew Love, "50 Best Stand-Up Comics of All Time," *Rolling Stone* (2017_02_14 2017). <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-lists/50-best-stand-up-comics-of-all-time-126359/wanda-sykes-128330/>.

Robert Guillaume, née Williams, was raised in St. Louis by his grandmother, Jeanette. His autobiography begins with the unflinchingly honest admission “I am a bastard, a Catholic, the son of a prostitute...” His mother’s profession may have been the reason that Guillaume never knew his father’s name. Living in the household of his abusive stepfather George Edwards with three siblings who were Edwards’s children, made him feel like an outsider in his own home. His maternal grandmother rescued him from the Edwards household and raised him at her home in the slums of St. Louis.²⁰⁵ When Guillaume was in his seventies, he collaborated with prolific biographer David Ritz on an autobiography, still attempting to “figure out why I did what I did.”²⁰⁶ The celebrated singer, who became an award-winning comedic actor, recalled a stinging abuse from his mother when he was six years old. “I was feeling bad. Feeling alone. Feeling like I wanted to be ... held and covered with kisses.” He ran to his mother for comfort. “‘Get away from me you little Black bastard,’ she screamed in my face.”²⁰⁷ He learned to repress his emotions and continued to love his troubled mother who used drugs to dull the pain of her domestic life. The fact that this intelligent, composed, super-achiever launches his autobiography with his private thoughts about his relationship with his mother, decades after her demise, suggests that the loss of mothering has a tremendous, sustained impact on a child’s life. The memory of this devastating rejection, and his mother’s absence from

²⁰⁵ Robert Guillaume and David Ritz, *Guillaume: A Life* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002), Autobiography, 1.

²⁰⁶ Guillaume and Ritz, *Guillaume: A Life*, xi.

²⁰⁷ Guillaume and Ritz, *Guillaume: A Life*, 3.

his daily life, influenced Guillaume's admitted desperation for acceptance and love and had an impact on his professional career.

After he released an album called *Tobacco Road* in 1964, Lou Rawls regularly performed the album's title song in live concerts.²⁰⁸ He invariably introduced it with a monologue that contained an implied claim about the pervasiveness of American racism and its effects nationwide:

This next song came along in the 60s when we were having a problem in the country about the area that this song was composed about. Now, this area is found in all of our major cities and most of our small towns. The only difference that you'll find is that in each and every city they have their own special name for the area. You take New York for instance. There they call the areas Harlem, Brooklyn, Bronx, Queens, and a few other choice names that we can't say on stage. In Los Angeles, they call the area Watts. In Chicago, they call the area Chicago. I can talk about that one because ..."²⁰⁹

"I was born ... in a dump. Mama died and my daddy got drunk" was the opening line which Rawls used to lead the audience subtly from his life story into the world of the song – a world which begins in "filth" and engenders a determination to be upwardly mobile. Although the details do not all match (Mama did not die; Rawls did not live in a "rusty shack"), determination to leave his childhood poverty behind ("gonna leave, get a job" and transform the various "Tobacco Roads" for the betterment of others was a consistent goal in Rawls's life. He did rise from rags to riches, and he did help Black students attend college by hosting the United Negro College Fund Parade of Stars Telethon and by raising

²⁰⁸ As a member of his band in the 1980s, I witnessed the inclusion of this song in many of the hundreds of Rawls's live concerts over several years. Audiences often recognized the tune during the musical introduction and showed their appreciation of it by applauding before Rawls sang the opening lyrics.

²⁰⁹ Lou Rawls, "Lou Rawls In Concert with the Edmonton Symphony," (DEP Distribution, 2013), YouTube video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KoNm4xdR0ss>.

nearly \$350 million to support America's historically Black colleges and universities.²¹⁰ Like Sam Cooke, Aretha Franklin, and Tina Turner (see next chapter), Guillaume and Rawls were entertainers from the Midwest who eventually moved to Los Angeles to achieve career goals. In California they used artistic creativity to recast the rejection and absence of the first love of each human's life – the mother – and transmute it into the attention, recognition, and admiration of the public. Young Aretha also performed such an alchemical task.

Aretha and Carolyn Franklin – the two youngest children of C.L. and Barbara Franklin – were deeply affected by the loss of daily contact with their mother. Carolyn reported that of all the four children in C.L. Franklin's household, Aretha was the one who was devastated by her mother's departure. In their shared bedroom, Carolyn witnessed Aretha's crying spells over the separation.²¹¹ The parent with whom they lived, their father, was often busy and away from the home, traveling and preaching, and their mother was no longer in the home. These parental absences fostered a feeling of abandonment by the most important adults in their lives. These circumstances affected their development as creative artists who strove to touch the emotions of their listeners. Carolyn's sense of abandonment was exacerbated by a decision her father made during her teenage years. He removed his bisexual daughter from the Franklin home and placed

²¹⁰ Ben Ratliff, "Lou Rawls, Suave Singer and Actor, Is Dead at 72," Obituary, *The New York Times* (New York), 2006_01_06 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/06/arts/music/lou-rawls-suave-singer-and-actor-is-dead-at-72.html>.

²¹¹ Ritz, *Respect: The Life of Aretha Franklin*, 25.

her in the care of neighbors who fulfilled the role of foster parents.²¹² Although Carolyn's aspirations to become a successful solo vocalist did not materialize, she performed as a background singer with Aretha and wrote two of Aretha's memorable releases, "Ain't No Way" and "Angel." The lyrics of both songs emanate from a person longing for love. "Ain't no way for me to love you if you won't let me" is a straightforward plea to a specific lover. "Angel" is a lamentation that has no boundaries in space or time.

Aretha's single release of "Angel," Carolyn's lyrical lament, co-written with Sonny Sanders and co-produced by Quincy Jones and Aretha herself, is a heart-gripping performance that encapsulates the essence of soul. Although it peaked at the #20 position of the *Billboard* Hot 100 on September 1, 1973, almost two months after its debut, it remained on the chart for thirteen weeks, one week longer than even Aretha's chart-topping classic, "Respect." The only hit from the strangely disjointed album *Hey Now Hey (The Other Side of the Sky)* the song briefly topped the Hot Soul Singles chart that summer. In it, Aretha relates the story of how she first heard her sister's song in a brief, spoken introduction that leads into her first vocal line: "Gotta find me an angel to fly away with me." The singer needs someone to be her spiritual partner as she wends her way through a life that has, so far, been excruciatingly lonely ("Too long have I loved so unattached within," "And there's no misery, oh, oh, like the misery I feel in me"). Carolyn's lyrics address the issue of homelessness that a child who is denied daily love and

²¹² Ritz, *Respect: The Life of Aretha Franklin*, 208. Morris, Fraser, "A legend in her own right': Carolyn Franklin, Aretha's forgotten sister," *The Guardian* (London), 2021_01_07, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/jan/07/a-legend-in-her-own-right-carolyn-franklin-arethas-forgotten-sister?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

attention from her parents feels (“My heart is without a home”), yet who feels the hope that faith can foster (“So I’ll just go on hoping that I find me someone”).²¹³

“Angel” is a statement from Carolyn’s heart - from a person who had, for many years, been yearning for a significant, loving connection. Over a spare orchestration that includes keyboard, bass, and a surreal guitar riff, listeners are gently introduced to the stream of consciousness tale by Aretha’s brief introductory monologue in which she states “my sister Carolyn” had something she “wanted to say” that “the melody on the box” helped her explain. Aretha begins her vocal calmly in a medium register as she sings the first verse alone until she reaches the recurring line “in my life” where she is joined on a harmonized pitch, by Carolyn. The sisters seem totally in sympathy when they sing of the need they have borne throughout most of their lives, a need we can link to their mother’s absence and early death. As the musical arrangement simulates the rocking of a baby in her mother’s arms, moving gently but rhythmically, Aretha begins the second verse with word painting, lengthening and emphasizing the word “long” (“too long have I loved so unattached within”) to establish that the wait has been extended and arduous. In the face of this painful struggle, she held tightly to the hope that love would arrive. String sections enter and slowly ascend through the second verse providing an increasing intensity to the tale. As the strings climb skyward, a mellow tenor sax solo also inches upward, increasing the emotional intensity of the mood over the first eight bars of

²¹³ In 1996, the British soul band, Simply Red, covered “Angel” on their *Greatest Hits* album. It was released as the album’s only single and charted as high as the number four position on the UK charts. An interesting connection to the shared experience of the absent mother influence in motivating artists is that Mick Hucknell, the lead singer of Simply Red, was inspired to write “Holding Back the Years” by his mother’s abandonment of the family when he was three years old.

the solo section. Out of nowhere, a French horn plays a hopeful octave leap followed by a smooth resolution. After short keyboard solo and an upward modulation, Aretha's voice rises to the highest point in the song thus far as she declares she knows there is someone meant for her over soaring strings. The music continues to strengthen, leading to a climactic scream as Aretha sings of her misery and her quest to find her "angel." As the outro begins, a new response appears. Background singers engage in call and response with Aretha, who repeats "in my life" as the singers assure her that she will meet her love, that she should not worry, that she should keep going, doing her daily tasks as she searches. This final section provides a denouement to the climax that allows the tune to end as it began, gently, and on a hopeful note. Aretha has done exactly what her sister, Carolyn, claimed she could do. She seductively enticed the listeners into her story – one that began with the hope of finding an angel, wound through the explication of her pain and travail, and returned to her faith that all will end well. Carolyn believed that Aretha's gift was "the ability to transform her pain into extreme beauty."²¹⁴ Aretha perpetuated the pain caused by a mother's absence, handing it down to the next generation of Franklins. She routinely left her children because of her work. Elder sister Erma explained Aretha's bittersweet experience with motherhood:

She dearly loves her children – as I love mine – but we were part of that generation of young female singers who definitely sacrificed time with our kids to attend to our careers. We did so knowingly. We did so with the support of Daddy and Big Mama and so many other caring relatives. But we also did so with heavy guilt.²¹⁵

²¹⁴ Lordi, *The Meaning of Soul*, 22.

²¹⁵ Ritz, *Respect: The Life of Aretha Franklin*, 220.

The combined efforts of these two motherless daughters and Quincy Jones's inspired orchestrations enact the power of faith in the transmutation of sorrow.

Reaching Royalty - *Lady Soul*

Lady Soul, released in 1968, solidified Aretha Franklin's position as the leading female soul singer of the time. Her third release for Atlantic followed a well-received debut album, *I Never Loved a Man the Way I Love You* (1967) that reached the top of the R&B album charts and the #2 position on the *Billboard 200*, delivering two crossover hit singles: "I Never Loved a Man" by Muscle Shoals songwriter Ronnie Shannon, and "Respect," a cover of the Otis Redding original. Her second Atlantic album, *Aretha Arrives*, (1967) which had only one successful single, "Baby I Love You," included empowering tracks like "Prove It" and "I Can't Get No Satisfaction," signaling imminent changes in her exploitative relationships with narcissistic men. Jerry Wexler noted that Franklin often chose songs to record that were "loosely but significantly autobiographical." Songs that she could "feel" during this stormy period in her life reflected two opposing circumstances: the success she was finally experiencing in her professional life and the personal heartache she tried to hide from the public.²¹⁶ The fan support for *Aretha Arrives* (#1 for five of its 28 weeks on the R&B album chart) was less enthusiastic than the response to her debut on Atlantic (#1 for fourteen of its 66 weeks on the charts). Despite undergoing heart-wrenching emotional struggles in her marriage, Franklin rebounded with the release

²¹⁶ Wexler and Ritz, *Rhythm and the blues: a life in American Music*, 309.

of *Lady Soul* in January 1968. The album remained at #1 on the R&B LP chart for 16 of 53 weeks and included no less than four hit singles ("Chain of Fools," "A Natural Woman," "Since You've Been Gone," and "Ain't No Way").²¹⁷ Two were written by Franklin sisters, one by Aretha ("Since You've Been Gone") and one by Carolyn ("Ain't No Way"). This pair of songs comment on relationship struggles; Carolyn's ballad, unsurprisingly, expresses the longings of a woman who yearns for love.

The theme of "Ain't No Way," a plea directed to a specific love interest whose reticence is perceived to be an obstacle to preserving a fulfilling relationship, may have held a personal significance for Aretha as she experienced turmoil in her marriage. As the song begins, Aretha plays an Eb maj⁷ piano arpeggio joined by a gentle, jazzy tenor saxophone riff in a four-measure introduction that establishes the largo tempo of this serious, deeply felt entreaty to accept the singer's love. Aretha's voice exudes a measured, self-assured kindness as she sings "Ain't no way /for me to love you/ if you won't let me." The lyrics describe the singer's vision to forge a path back to love for a couple floundering in emotional distress. She believes that her man is withholding his receptiveness to her overtures and is thereby limiting, if not destroying, their shared future. Describing a man, perhaps her own husband, who could become "hard, cold and cruel," she cautions that he has to abandon his attempt to be "someone you're not." As early as 1964, observers of Aretha's marriage to White deplored the abusive behavior he directed toward Aretha. Clyde Otis, who produced two of her Columbia albums, reported

²¹⁷ Billboard, "Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums Chart History Aretha Franklin," 2022, 2022, <https://www.billboard.com/artist/aretha-franklin/chart-history/blk/>.

that when Aretha was in the studio, if she smiled White became angry and, on occasion, slapped “the shit out of her” in front of anyone present. White’s behavior was also self-serving. With no previous management experience, he was paid to book her gigs. He also earned royalties for recordings of songs his publishing company owned or on songs for which they shared writer’s credits. Otis claimed Aretha told him she wrote the songs that White “just put his name on.”²¹⁸ Her career provided income for White, so he was motivated to exploit her professional success. In 1965, he insisted Aretha record a studio album that simulated a recording of a live performance in a jazz nightclub. He also pressed for her to tone down her soulful vocal style in the album *Yeah!!!*, her only album release that year. The release was a marketing tactic that would help him, her manager book (and take a cut of the profit from) jazz-oriented, nightclub gigs. He claimed that the album showcased her ability to sing in the jazz, pop, and rock & roll genres. But the unfocused approach to song selection and vocal styling did little to advance her recording career.²¹⁹ By his own admission, White had little previous experience in the music business. His ownership of a few jukeboxes in Detroit certainly did not prepare him for the role of record producer. Footage of the “Ain’t No Way” recording session recorded by ABC-TV News documents his inexperience. Four participants in the session are briefly featured: Aretha develops the piano part while Carolyn demonstrates the melody. Arranger Tom Dowd suggests ideas for background vocals. White, whose singular on-camera contribution was the comment, “Sounds pretty good,” was the only person who

²¹⁸ Ritz, *Respect: The Life of Aretha Franklin*, Loc 1748.

²¹⁹ Bego, *Aretha Franklin: The Queen of Soul*, 53–54.

seemed to have no practical function in the studio. His fish out of water demeanor here helps interpret the song's lyrics: "stop trying to be someone you're not." As her father once put it in the music-themed sermon quoted above, "Some things you can't say, you can sing."

Dynamic variation, artfully managed in many of Aretha's most emotionally charged recordings, is an essential element of "Ain't No Way."²²⁰ The instrumental introduction is gentle, and Aretha's lead vocal begins calmly as she explains that she needs her lover's help. As the next section begins, Cissy Houston, a background vocalist on the track, signals an important shift by wordlessly sliding up a full octave. Aretha intensifies the emotion as the melody ascends when she describes her responsibility ("to *help* and love her man") in the relationship. This change of timbre and volume as the melody ascends is an effective strategy to communicate drive and serious commitment, leading to a transformative moment where background and lead vocals converge, chanting "ain't no way" in a call and response pattern while a rhythmic pulse and pulsating horns powerfully drive the message home.

Vocal techniques and strategies developed over decades by gospel singers in African American churches are essential ingredients for this successful single release. Many of the soulful vocal practices that epitomize the African American gospel style, the slides, extended melismatic constructions, repetition, moans, wails, and rhythmic improvisation that Aretha learned from James Cleveland and Clara Ward, are on full

²²⁰ Listen to "Prove It," "Daydreaming," "See Saw," and "Spirit in the Dark" for instances of effective uses of dynamics.

display. Aretha sings the first line (“Ain’t no way for me to love you”) quite simply. The single notable feature of this first phrase is a five-note melisma which emphasizes the importance of the word “love” to begin her plea. The balance of the statement (“if you won’t let me”) ends with a downward slide on “me,” a perceptible and perhaps symbolic drop in energy. As she develops her relational argument (“It ain’t no way for me to give you all you need if you won’t let me give all of me”) she works in a stronger vocal timbre and delivers “if you won’t let me give all” on the highest pitch employed so far, using a song-speech style reminiscent of preachers at the pulpit. The gospel tone is set within the first minute of the recording.

A rarely acknowledged feature of many of Aretha’s successful singles is the incorporation of uncommon, varied background arrangements. When Houston repeats her operatic octave glissando, it reaches an even higher pitch before descending and releasing intensity. Call and response between the lead and background vocalists on the title phrase is enhanced by carefully varying the melody, placement, and rhythmic delivery of each of the four responses. After the fourth and final response, as the lead vocal assertively argues “It ain’t no way for me to love you,” a single background voice, mixed low, interjects a high-pitched shout over Aretha’s “way” imbuing the message with emotional force. Traditional girl-group phonemes like “oo” and “aa” pepper the bridge and provide a foundation as Aretha uses repetition (“say, say you do”) to build the energy that drives her up to the highest note of the song as she proclaims, “I need you!”

In Closing

Aretha's voice was a clarion call for justice from Black Americans battling for equality during the latter years of the Civil Rights era. She understood, as did many African Americans who were young in the 1950s and 1960s, that she had something special, a uniqueness to share with the world. Aretha sensed her worth and her value. She had been raised in a vivid consciousness of her musical gift and had been trained by her father to embrace it. When no other Black female soul artist except Nina Simone could boldly release a song about female sexual agency, Aretha did with 1967's "Dr. Feelgood." Georgia Christgau remembers this recording as "powerful," "earthy," and "pro-female."²²¹ Aretha's musical boldness transformed Otis Redding's "Respect" from a national hit to an international anthem for equal rights.

First, throughout her life Aretha embraced a strategy of expressing positivity. David Ritz, who co-authored her autobiography, wrote of several instances when she described remembrances of grief-ridden experiences as though they were being viewed through rose-colored glasses and were not nearly as devastating in memory as they probably were in real time.²²² Similarly, despite a history replete with race-based atrocities in America, those citizens who participated in the movement, marched for freedom, attended rallies and meetings, registered voters, organized fundraisers, donated to the NAACP, and voted religiously for candidates who supported integration and the end of

²²¹ Robert Fink et al., "Remembering Aretha Franklin," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 31, no. 1 (2019), https://www.academia.edu/74337516/Remembering_Aretha_Franklin?auto=download.

²²² David Ritz, "Aretha Franklin's Ghostwriter on the Singer's Enduring Mysteries," *Rolling Stone* (2018_08_16 2018). <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/aretha-franklin-ghostwriter-david-ritz-710430/>.

Jim Crow policies demonstrated their inclination for positivity and the belief that, as Cooke wrote, “A Change is Gonna Come.” In the face of an oftentimes sordid history, that positivity was an indispensable element in the fight for equality. Aretha’s essential survival strategy of remaining optimistic during difficulties was synchronous with the zeitgeist of the Sixties when the battles for the end of African American’s second-class citizenship status were fought by a multi-racial coalition of Americans. The coeval relationship between Aretha’s temperament and that of the movement fueled her ascendancy to national recognition. The timing of her entry into the world of pop music was another beneficial element in her success.

Aretha entered the secular singing segment of professional entertainment just as many Americans were primed and ready for the sound of a Black gospel that combined attributes from its Southern origins with its Northern polishing. She was a living metaphor for the soul sound she sang. Born in Memphis, then raised in Buffalo and Detroit, Aretha lived the journey of the music that had migrated from its birthplace and had been simmering like a delicious stew in the cauldrons of communities comprised of former Southern Blacks. Her entry into the soul genre took place just as the ingredients of the soul stew had simmered long enough to blend into a savory sound that captured the American, and then an international, audience.

Furthermore, Aretha’s voice was a singular encapsulation of the body of African Americans who were anxious to fulfill the dream of America by relentlessly pressing for the rejection of injustices endured by their forefathers and foremothers and by achieving equal status with White Americans. The concept of “the grain of the voice” advanced by Roland Barthes is useful in understanding how the sounds emanating from Aretha’s body

captivated a multitude of Americans in the 1960s. Barthes claims that the “grain” is not just the timbre of the voice but also is the body of the voice – its significance in addition to its sound.²²³ Matt Dobkin argues that this concept explains “the uncanny aural-emotional appeal” of Franklin through her voice - one that married music with meaning and made her artistic work an essential and vital component of the era.²²⁴

²²³ Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," in *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 188.

²²⁴ Matt Dobkin, *I Never Loved a Man the Way I Love You: Aretha Franklin, Respect, and the Making of a Soul Music Masterpiece* (St. Martin's Griffin, 2006), 224.

Chapter 5 Queen of Rock & Roll - Tina Turner – The World She Left Behind

"Fascism is a new name for that kind of terror the Negro has always faced in America."
Langston Hughes, speech at the Third US Congress Against War and Fascism (1936)



Figure 12 Tina on the Eiffel Tower. Cover of "Foreign Affair" single release.

What do we know about this child of Brownsville, Tennessee, the artist Tina Turner? The iconic Peter Lindbergh photograph on the cover of her 1990 single release of "Foreign Affair" suggests several qualities defining the woman crowned (late in life) as the Queen of Rock 'n' Roll. On stage, she was audacious, bold, and charismatic. To her adoring fans and the public, she was authentic, beautiful, and charming. In her approach to career matters Tina was focused, businesslike, and confident. Posing majestically in high heels on the Eiffel Tower, holding on with one hand high above the streets of Paris, she commanded attention and exhibited *amour de soi, amour de soi en abondance!*

Even at the outset of her career, she was an unparalleled performer and a dynamic vocalist who commanded attention. I first heard Tina Turner in 1960 when she sang the lead vocals on the new release "A Fool in Love," Ike and Tina Turner Revue's first hit single. Based on that performance, I expected she would be embraced by lovers of soul, rhythm & blues, and rock and roll. During an era when the Top 10 charts were dominated by groups of girls whose sweet-toned serenades gushed over the euphoria of young love

or lamented wistfully about its perils, Tina was a fierce anomaly. Her vocal timbre was raw, loud, and harsh. In her first recording she shouted sonances rarely heard in a pop single and exuded roughness, toughness, and an overweening confidence. Tina violently expelled defiant emotions, growling and screaming in response to reasonable claims from the female background vocalists that she was just “a fool in love.”²²⁵ These ladies argued that Tina, a woman who could not “understand why he treats you like he do when he’s such a good man,” was caught in a confusing entanglement with a man whose mixed messages of love and betrayal pointed at one of two possibilities: hopefully genuine ambivalence, but more likely just bad intentions. Despite their efforts to counsel their naive friend, Turner insisted that she didn’t want to live without him and would “do anything” he wants her to do. Her guttural tones emphasized her almost terrifying emotional determination to hold on to this man no matter what. By this point in the evolution of soul music, James Brown, the “hardest working man in show business,” was the master of piercing vocables that seemed to be torn from the most extreme emotional depths. Turner was the only female vocalist of the time who dared, not just to sing like Brown, but brazenly cover his hits in her live performances. As she wailed about the grievances of women during that male-dominated epoch, two long years before the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*, Turner’s approach to musical performance was aggressive and unforgettable. And, like so many of the songs she performed and

²²⁵ See Appendix A for “A Fool in Love” lyrics.

recorded in her five-plus decade career, these lyrics, in their depiction of naïve trust in the face of misogyny, seem autobiographical in retrospect.

Within Turner's masculine vocal style were gentler qualities like sincerity, affability, and a vulnerability that endeared her to a growing fanbase. The Ike & Tina Turner Revue's next successful release, "I Think It's Gonna Work Out Fine," is a tale of a love affair seen from differing points of view: the woman wants to marry but (of course) the man is reluctant. When the song was released in 1961, Ike Turner, Tina's life partner, her musical mentor, and her counterpart in this stage duet, was adroit at delivering lyrics with universal appeal accompanied by simple, down-home funky, music.²²⁶ His band leadership during live nightclub performances and on local television shows made the Kings of Rhythm one of the most popular draws in the metropolitan St. Louis area. Moreover, he was sufficiently skilled in the recording studio to guide the teenaged Turner as she learned to record and perform live. Although her delivery was harsh and tough, Tina's winsomeness charmed listeners. She presented a brash façade founded upon her study and emulation of male vocalists. This approach was eccentric, unusual, and valiant, emanating from a sweet-natured teenager who earnestly yearned for love in her personal life and acceptance as a professional singer. Reflecting on her youth when she was forty-six, she explained, "It might seem that my mother, my grandparents, and everybody who helped raise me were not necessarily nice people. They were good people, but I did not receive a lot of love from them. It's that receiving of love that has been missing from my

²²⁶ Some references claim that Mickey Baker (of the duet Mickey & Sylvia) – not Ike Turner - performed the male vocal part in the recording and that Sylvia Robinson co-wrote the song with Rose McCoy.

life.”²²⁷ She experienced rejection and abandonment by her parents during her childhood and callous abuse and disrespect from her first husband in her early adult years. Furthermore, she spent her mid-twentieth century childhood in the intimidating, ominous shadow of virulent, ubiquitous racism. As a result, she often felt deeply unloved and unwelcomed by the people around her. This sense of rejection produced personal pain that persisted for decades, influencing her romantic and career decisions. Although that void was eventually filled, Turner lived with a gnawing feeling of not being loved for approximately four decades.

Turner’s personal life and her career survived many physical and mental challenges and eventually thrived. A dedicated student of life’s mysteries, she explored and expanded the boundaries of her world through travel, the study of metaphysics, and the practice of religious faith. Her journey began in Brownsville, a small Tennessee town, and developed in the even smaller community called Nutbush, comprised of cotton fields, a Baptist church, a tiny schoolhouse, and a dusty road. It led Turner not just out of town, but ultimately to international stardom and life as an expatriate. Her family of origin was troubled, tense, and eventually, shattered by separations and abandonment. In her earliest memories, Turner felt emotionally distant from both of her parents. But she also discovered that connecting with nature in the neighboring meadows renewed her spirit and that singing in church engendered a freeing of her innermost self. When she left Nutbush in her teens to reunite with her mother and sister in St. Louis, she found herself

²²⁷ Ebony, "TINA TURNER: The Shocking Story Of A Battered Wife Who Escaped To Fame And Fortune," *Ebony Magazine Archive* (Article), November 1986, 1986, 42, EBSCOhost, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ear&AN=139305254&site=ehost-live>.

in a new world. Her metamorphosis from country girl to urban teen was a significant early step in the life-long expansion of her horizons.

This sensitive, creative woman, who was forced to pick cotton in sweltering Tennessee fields during her youth, had to overcome a long series of obstacles to travel internationally, entertain tens of millions of people, and ascend to rock queendom over a five-decades-long career. She was beloved not only by her peers, but also by generations of music lovers. Her life was eclectic and transformational. Turner is a heroine to those who have suffered abuse and survived because she manifested and shared her transformation from victim to victor. Her fire, drive, discipline, work ethic, and faith synergistically fused, and enabled Turner to live an extraordinary feminist saga that began in the most unpropitious place: not even a town, just a dirt-poor unincorporated section of rural Haywood County, Tennessee she later ironically hailed as within the “Nutbush City Limits.” Unlike Cooke and Franklin who left the South early in their childhoods, Turner’s first sixteen years were spent in the Mississippi Delta. Delta life undergirds much of what Turner understood about life in the United States and about life in general.

Tina’s Tennessee

Turner’s mother’s people, the Flagg family, had lived in Haywood County for almost a century when Turner was born. Turner loved her maternal grandmother, Mama Georgie so dearly that as a three-year-old she wanted to live in Mama Georgie’s home when Richard and Zelma Bullock left their daughters, Alline and Anna Mae (Turner’s birthname) in 1942, seeking defense work in Oak Ridge. Georgianna Flagg Currie was one of the

first generation of Flaggs born in Haywood County, Tennessee. The previous Flaggs were North Carolinians who became upstanding members of their new Western Tennessee community. Georgianna's uncle, Benjamin Flagg, born in Oxford, North Carolina in 1856, was a young boy when his family travelled over seven hundred miles to Tennessee. They were attracted to Haywood County where farmers and plantation owners prospered due to the fertility of the soil along the lower Mississippi River. By 1870 Ben Flagg's sixty-year-old father, Samuel, and six of Ben's siblings were farm hands in a region that had been Chickasaw land until the Jackson Purchase of 1818 extended the western boundary of the state to the Mississippi River.²²⁸ By 1889, before his thirtieth birthday, Ben Flagg owned a farm of sufficient size that he could afford to contribute land to benefit the African American children growing up near his Flagg Grove home. He sold an acre of his Haywood County, Tennessee farmland for twenty-five dollars, approximately one-third of its market value, to a group of local men who established a school for Black children.²²⁹

Just as the Flagg family were motivated to relocate to the fertile soil of West Tennessee, so were White enslavers who established cotton plantations there. Although slaveholders were a minority in the state in the early nineteenth century, as their numbers increased in the West, they exercised significant political power, enough to prevent the name of anti-slavery Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln from appearing on the state

²²⁸ United States Census Bureau, 1870 Census District 15 Haywood Tennessee, (1870). Tennessee State Library and Archives, "Tennessee's Coming of Age," Tennessee Secretary of State, 2018, accessed 2024_02_27, 2024, <https://tnsoshistory.com/chapter4>.

²²⁹ Henry Louis Gates Jr., "African American Lives 2," in *African American Lives* (02/06/2008 2008). <https://youtu.be/a936Hb8l-fU?si=mFTI2YRmq24EDkTB>; Gates Jr., "African American Lives 2."

ballot in the 1860 presidential election.²³⁰ Anti-slavery sentiment was centered in East Tennessee while pro-slavery factions dominated the western part of the state. When they left North Carolina for Tennessee, the Flaggs did not escape racial intolerance. Their Tennessee home was about 150 miles northwest of Pulaski, Tennessee where the Ku Klux Klan was founded by six Confederate veterans in 1866.²³¹ When Tennessee enfranchised free Black men in 1867, the KKK responded to this increase in the political power of African Americans by using violence to intimidate Blacks and to restore White control in Tennessee, North Carolina, and Georgia.²³²

On a television broadcast in the *African American Lives* series, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. informed Turner that Flagg Grove School, the elementary school she attended in the 1940s, stood on land once owned by her maternal great-grand-uncle, Ben Flagg. Her emotional response was a delighted, tearful "Great! Just great!"²³³ When Turner attended elementary school, the building had no electricity or plumbing. A well pump provided water. The children's toilets consisted of two holes in the ground covered by

²³⁰ Tennessee State Library and Archives, "The Times of Trouble," Tennessee Secretary of State, 2018, accessed 2024_02_27, 2024, <https://tnsoshistory.com/chapter6>; Tennessee State Library and Archives, "The Times of Trouble."

²³¹ Mark V. Wetherington, "Ku Klux Klan," in *Tennessee Encyclopedia* (Nashville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2018). <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/ku-klux-klan/>.

²³² Helen Greene and Shaun Gabbidon, "Encyclopedia of Race and Crime," (2008), under "Ku Klux Klan." <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412971928>.

²³³ Leslie D. Farrell et al., "African American Lives 2," in *African American Lives* (2/6/2008 2008). <https://youtu.be/SuxQKICZr4E?si=7mz9AV3giN4ZQrgH>.

sheds. A potbelly stove heated the single room where one teacher taught all grades and all subjects.²³⁴ The building's conditions were so rudimentary that when, in her senior years, Turner read a story in a Swiss magazine that stated her town's school was going



Figure 13 Tina Turner's elementary school building

to be the site of a museum in her honor, she mistakenly assumed that the article referenced the segregated school attended by White children in the 1940s.²³⁵ When the one-room school closed in 1967 its wooden building was repurposed as a barn. In 2014, Turner's supporters

moved the building from Nutbush to Brownsville and renovated it to house the Tina Turner Museum.

Early 20th-century Southern Black communities often had to be self-reliant to provide education for their children. After completing her elementary school years in Nutbush, Turner attended George Washington Carver High School in Brownsville where she was an energetic member of both the basketball team and the cheerleading squad. Her academic career ended when she graduated from Sumner High School in St. Louis Missouri in 1958.²³⁶

²³⁴ David Smith, "'I'm very proud it's there': how Tina Turner's one-room school became a museum," *The Guardian* (2023_05_28 2023). <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2023/may/28/tina-turner-school-museum-tennessee>.

²³⁵ West Tennessee Delta Heritage Center, *Tina Turner talks about Flagg Grove School* (Tennessee: City of Brownsville, TN, 2014).

²³⁶ All three schools Turner attended are linked to significant moments in African American history. Like many other elementary schools attended by Black children in the South in the early twentieth century, Flagg Grove School was founded by members of the local Black community, not the local government. As was also common practice in African American neighborhoods, Turner's high school in Brownsville was named for George Washington Carver, a Black scientist and inventor who was not just accepted, but also lauded, by white Americans. Turner's next secondary school was the first African American high school founded west of the Mississippi River. Charles H. Sumner High School was established in response to

Unlike Sam Cooke and Aretha Franklin, the future Tina Turner, who lived in Tennessee until the age of 16, was deeply troubled by Southern racism during the formative years of her childhood. She was born on November 26, 1939, in a windowless section of the basement in Haywood Memorial Hospital where African American patients were segregated from Whites. Built in 1930 as the effects of the Great Depression were waning and fears of a second World War were taking root, the hospital had a basement that was starkly different from the upstairs wards. The walls were lined with steel pipes, and the hissing of steam permeated the underground space. One visitor to the basement reserved for Black patients opined about her ailing grandmother's surroundings in the undercroft, "It didn't look like nothin' that I had seen in a book about a hospital'."²³⁷ Anna Mae Bullock and her mother, Zelma, went home from the hospital basement to a simple wooden house on the farm owned by the White Poindexter family, who employed Richard Bullock, Turner's father, as an overseer. The house was on Solomon Road, a partially paved and extremely narrow country lane. The 1940 U.S. Census records only eight homes on the roadway, occupied by "farm laborers" - seven African American families and one White household.²³⁸ Although Turner played with White children who were neighbors, Jim Crow laws and Southern customs prevented her from attending schools

effective lobbying by the city's African American residents. It was named after the abolitionist Senator of Massachusetts whose infamous caning by South Carolina Representative Preston Brooks on the floor of the Senate in 1856 was symbolic of the growing intensity of the contemporaneous national debate over slavery in mid-nineteenth-century America.

²³⁷ Aallyah Wright, "Healing a Dark Past: The Long Road to Reopening Hospitals in the Rural South," *Capital B* (12/30/2024 2024). <https://capitalbnews.org/reversing-rural-hospital-closures/>.

²³⁸ United States Census Bureau, 1940 Census District 11 Haywood Tennessee, (1940).

or churches with them.²³⁹ During her childhood, she was aware of institutional racism. In the first chapter of her memoir *Happiness Becomes You*, she recalled seeing a sheriff who, although he was a well-known criminal, was still employed as a law enforcement officer. She also remembered the “fragile calm” among segregated Haywood County residents who did not want to talk about his offenses.²⁴⁰ Even a brief investigation into the racial histories of Tennessee, Haywood County, and the city of Brownsville reveals the rigorously segregated world that surrounded and influenced Turner from birth to age sixteen.

Racism in Haywood County, Tennessee

The legacy of enslavement and the denial of Black Americans’ civil rights in nineteenth-century Western Tennessee created a pervasive atmosphere of intimidation in Haywood County during Turner’s childhood years. When Tennessee was admitted to the Union in 1796, the state comprised only the eastern counties located in the Great Smoky Mountain range. After the Cherokee and Chickasaw nations ceded the region that became western Tennessee, White Americans began purchasing this inexpensive yet extremely fertile public land. Easy availability of large parcels of high-yielding agricultural acreage perfect for raising labor-intensive cotton and tobacco attracted enslaving farmers and their Black

²³⁹ Jo Zanice Bond, "Race, Place, and Family: Narratives of the Civil Rights Movement in Brownsville, Tennessee, and the Nation" (Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation, University of Kansas, 2011), 12, https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/10696/Bond_ku_0099D_11855_DATA_1.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1.

²⁴⁰ Tina Turner, Taro Gold, and Regula Curti, *Happiness Becomes You: a guide to changing your life for good* (New York: Atria Books, 2020), 5.

captives to the region. In 1791, before the westward expansion that incorporated the fruitful Mississippi Delta and adjacent counties into the state, African Americans accounted for a mere ten percent of Tennesseans. By 1810, that percentage had doubled, and most were farm laborers in western counties. As the political influence of Tennessean enslavers increased, popular opinion on slavery in the state hardened. Although the Tennessee Constitution of 1796 had guaranteed free African Americans voting rights and made manumission an easy procedure, by the early 1800s enslavers passed laws that made emancipation more difficult and eradicated some of the civil rights once guaranteed to Black Tennesseans.²⁴¹ As pro-slavery sentiment flourished in the early nineteenth century, East Tennessean anti-slavery proponents proposed an amendment to the 1834 state constitution calling for eventual emancipation of enslaved African Americans. The proposed amendment failed, and soon thereafter, the anti-slavery societies of eastern Tennessee vanished.²⁴²

Because extensive labor was required to maximize production of cotton on large plantations, by mid-nineteenth century Blacks outnumbered Whites in Turner's home county. The potential political power they could have wielded after emancipation as the majority demographic in the region fomented an intense racism that employed terror, intimidation, and violent criminal acts to maintain the political and economic power of local White men. Despite their numerical advantage, African Americans exercised no real political power until the Civil War ended. This virulent form of racism produced starkly

²⁴¹ Tennessee State Library and Archives, "Tennessee's Coming of Age," 2.

²⁴²East Tennessee Historical Society, "Slavery and Cotton in Tennessee," *Teach Tennessee History*. <http://teachtnhistory.org/file/23%20Slavery%20and%20Cotton%20in%20Tennessee.pdf>.

divergent experiences for Black and White members of an influential, multiracial family of Western Tennessee: the Bond family.

The Bond family legacy is deeply entwined with Haywood County history and race relations and provides insight into the challenges Black residents faced at the time of Turner's birth. From the mid-nineteenth through the early twentieth centuries, White Bond family members wielded disproportionately greater political and economic power in Haywood County than its Black members. Their influence began in the mid-1820s, when White North Carolinians Thomas Bond and his nephew, James, moved west to take advantage of the wealth-building potential of cotton plantation ownership in Tennessee. Thomas and James left their homes in Windsor, NC, just fifteen miles from the East Coast, and traveled over eight hundred miles to Brownsville to establish farms in the fertile plains of West Tennessee soon after the Chickasaw Nation ceded its land in the Jackson Purchase of 1818, the treaty that expanded the western boundary of the state to the Mississippi River. Genealogical records indicate that around 1824, Maltimore, a mulatto son of forty-one-year-old Thomas Bond, was born to Phillas Bond, an enslaved Black thirteen or fourteen-year-old girl. Maltimore moved from North Carolina to Brownsville, as did his White father and his half-cousin, James.²⁴³ Through Maltimore, several Black descendants of Thomas Bond played significant roles in the civil rights history of Brownsville and in young Turner's childhood.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ brimoser, "Maltimore Bond," (Ancestry.com). <https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/14179948/person/71572597/facts>.

²⁴⁴ Tina Turner and Kurt Loder, *I, Tina* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1986). In the Acknowledgments Loder thanked Roy Bond and Carolyn Bond Flagg (born in 1939, one month before Turner)

Predictably, the fortunes of the White branch of the Bond family outpaced those of the Black branch. Several White Bond family members profited greatly from the employment of enslaved labor on their western Tennessee plantations. Within thirty years of his arrival in Haywood County, James Bond owned over 17,000 acres in the area. He eventually acquired 35,400 acres of land and became one of the wealthiest enslavers in the South. His personal fortune, valued at almost \$800,000 in 1860, was worth more than the total value of all the real property in Johnson County, Tennessee. He accrued wealth by the continual forced labor of about 220 Black workers in cotton fields around Brownsville, Turner's birthplace. In contrast to James's financial success, the 1870 Census reports that his forty-seven-year-old cousin Maltimore worked as a brick mason and owned real property worth \$1,000 and a personal estate valued at \$700.²⁴⁵ Before the Civil War, the White Bonds, along with other wealthy White families of Brownsville and the surrounding rural area, wielded virtually all political power in Haywood County. At that time, free Blacks already lived in the state, mostly in Eastern Tennessee. But the laws passed by the state legislature to make manumission difficult in the early 1800s ensured that, at the outset of the War Between the States, in the western regions where most African Americans labored, and where Turner spent her childhood a century later, most Black folks remained enslaved.²⁴⁶

African Americans had arrived in Haywood County before Thomas and James Bond settled there. Enslaved labor had been shipped to the county by boat up the Hatchie

²⁴⁵ United States Census Bureau, 1870 Census Maltimore Bond, (1870).

²⁴⁶ Robert Tracy McKenzie, "James Bond," in *Tennessee Encyclopedia* (Nashville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2018). <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/james-bond/>.

River. Others in bondage were purchased at St. Louis slave markets and traveled south to Tennessee on the Mississippi River. In 1830, enslaved people made up thirty-four percent of the population in Haywood County. The Black/White demographic ratio changed dramatically over the next three decades. On the eve of the Civil War, fifty-seven percent of Haywood County residents were African Americans. Although their forced labor built many of the homes and commercial buildings in the region and farmed White-owned crops, these workers had no voice in local government.²⁴⁷ The Union victory ended enslavement, but the post-war sharecropper system of farm management returned most freed Black workers and generations of their descendants to the fields. During her childhood in the 1940s and 1950s, Turner reluctantly picked ripe strawberries in late spring and cotton in the searing heat of the July sun. “One thing I couldn’t fit into any kind of dream was picking cotton. God, I hated that - hated it. ...It was hot, and hard, and I was never very good at it.”²⁴⁸ A minority of these Black farmworkers became landowners capable of building wealth to bequeath to their children or political power with which to effect a positive change in the local Black community.

The Reconstruction Era emergence of political activity in Haywood County’s Black population lifted their hopes that they were finally participants in American democracy. In the year of Turner’s birth, community elders knew that before Jim Crow strategies and Ku Klux Klan terrorism were sufficiently organized to intimidate Black voters, because Blacks outnumbered Whites, an African American was elected to the Tennessee House of

²⁴⁷ Rebecca Hightower, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, (2014).

²⁴⁸ Turner and Loder, *I, Tina*, 22–23.

Representatives. In 1882, Haywood County sent Samuel McElwee to Nashville, their first African American attorney, and, in evidence of the severe, persistent nature of local racism, the last lawyer to live in the county until the 1960s. He was elected to four terms

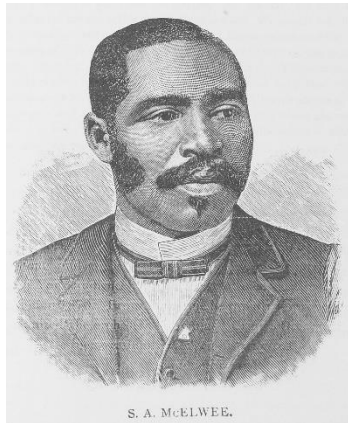


Figure 14 Rep. Samuel McElwee

in the state legislature, and in Obama-like fashion, his impressive oratorical skills garnered national recognition. After he proposed an anti-lynching bill that was tabled by a relatively close vote in 1888, to counter his legislative efforts and prevent his re-election that year, White separatists threatened him and intimidated Black voters by sending armed patrols to polling places. Black sharecroppers feared physical and economic

retaliation if they went to the polls. McElwee fled the county. He received less than thirty-three percent of his previous vote tally. Suspicious of the outcome, African Americans filed a lawsuit claiming election fraud. The suit generated a grand jury indictment of over thirty election officials. However, as was common in the South in cases where Whites were charged with a crime against the Black community, the search for justice ended abruptly. The Sixth Judicial Court ruled that there was insufficient evidence to convict the indictees and dismissed the suit.²⁴⁹ The political hopes of Haywood County African Americans were dashed. In 1939, the year of Turner's birth, they were reignited by the establishment of the Haywood County Chapter of the NAACP.

²⁴⁹ Tennessee Secretary of State, "Samuel Allen McElwee," 2013, accessed 2024_03_03, 2024, <https://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/mcelwee.htm>.

In 1876 the Tennessee legislature passed Jim Crow laws that separated Blacks from Whites in public places and commercial spaces.²⁵⁰ These recently adopted laws, along with the rise of White supremacist terrorist actions – night rides of the KKK, lynchings, mob attacks and arson – that suppressed the Black vote, interrupted the election of African American Tennessean lawmakers over most of the twentieth century. Black legislators did not win elections in the state between the 1890s and the 1960s.²⁵¹ The institution of poll taxes and literacy tests that made it difficult, if not impossible, for a Black person to become a registered voter contributed significantly to the decrease in the number of Tennessee’s African American voters in the first half of the twentieth century. Statewide disenfranchisement of Black residents was singularly severe in Turner’s Haywood County during Turner’s formative years.

The life-threatening racism – on local and national levels – that had a chilling effect on the lives of African Americans during the early years of the twentieth century was extremely brutal in 1940s Haywood County. Blacks struggled mightily due to their extreme economic vulnerability during and after the Great Depression. A decade before Turner’s birth, most Black Americans lived in the South and nearly two-thirds of them worked on cotton farms. Of the nearly 1.4 million southern Black farmers, fewer than 23 percent owned the land on which they worked. Black farm laborers and sharecroppers were the lowest paid labor group in the nation.²⁵² In the New Deal era, President Roosevelt’s

²⁵⁰ Hightower, Short National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form.

²⁵¹ Tennessee State Library and Archives, "Reconstruction and Rebuilding," Tennessee Secretary of State, 2018, accessed 2024_02_27, 2024, <https://tnsoshistory.com/chapter6>.

²⁵² Donald Holley, "The Negro in the New Deal Resettlement Program," *Agricultural History* 45, no. 3 (1971): 179–80, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3741977>.

Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) implemented policies that harmed Black farm laborers. The AAA paid farm owners to reduce the number of acres on which they grew cotton. As a result, many White owners profited from the government payments while the predominantly Black labor force, denied a share of the subsidies, struggled financially. Black landowners lost their property and became sharecroppers. Some sharecroppers were forced to leave the land they had farmed and called home.²⁵³ About 200,000 African American tenants, sharecroppers, and even small owners were displaced by the effects of the program in the early 1930s. African American farm workers who survived this purge comprised the largest demographic of Haywood County's Black population by 1940. Their economic position was extraordinarily tenuous in this Jim Crow County in 1939 when Turner was born.

Tennessee Terror in Turner's Time

Turner was so deeply affected by race relations in Brownsville, her birthplace, and its surrounding rural area that, although it occurred before her first birthday, she remembered the tragedy of Tennessee's last known lynching. Eighty years later, she mentioned the event in her third and final book – the one she wrote to help readers create happy lives by sharing wisdom gleaned from her spiritual practices and her life experiences.²⁵⁴ The saga of Brownsville residents Elbert Williams, Ollie and Mattye Bond, the Davis family,

²⁵³ Kelley and Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew: Volume II: A History of African Americans Since 1880*: 2, 2, 136.

²⁵⁴ Turner, Gold, and Curti, *Happiness Becomes You: a guide to changing your life for good*, 5.

and Buster Walker is at once heroic, frightening, and tragic. The White supremacist culture in Haywood County was cruel at the end of the Great Depression when certain American workers, largely distinguished by race, benefitted from President Roosevelt's progressive New Deal programs while unprotected workers languished. In 1939, the year of Turner's birth, a coalition of Black Brownsville residents began to actively resist the suppression of their voting rights by organizing a local chapter of the NAACP and

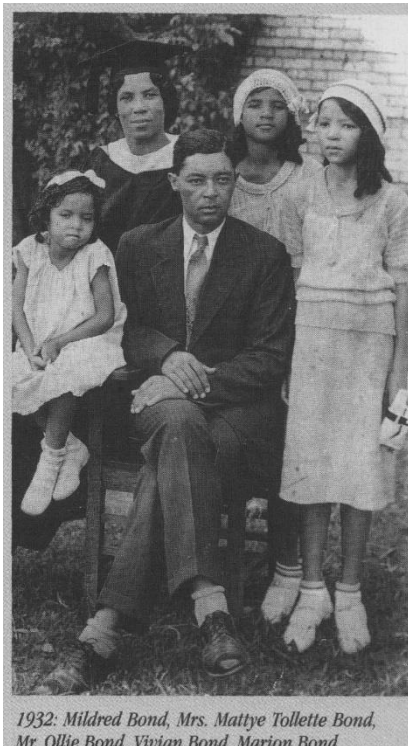


Figure 15 The Ollie and Mattye Bond Family

encouraging their neighbors to vote. Ollie Bond, a grandson of mulatto Maltimore Bond, was a member of the Black branch of the Thomas Bond family. He and his wife, Mattye Tollette Bond were at the center of this voting rights activism.

Ollie and Mattye Bond inherited a tradition of progressivism and resistance. Mattye was an educator born into a trailblazing, ambitious family. In the late 1800s, her parents, Sanford and Caldonia Crofton Tollette founded the African American town of Tollette, Arkansas where they built a general store, church, and public

school. Ollie was the seventh child of Andrew (Buck) and Aurelia Bond. Buck Bond (1856-1918), the first child of Maltimore and his mulatto wife, was the unofficial grandson of the wealthy enslaver, Thomas Bond. By 1867, Maltimore was a spokesman for the Brownsville Black community and took part in the establishment of the Dunbar School,

the city's first permanent school for African Americans.²⁵⁵ ²⁵⁶ During the brief post-Civil War period when African Americans held positions of authority, Maltimore's son, Buck served as a deputy sheriff and even arrested White people. Murph Currie, a Black magistrate, assessed their fines.²⁵⁷ Needless to say, the power and authority Bond and Currie exercised over White criminals angered some Brownsville Whites. Still, at the end of the nineteenth century several African American members of the Bond family held positions of prominence in the Brownsville community.

In his youth, Ollie demonstrated a generosity of spirit and a sense of responsibility to his family and community. His White uncle, Dr. John Sevier, was a friendly half-brother of Ollie's Black mother, Aurelia. When Sevier promised her that only one of her sons would be drafted to go to war in 1917, Ollie volunteered to serve so that his brothers could continue work on the family farm.²⁵⁸ He joined over 380,000 African Americans in the Army during the Great War. Approximately 200,000 of these Black soldiers were deployed to Europe.²⁵⁹ For many of them, the experience of escaping American racism cultivated

²⁵⁵ Bond, "Race, Place, and Family: Narratives of the Civil Rights Movement in Brownsville, Tennessee, and the Nation," 40.

²⁵⁶ A fire destroyed the Dunbar School in the 1910s. The Haywood County Training School which replaced Dunbar, became Carver High School in 1950. Turner played basketball and joined the cheerleading squad while she attended Carver High in the mid-1950s when Dr. Roy Bond (Ollie Bond's nephew) was the principal.

²⁵⁷ Marc Crawford, "Haywood, A 50-Year Voting Void," *Jet*, 10_01_1959, 1959, 12, <https://books.google.com/books?id=gUEDAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA12&dq=haywood+a+50+year+voting+void&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi6v472jNmEAxURH0QIHZHDazEQ6AF6BAglEAl#v=onepage&q=haywood%20a%2050%20year%20voting%20void&f=false>.

²⁵⁸ Bond, "Race, Place, and Family: Narratives of the Civil Rights Movement in Brownsville, Tennessee, and the Nation," 25.

²⁵⁹ Col. Richard Goldenberg, "African-American Troops Fought to Fight in World War I," 2025, no. 2025_02_19 (2018). <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/article/1429624/african-american-troops-fought-to-fight-in-world-war->

a powerful resistance to abiding racial oppression. White Americans were in general angered by the resolve of Black veterans to thwart racial injustice. In the May 1919 issue of the NAACP monthly magazine, *The Crisis*, W.E.B. Du Bois urged African American veterans to continue to fight for democracy:

But by the God of Heaven, we are cowards and jackasses if now that that war is over, we do not marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land. *We return. We return from fighting. We return fighting.* Make way for Democracy! We saved it in France, and by the Great Jehovah, we will save it in the United States of America or know the reason why.²⁶⁰

DuBois was not the first to associate the service of Black men in the fight for democracy overseas with the struggle for equality at home. Two years before his exhortation to battle at home at the beginning of the U.S war effort, A. Philip Randolph's Harlem-based publication, *The Messenger*, reported on a resolution made by the usually conservative National Negro Business League (NNBL) at their annual convention:

We most respectfully urge that consistency demands that as we preach democracy, we shall practice it at home. We cannot make the world safe for democracy unless every man in America shall have a man's chance, America's plea for world democracy shall, because of our inconsistency, be the occasion of our humiliation.²⁶¹

Since its founding by Booker T. Washington in 1900, the NNLB had been conservative in its public statements. But after his death in 1915, a "younger, more discontented type

i/#:~:text=More%20than%20380%2C000%20African%2DAmericans,to%20labor%20and%20stevedore%20battalions; Goldenberg, "African-American Troops Fought to Fight in World War I."

²⁶⁰ W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, "Returning Soldiers," *The Crisis* (Editorial), May 1919, 1919, 14, UCLA, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=inu.30000052846791&seq=13>.

²⁶¹ The Messenger, "Making the World Safe for Democracy," *The Messenger*, November 1917, 1917, 9, UCLA, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.c2904887&seq=7>.

of ‘new Negro’” attended the NNBL convention in 1917 and made more radical demands.²⁶² When Ollie labored on his family farm in 1917 he may not have been a “new Negro,” but by the time he returned to Tennessee as a war veteran, his subsequent civil rights activism suggest he had become one. These Army-trained Black men were emboldened to undertake the domestic struggle and face the consequent threats. Journalist William A. Sweeney expressed their determination and resolve thusly:

The talk of the revival of the KuKlux societies to intimidate the Negro; “to keep him in his place,” is the graveyard yawp of a dying monster. Are the thousands of Negroes who faced bullets in the most disastrous war of history, and several hundred thousand more who were ready and willing to undergo the same perils, likely to be frightened by such a threat, such an antiquated, silly, short-sighted piece of injustice and terrorism?²⁶³

The fight was indeed real. By searching government records, historian Nancy MacLean discovered that a 1918 report issued by the U. S. Division of Military Intelligence (USDMI) described a Black soldier “strutting around in his uniform” as a “potential danger” and predicted an “era of bloodshed” if these men of color attempted to have romantic relationships with Whites. The resistance of Black veterans to Southern White dominance was seen as “Negro subversion.” The USDMI was so anxious over the possibility that it conducted a secret investigation to ascertain if there was an organization supporting this push for civil rights.²⁶⁴ Racists deemed the combination of military service and affiliation

²⁶² The Messenger, “Making the World Safe for Democracy.”

²⁶³ William Allison Sweeney, *History of the American Negro in the Great World War* (G. G. Sapp, 1919), 304.
<https://ia802300.us.archive.org/26/items/historyamerican00sweegoog/historyamerican00sweegoog.pdf>.

²⁶⁴ Nancy Maclean, *Behind the mask of chivalry: the making of the second Ku Klux Klan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 28–29.

with the NAACP as particularly troubling. Returning to Haywood County in 1919, Ollie Bond would become the human embodiment of that synthesis – and pay the price.

After Ollie returned to civilian life, he graduated from Lane College, inherited a funeral business, and graduated with honors from Gupton Jones School of Embalming in Nashville. Since Black Southerners had meager access to attorneys, accountants, and other professional consultants, Black undertakers often helped their neighbors by reading and explaining documents, advising them about financial and legal matters, and advocating on behalf of laborers who were victims of wage theft. Ollie provided these services and sometimes accepted home-grown food as payment in lieu of cash.²⁶⁵ In addition to helping individuals, he was also committed to serving his community. His daughter, Mildred Bond Roxborough, recalled that restoring voting rights to Haywood County African Americans was “a burning issue” for her father.²⁶⁶ Roxborough, who witnessed the dedication of her parents to the cause of Black enfranchisement, began selling subscriptions to the NAACP newspaper, *The Crisis*, when she was nine years old. In 1954, she accepted a job with the NAACP in New York City as national staff field secretary, ascended the ranks through various assignments and became the longest serving staff member of the NAACP when she retired forty-three years later, in 1997.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ Bond, "Race, Place, and Family: Narratives of the Civil Rights Movement in Brownsville, Tennessee, and the Nation," 27.

²⁶⁶ Janus Adams and Mattye Tollette Bond, "Mildred Bond Roxborough: Born and bred for the NAACP," *The New Crisis*, Mar/Apr 2000, 2000, 18.

²⁶⁷ NAACP, "NAACPLA: Mrs. Mildred Roxborough, NAACP Stalwart," *NAACP*, 07_01_2021, 2021, <https://naacplosangeles.org/president-naacpla/f/naacpla-mrs-mildred-roxborough-naacp-stalwart>.

Ollie and Mattye endured repeated threats of physical violence and terroristic attacks due to their efforts to register Black voters in Haywood County. In 1933, when all but the chimney of their custom-built house was burned to the ground, the couple suspected that the arson was triggered by their activism. After Ollie helped establish the Brownsville chapter of the American Legion, he organized activists who petitioned the City of Brownsville to protect the right to vote systematically denied to Blacks since 1888. City officials responded to the petition by threatening the committee members with loss of employment, denial of credit, and even mortgage foreclosure. Despite the intimidation, Mattye and Ollie organized the first chapter of the NAACP in Brownsville. In 1939, the year of Turner's birth, Ollie was chapter president and Mattye served as chapter secretary while she worked as a teacher.

In addition to working to restore voting rights for African Americans, the Bonds also advocated for better wages for educators and the end of segregation in local public institutions. These efforts on behalf of undervalued local citizens provoked recurrent economic and physical threats from domineering members of the White community. Patrons of Ollie Bond's business were warned to use other services "if they knew what was good for them."²⁶⁸ Mattye also suffered repercussions in her career. Dr. Roy Bond, Ollie's nephew, was the principal at the school where Mattye taught and which Turner eventually attended. Roy grew up in his father's six-bedroom house with a quality of life that most Black Brownsville residents could not afford. Although the Bond family produced

²⁶⁸ Mattye Tollette Bond, "The Turning Point of My Life," *Crisis*, March/April 2000, 2000, <https://www.proquest.com/hnppittsburghcourier/magazines/mildred-bond-roxborough-born-bred-naacp/docview/199608970/sem-2?accountid=14512>.

strong advocates for their Black community, Dr. Bond occasionally seemed to prioritize his standing with the White community above the needs of his community. He knew that his uncle and aunt, Ollie and Mattye, were being surveilled by powerful segregationists.²⁶⁹ Still, Dr. Bond eventually demurred to his uncle's persecutors and fired Mattye. In a memoir published in *The Crisis*, she wrote that Dr. Bond told her that "although I was an excellent teacher, he was not going to recommend ...that they renew my contract because of my "outside" activities."²⁷⁰

Ollie was repeatedly harassed by threats, multiple arrests, and injuries suffered in several beatings. When he collected the remains of a Black man who had been murdered and left on the roadside, a White man warned him that if he testified in the upcoming inquest, he "wouldn't live to see another day."²⁷¹ In due course, Ollie and Mattye found the threats to their family too unsettling to endure. After hearing from his mother that her White half-brother had warned of a plan to murder Ollie on Christmas Eve, 1939 (Anna Mae Bullock was less than a month old), Ollie fled Brownsville and joined Mattye who was caring for her brother in Kansas City. That night, their family home and its contents were destroyed by fire.²⁷² Mattye and Ollie never returned.

²⁶⁹ Bond, "Race, Place, and Family: Narratives of the Civil Rights Movement in Brownsville, Tennessee, and the Nation," 40.

²⁷⁰ Bond, "The Turning Point of My Life."

²⁷¹ Bond, "Race, Place, and Family: Narratives of the Civil Rights Movement in Brownsville, Tennessee, and the Nation," 40–41.

²⁷² Bond, "The Turning Point of My Life."

Turner's Metaracist Tale

Following Ollie Bond's banishment, an incident took place that Turner alluded to in print eight decades after its occurrence. She deemed it sufficiently significant to write about it near the beginning of her final instructional guide to living a life brimming with kindness and happiness. Since she was a mere infant at the time of the incident, she may have discovered what happened because the occurrence terrified the local African American community and became part of their oral history. Their recollection, examination, and discussion of this disquieting event constituted Black resistance to the eventual attempts by certain White Brownsville residents to cover up the criminal abuse that occurred. Soon after local Whites coerced the Bonds to flee to Kansas, several remaining members of the local NAACP chapter were forced out of their Haywood County homes by White mobs led by several community leaders and law enforcement officers. Elbert Williams, Ollie's friend and one of the founding members of the NAACP chapter, was abducted from his home on the night of June 20, 1940, and brutally murdered. The news of his murder was promptly suppressed by two factors common to American racism. White power brokers in Brownsville engaged in a conspiratorial cover-up that successfully misinformed those who learned of Williams's death. As well, the response of federal law enforcement officials who were notified of the incident demonstrated the indifference to the plight of African Americans in Brownsville that was a common feature of the metaracism extant before the 1960s Civil Rights Movement.²⁷³

²⁷³ Tricia Rose defines metaracism as "(the metaeffect of systemic racism): the dynamic, compounding patterns of racial disadvantage and discrimination produced by the interconnections among policies and practices across society over time. No single policy or practice – nor a linear additive combination of them

African American history is spattered with gaping silences that have often been filled by imprecise, adulterated, or false narratives created by White authors who managed the media, the government, and educational institutions. This can be a result of inattention to, and ignorance of the African American experience. At times, Whites have intentionally misrepresented facts in public and private accounts. A deliberate falsification of records produced the official story describing what several Brownsville NAACP members experienced in 1940. Commenting on the hidden history of African American music from the perspective of a White musicologist, Elijah Wald cautions, “how wary we should be about how other people tell our stories and how we tell other people’s stories.”²⁷⁴ He supports this assessment with a quote from Haitian American historian Michel-Ralph Trouillot regarding “the creation of silences” in the history-making process.²⁷⁵ Trouillot argues that “silences” enter the process of creating history at four points: fact creation (sources), fact assembly (archiving); fact retrieval (narratives); and “the moment of retrospective significance” (history-making).²⁷⁶ The facts of Turner’s metaracist remembrance demonstrate how thoroughly the truth can be erased when silences enter the process at all four stages. In a particularly significant – and relevant – insight Manning Marable affirms that the “black intellectual tradition” offers the “reality of

– can produce metaracism. Metaracism is an impact greater than the sum of systemic racism’s parts.” Tricia Rose, *Metaracism: How Systemic Racism Devastates Black Lives-And How We Break Free* (New York: Basic Books, 2024), 7.

²⁷⁴ Elijah Wald, *Jelly Roll Blues: Censored Songs and Hidden Histories* (New York: Hachette Books, 2024), xiii.

²⁷⁵ Wald, *Jelly Roll Blues: Censored Songs and Hidden Histories*, 5.

²⁷⁶ Michel-Ralph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston MA: Beacon Press, 1995), 26.

black life and experiences” not just from the perspective of Black people but also from the “presumed centrality of black life.”²⁷⁷ The sources employed herein in the telling of this tragic tale offer recollections of both Black and White witnesses who created the historical account.

Although Ollie and Mattye’s coerced escape from Tennessee had a frightening impact on members of the Brownsville NAACP chapter, the group survived, continued to meet, and planned to register to vote in the 1940 presidential election. Since Black Haywood County residents had not been allowed to exercise their franchise since the late 1800s, they needed to ascertain the process required to become a registered voter. These middle-class “colored” professionals learned that, in the spring of 1940, the mere act of asking about the process of voter registration placed them on an extremely dangerous course.

On May 6, 1940, five NAACP members requested information about the registration process at the Haywood County registrar’s office. They were directed to the city judge who responded by interrogating them. He asked for the name of their committee. When told they were not committee members, the judge referred them to the chairman of the elections committee who was out of town that day and, therefore, unavailable. The NAACP members left after learning that the window for registration

²⁷⁷ Manning Marable, “Introduction: Black Studies and the Racial Mountain” from *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower* (2000),” in *Our History Has Always Been Contraband: In Defense of Black Studies*, ed. Colin Kaepernick, Robin D. G. Kelley, and Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2023), 158.

would not be open until August. Two of the men received a “friendly warning” from White acquaintances that “there would be trouble” for local “Negroes” if they tried to vote.

The day after the courthouse visit, Rev. Buster Walker, one of the men who had dared to request the voter registration information, was warned by a deputy that if the push to vote did not end “there would be trouble.”²⁷⁸ When Walker asked Brownsville



Some charter members of the Brownsville, Tenn., branch. This unit was formed on March 12, 1939. The present enrollment: Left to right, seated: William Williamson, vice-president; Mrs. Justine Harwell; Mrs. Roberta Davis; Mrs. Nannie Hil Bond, secretary; O. S. Bond, president; Mrs. Susie B. Taylor, Mrs. Irma L. Newbern, assistant secretary; Judson Taylor; L. V. Hill; Abe Harris. Back row, left to right: Elbert Williams; Alex Hill; Elisha Davis; Dr. L. D. Thomas; Dewitt Car Joseph Boone, treasurer; Walter Hilliard; Taylor Newbern; Thomas Davis; Silas Covington; Cashier Davis; and Rev. Bus.

Elbert Williams stands on the far left in this photograph of the charter members of Brownsville's NAACP chapter.

Figure 16 Brownsville Chapter of the NAACP, 1939

Mayor J. D. Borner for his advice about the effort of African American Brownsville residents to vote, the mayor agreed that they had the right to vote but acknowledged that “trash among my group” were upset about “colored people wanting to vote.”²⁷⁹ The mayor conceded that he could not guarantee the safety of Black activists. Whites opposed to the

²⁷⁸ Richard A. Couto, *Lifting the Veil: A political history of struggles for emancipation* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 131.

²⁷⁹ Couto, *Lifting the Veil: A political history of struggles for emancipation*, 131.

registration effort were so disturbed that someone attempted to recruit African Americans to spy on NAACP members and report what happened in their meetings.²⁸⁰

Three weeks later, racial tensions erupted. First, J. Emmett Ballard, an African American attorney from Jackson, arrived in Brownsville to defend a Black man accused of shooting a White constable. A White mob confronted Ballard telling him that they would not allow a “nigger” to practice law in their court. The sheriff escorted Ballard out of town and a White attorney was appointed in his place. Next, the reprisals against NAACP members escalated. In early June, members were denied credit in stores and banks where they had been longstanding patrons. A rumor circulated in the black community that Whites opened mail belonging to NAACP members or their associates to uncover the activists’ plans.²⁸¹

Before Turner’s first birthday, three of the five men who bravely inquired about the registration process in the spring of 1940 – Elisha Davis, Rev. Walker, and Taylor Newbern – were coerced to flee Brownsville by mid-June of that presidential election year.²⁸² Elisha Davis and his brothers, Casher and Thomas, were sons of a Black tradesman named Ike who earned a reliable income, owned land, and was the son of an unnamed, White father. Having a White father enabled Ike to borrow enough money to purchase land. Like Ollie Bond’s father (Andrew ‘Buck’ Bond), Ike voted in 1891. But as of 1940, his sons had never been allowed to register to vote. Ike Davis and Buck Bond

²⁸⁰ Couto, *Lifting the Veil: A political history of struggles for emancipation*, 133.

²⁸¹ Couto, *Lifting the Veil: A political history of struggles for emancipation*, 132.

²⁸² NAACP, "Press releases and news clippings on lynching and riot in Brownsville Tennessee," (1940), Collection of documents related to lynching of Elbert Williams, 30.
https://repository.library.northeastern.edu/downloads/neu:4f17tj27z?datastream_id=content.

shared some standing in the White community by having recent White (though unacknowledged) ancestors. White residents often deemed these African Americans the “good colored people.” Accordingly, the children of mixed-race parents were, at times, economically and professionally advantaged when compared to other Blacks. In 1940 Brownsville’s NAACP chapter was comprised primarily of those “good colored” folk: a physician, a mortician, a beautician, and teachers, nurses, housewives, even business owners. A particularly salient fact in the following narrative that remained in Turner’s memory throughout her life is that Elisha Davis, who operated a gas station, was a business owner just as Turner had to become after leaving Ike Turner to save her life and losing most of her intellectual and real property to him in the divorce. Elisha Davis’s story is a cautionary tale about how easily an African American could be forced to abandon his personal and business property to save his, and his family’s lives.

A group of White men responded to the inquiry NAACP members made about voter registration by initiating a series of frightening late-night inquisitions. On June 15, they could not find Rev. Walker when they visited his store because, having been warned of impending danger, he had already fled Brownsville and subsequently left Haywood County. Unsuccessful in their attempt to confront Walker, they decided to apprehend Elisha Davis. The White mob encountered Jack Adams, a young Black man, who was strolling with his sweetheart. They abducted Adams and compelled him to guide them to Davis’s home. Davis and his wife were awakened in the early morning hours of June 16, 1940, by the sound of banging on their front door. When he opened the door, Davis saw a mob of over fifty White men on his property. Armed with long poles used to drive cattle, two police officers and a local farm foreman barged into the Davis home and insisted that

Elisha put on his pants and go with them. Without being allowed time to put on his shoes, Davis was forced out of his home to a waiting car. His wife implored the men to say where they were taking her husband. A mob member replied that she would "... never see this black son-of-a-bitch again. We are going to kill him."²⁸³

But angry White men did not kill Davis that fateful night. They drove Davis and Adams several miles to the Forked Deer River Bottom to clandestinely question them about NAACP matters. Although Davis swore that Adams had no connection to the organization, the youth continued to be detained during Davis's interrogation. Some men threatened to kill Davis if he did not name NAACP members. Under duress, he gave names of a few members and revealed plans to mobilize the Black vote. Fortunately, Tom Freeman, a wealthy White man who had employed Elisha Davis when he was a child, sent the mob a warning - "don't hurt him." Dan Shaw, a local banker who was a friend of Elisha's White grandfather also told one of policemen not to allow the mob to hurt him. Eventually, the mob released Davis on the condition that he leave town immediately and warned that he would be killed if he ever returned. When he asked if he could go home to prepare for his departure his request was denied. Davis departed on foot in the middle of the night walking about nine miles before hitching a ride with two Black men who drove to a nearby town. Meanwhile, back at the river bottom, the mob "beat the snot out" of hapless Jack Adams.²⁸⁴

²⁸³ Couto, *Lifting the Veil: A political history of struggles for emancipation*, 135.

²⁸⁴ Couto, *Lifting the Veil: A political history of struggles for emancipation*, 135–36.

As the news of Elisha Davis's kidnapping spread through the Black community, so did the resultant disquietude. Elisha's wife and seven children were terrified. They fled their home, with nothing but the clothes they were wearing, and hid. Worried that he might be the mob's next victim, Elisha's brother, Casher walked out of town under cover of darkness and within a few days made his way to Newbern, a town almost fifty miles north of Brownsville. Having once witnessed the beating of a Black boy by Guy Harold, the White superintendent of the prison farm where Black convicts served their sentences, Casher feared the proclivity of angry Whites to use violence against innocent Blacks both inside and outside detention facilities. Superintendent Harold's violent behavior was so notorious that local acclaimed blues musician Sleepy John Estes memorialized a police officer and Superintendent Harold in the lyrics one of his tunes. In his song, Estes cautioned travelers in the area to avoid attention because "Billy Whitten [the police officer] will get you, Mr. Guy Harold will wear you out."²⁸⁵

Casher's fear of violence was well founded. Less than a week after the mob kidnapped Elisha, it reassembled. This time, Coca Cola plant manager Ed Lee, Casher's employer, was one of the kidnappers who arrived at the home of Thomas, another Davis brother, around 9:30pm on Thursday, June 20, 1940. Lee, policeman Tip Hunter (who was the sheriff-elect), and garage mechanic Milton Osborn drove Thomas to the home of laundry worker Elbert Williams who was the treasurer of the NAACP chapter.²⁸⁶ Williams was also a good friend of the former chapter president, Ollie Bond, who had fled

²⁸⁵ Richard A. Couto, "Narrative, Free Space, and Political Leadership in Social Movements," *The Journal of Politics* 55, no. 1 (1993): 68–69, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2132228>, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2132228>.

²⁸⁶ NAACP, "Press releases and news clippings on lynching and riot in Brownsville Tennessee," 8.

Brownsville six months earlier, on the previous Christmas Eve, due to threats of violence.²⁸⁷ The forced escapes of Bond and Elisha Davis from the area forewarned of the danger this late night visit held for Williams. At the Williams residence, Bob Dye, co-owner of the Pittman Automobile Company of Brownsville and police officer Charles Reed joined the three men who kidnapped Thomas. Wearing only pajama pants and a vest, Williams was forced out of his home and put in the car that held Thomas Davis. Williams's wife, Anne, heard Thomas ask her husband, Elisha, to tell them [the mob] "what you told me this afternoon."²⁸⁸ She surmised that Thomas was referring to the arrangement made with Elisha Davis for Elbert to re-open and operate the Davis filing station to support Elisha's family in his absence. Thomas and Elbert were taken to the police station and interrogated as a mob of nearly fifty White men gathered outside. After Officer Hunter released Thomas Davis, he became the third Davis brother to flee from Brownsville in the dark of night. Later, on that Thursday night, Anne Williams, Elbert's wife, went to the jail to bring him some clothes, and was told that Elbert was not there. When she returned Friday morning, the officer in charge said that he would be released after he answered their questions. Anne travelled to Jackson, TN to talk with Thomas Davis about what transpired after her husband was abducted from his home. Thomas contradicted the claim that Elbert was not in the jail when she inquired about her husband's whereabouts soon after his abduction. Thomas stated that when he was released Elbert was still in the jail.

²⁸⁷ Bond, "The Turning Point of My Life."

²⁸⁸ Atlanta Daily World, "Wife Gives Version Of Tennessee. Lynching, Names. Mob Characters," *Atlanta Daily World* (1932-) (Atlanta, Ga.), 07/05/1940 1940, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/wife-gives-version-tennessee-lynching-names-mob/docview/490626264/se-2?accountid=14512Well>

On Saturday, she sought help from the owner of Sunshine Laundry, the White man who employed Elbert and Annie Williams. Early Sunday morning, after nearly two and a half days of extreme trepidation, Mrs. Williams received a message from a Black undertaker. He told her to go to the Hatchee River where a fisherman had discovered a body. Although the coroner initially refused to remove the body from the water to prevent her from viewing it, Mrs. Williams' insistence that he do so prevailed.²⁸⁹ On the bank of the Hatchee, she barely recognized her husband Elbert's tortured body – his head swollen from beatings and his chest punctured on both sides by stabs or bullets. Elbert's arms and feet were bound and a rope around his neck was tied to a heavy log.²⁹⁰ Horrified and grief-stricken, Mrs. Williams fled Haywood County later that day.

Terror gripped the Haywood County Black community when they learned of Williams' fate. His childhood playmate Robert McElwee (grandson of the sole Black Haywood County elected state official, Samuel McElwee) had been alarmed by the White mob's procession of approximately twenty cars that had passed by his home on the night of the kidnapping.²⁹¹ Two days later, the undertaker who had contacted Mrs. Williams called McElwee and told him to dig a grave. Elbert Williams was buried with only two people - the gravediggers - in attendance. McElwee opined, "It was pretty sad. They cut his tongue out, cut his privates off and stuck them in his mouth."²⁹² McElwee's younger

²⁸⁹ Couto, *Lifting the Veil: A political history of struggles for emancipation*, 144.

²⁹⁰ Walter White, "Walter White to William McClanahan, July 1, 1940," in *Press releases and news clippings on lynching and riot in Brownsville Tennessee*, ed. NAACP (07/01/1940 1940), Collection of documents related to lynching of Elbert Williams, 3.
https://repository.library.northeastern.edu/downloads/neu:4f17tj27z?datastream_id=content.

²⁹¹ Couto, *Lifting the Veil: A political history of struggles for emancipation*, 147.

²⁹² Couto, *Lifting the Veil: A political history of struggles for emancipation*, 147.

sister was so frightened by the lynching that she couldn't sleep. McElwee mistakenly theorized that Williams' death was a consequence of disobeying his White boss's order to stop lending his car to the boss's daughter. Others suspected that Williams lost his temper or didn't back down while being interrogated during his abduction. Casher Davis surmised that Williams "got smart with one of the mob."²⁹³ Events that occurred after the murder suggested a more likely, and more common, intention was at play.

Another motive – the most palpable one in a setting where racism, fascism, and capitalism converge – elucidates the circumstances surrounding three occurrences: Williams's murder, the banishment of Elisha Davis and his family, and the dismissing of Mrs. Elisha Davis's request for permission from Sheriff R. C. Hawkins to reopen her husband's filling station.²⁹⁴ Elisha Davis told Casher that during his interrogation on June 15, he heard a policeman tell the mob, "Uncle Dan said 'Don't hurt him but get him out of town.'"²⁹⁵ Casher knew that "Uncle Dan" referred to the banker Dan Shaw, a friend of their deceased White grandfather. Two of the eight men standing on Davis's porch when he was kidnapped were Shaw's employees and two more were policemen. When he was released by the mob on the condition he left town, Davis asked if he could get some clothing from his home. That request was denied. Hence, no family member knew what had happened to him until the next day. A powerful person urgently wanted, and manipulated, Davis's banishment to take effect before he could discuss plans to care for his family and business. The next day, Davis notified his family that he was nearby in

²⁹³ Couto, *Lifting the Veil: A political history of struggles for emancipation*, 149.

²⁹⁴ NAACP, "Press releases and news clippings on lynching and riot in Brownsville Tennessee," 37.

²⁹⁵ Couto, *Lifting the Veil: A political history of struggles for emancipation*, 136.

Jackson. Just before his own abduction, Elbert Williams went to visit Davis and discuss an arrangement whereby Williams would lease Davis's gas station to restart income for the family. Upon his return to Brownsville, Williams had talked about this deal. On the night of his kidnapping, as he walked to the car that would take him from his home for the last time, Elisha's brother Thomas, called out from the back seat and implored Williams to tell his abductors about the business deal he made with Elisha. The two abductees were unaware of a crucial impediment to the implementation of the arrangement made to reopen Elisha's filling station. The sheriff had already confiscated Davis's equipment, ostensibly for nonpayment of a collateralized loan. When notified of this seizure, Davis stated unequivocally that he had not borrowed money to buy his equipment and owed no one for it. Nonetheless, within four weeks of his banishment, the sheriff had designated two White men to use the equipment and operate the filling station. Davis's family members were never compensated for the loss of their business, or for the real and personal property they were forced to abandon when the terrorized family fled Haywood County in the bed of a truck, "covered like fruit."²⁹⁶

There is a long history of the use of lynching and banishment to obscure the theft of property owned by successful Black Americans and to deny them the opportunity to exercise their civil rights. In 1901, when a group of White men publicly posted demands that African American Sterling Thompson leave Campbell County, Georgia and abandon his prospering farm, he refused to do so. Thompson was a prominent local politician in an era when Black men were being systematically disenfranchised across the South.

²⁹⁶ Couto, *Lifting the Veil: A political history of struggles for emancipation*, 149–50.

Soon after his noncompliance with the public command from local Whites, he was murdered, and his son was shot.²⁹⁷ In 1916, after a dispute over the price a White man offered to pay for his cotton crop, prosperous Black South Carolina farmer Anthony P. Crawford was threatened by ax-wielding store clerks, arrested for cursing a White man, beaten and stabbed by a White mob, then hanged from a tree. According to University of North Carolina historian Loren Schweninger, well-to-do African Americans “lived with a gnawing fear ... that White neighbors could at any time do something violent and take everything away from them.”²⁹⁸ Walter F. White, president of the NAACP, opined that lynching was due more to White fear of African American economic progress than to Black crime. He noted that the economic advancement of Blacks was “one of the most active stimulants of race hatred.”²⁹⁹ Sociologist Arthur Raper, who was one of the first White Southern scholars to examine the sources and triggers of racial violence, wrote that Black economic success “further embittered the propertyless Whites who openly begrudged the Negroes any evidence of accumulated savings or regular employment.”³⁰⁰ Raper reported that in 1930, when a White mob burned “Negro properties” after emptying the buildings of all their valuables in Sherman, Texas, African Americans believed that

²⁹⁷ Amy Kate Bailey and Stewart E. Tolnay, *Lynched : The Victims of Southern Mob Violence*, UPCC Book Collections on Project MUSE, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 119–20. <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=ef06803e-b9d2-3ec8-8d76-bb727b3d4070>.

²⁹⁸ Dolores Barclay, Todd Lewan, and Allen G. Breed, "Prosperity Made Blacks a Target for Land Grabs; History: Specter of lynching boosted impact of lesser threats. Series: Second in a weekly series: [Bulldog Edition]," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, Calif.), 12/09/2001 Dec 09 2001, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/prosperity-made-blacks-target-land-grabs-history/docview/421684675/se-2?accountid=14512>.

²⁹⁹ Bailey and Tolnay, *Lynched : The Victims of Southern Mob Violence*, 122.

³⁰⁰ Arthur F. Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933), 340. <https://archive.org/details/tragedyoflynchin0000rape/page/340/mode/2up>.

the mob leaders coveted their displaced and stolen valuables . Given the repeated evidence of the fragility of Black property ownership throughout the South, Brownsville's African American residents could conclude that Williams' lynching was one component of the scheme by local Whites – including law enforcement officers – to embezzle Elisha Davis's properties while simultaneously halting the registration of African American voters. Although these events occurred during Turner's infancy, she remembered the account late in her life as she authored her final memoir – a book she intended to be a handbook for manifesting happiness. Her understanding that African American business owners who achieved enviable status, economic stability, and entrepreneurial success faced peril in the United States buttressed Turner's eventual decision to emigrate to Europe with her fortune. In the wake of the lynching and the exile of these Brownsville families, apprehension permeated Turner's local Black community in the years following her birth.

Terror's Residuum

In late June 1940, African Americans in Haywood County were fearful as they dealt with new race-based restrictions and dangers. Elbert Williams's classmate, Robert McElwee, had been frightened by the caravan of cars carrying the White mob. A few days later, when he and his brother prepared Williams' grave the terrified community kept clear of the burial. McElwee reported, "The only people there at the cemetery were us that

opened the grave.”³⁰¹ Although the victims of the recent tragic events were Black and the perpetrators were White, the African American community was scapegoated when Brownsville police instituted a curfew for Blacks. Local law enforcement attempted to isolate Brownsville African Americans by posting officers on highways to prevent non-resident Blacks from entering town.³⁰² Black families reacted with quiet determination to protect themselves. Some stockpiled weapons and kept handguns in their cars. Parents instructed Black children to stay close to their home. All but one of the officers of the Brownsville NAACP chapter fled town. But leaving Brownsville did not quell their fear. While living in Newbern, a town fifty miles from Brownsville, Casher Davis spent the next year nervously checking cars to see if they had Haywood County license plates.³⁰³ Fearing reprisals against her family, local NAACP Secretary Irma Newbern was uneasy in her home at night. She wrote to NAACP Secretary Walter White to request that the national office halt all correspondence to her address because she believed NAACP correspondence would be opened and read before it was delivered.³⁰⁴ Understanding that they needed assistance to safeguard their community, Black residents called upon the NAACP’s national headquarters and the federal government to take up their struggle.

During the 1930s, African Americans were heartened by President Roosevelt’s statements about minority civil rights and by the First Lady’s efforts to advocate on their behalf. In 1933 - the year Ollie and Mattye Bond lost their home to arson for the first time

³⁰¹ Couto, *Lifting the Veil: A political history of struggles for emancipation*, 146–47.

³⁰² NAACP, "Press releases and news clippings on lynching and riot in Brownsville Tennessee," 10.

³⁰³ 151Couto, *Lifting the Veil: A political history of struggles for emancipation*.

³⁰⁴ Bond, "Race, Place, and Family: Narratives of the Civil Rights Movement in Brownsville, Tennessee, and the Nation," 70–71.

- competition for jobs was exacerbating racial tensions and contributing to an increasing number of attacks against African Americans by the Ku Klux Klan. Although Black Americans did not benefit much from early New Deal policies, they heard Roosevelt repeatedly affirm his commitment to the social welfare of all Americans and denounce the terrifying practice of lynching. After a “frenzied mob of 3,000 men, women, and children” routed fifty Maryland State Troopers to capture and lynch African American George Armwood in October 1933, the NAACP asked Roosevelt to condemn lynching. A month later, two White men were awaiting trial in San Jose, California for kidnapping and murdering the son of a wealthy department store owner. A vigilante mob hanged the White suspects, and subsequently, President Roosevelt publicly denounced the practice of lynching. Speaking in a national radio broadcast to an assembly representing twenty-five Christian denominations on December 6, 1933 Roosevelt argued that lynching is “murder, and a deliberate and definite disobedience of the Commandment, ‘Thou shalt not kill.’”³⁰⁵ In the January 1934 issue of NAACP’s *Crisis*, W.E.B. Du Bois opined that the President’s remarks “give us hope.”³⁰⁶ Americans who learned of President Roosevelt’s statements were justified in feeling optimistic that the heinous murderous practice would finally be opposed, and eventually prohibited, by federal government actions.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “Address before the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America,” ed. White House (1933). <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-before-the-federal-council-churches-christ-america>.

³⁰⁶ W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, “Postscript,” *The Crisis*, 1934, 20, https://archive.org/details/sim_crisis_1934-01_41_1/page/20/mode/2up?q=%22lynching+is+murder%22.

³⁰⁷ Kelley and Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew: Volume II: A History of African Americans Since 1880*: 2, 2, 133.

In the mid-1930s, Roosevelt seemed to recognize the value of an interracial alliance of voters when his administration appointed over forty African Americans to New Deal agencies. Thereafter, Black Americans began to benefit from New Deal job opportunities and from educational and social programs. This group of advisors, known as the “Black Cabinet,” collaborated with Eleanor Roosevelt on issues of concern to the African American community. As her friendships with NAACP Executive Secretary Walter White and with other Black leaders developed, the First Lady publicly increased her support for the respect and protection of minority civil rights.³⁰⁸ In February 1939 Attorney General Frank Murphy created the Civil Liberties Unit in the Criminal Division of the Department of Justice and reorganized staffing to enable the investigation of civil rights violations. In a commencement address, Murphy explained that this new unit received daily letters containing claims of civil rights violations by local authorities. “We hear of municipal officials aiding in the provocation of race conflict, even though government in a democracy is intended to be for all and not just some of the people.”³⁰⁹ The Roosevelt Administration seemed to be aware of, and concerned about, the civil rights of all Americans in 1939, the year of Turner’s birth.

Hopeful African American activists in Haywood County decided to exercise their right to vote in the next presidential election so the Brownsville chapter of the NAACP began a voter registration drive. Casher Davis explained:

³⁰⁸ Kelley and Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew: Volume II: A History of African Americans Since 1880*: 2, 2, 140.

³⁰⁹ Frank Murphy, “The Meaning of Civil Liberty,” (Jersey City, NJ, 1939_06_21 1939). <https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/ag/legacy/2011/09/16/06-21-1939.pdf>.

Now NAACP, we thought wasn't all that bad. At that time, we didn't think it was beyond our place...Our good white friend told Eli [Elisha], "Hang in there, Eli. Hell, we'll help you." We kind of thought that we were leading Negroes and that if anything was to be done that was what we ought to do. We thought we were working with the white community to do something.³¹⁰

Prior to the frightening events of June 1940, Brownsville African Americans were optimistic that their right to vote would be respected. When they realized that certain local authorities were complicit in the Williams murder and in the expulsion of NAACP members from their homes and businesses, the Haywood County Black community looked to national leaders and federal law enforcement for protection. The NAACP acted as an intermediary for these African Americans and communicated their grievances and appeals nationwide.

NAACP members and staff responded quickly in support of the Brownsville minority community. Before Elisha Davis was abducted and expelled from his hometown on June 15, leaders in the national office had been advised that the Brownsville Black community faced threats of reprisals for organizing a local NAACP branch. Member Milmon Mitchell of nearby Jackson, TN wrote to NAACP Secretary White on June 13 to inform leaders in New York that "the Colored Citizens in Brownsville are now crying like children in the wilderness" and awaiting assistance from the civil rights group regarding a number of concerns triggered by the effort to establish a local chapter.³¹¹ White employers fired Black employees. Banks and stores refused to extend credit to NAACP members.³¹²

³¹⁰ Couto, *Lifting the Veil: A political history of struggles for emancipation*, 140.

³¹¹ Couto, *Lifting the Veil: A political history of struggles for emancipation*, 132.

³¹² Dan Biddle and Sara Rimer, "The History of Violent Opposition to Black Political Participation," (08_13_2024). [eji.org/news/the-history-of-violent-opposition-to-black-political-participation/](https://www.eji.org/news/the-history-of-violent-opposition-to-black-political-participation/).

On June 21, the morning after Thomas Davis and Williams were abducted, Mitchell informed the NAACP headquarters about the crime and pleaded for immediate assistance.

The NAACP leadership responded quickly and issued press releases that placed the Brownsville debacle in the national discourse. Although African American newspapers across the nation covered the story, mainstream White-owned newspapers ignored it. In an article published five days after the discovery of Williams's body, the Memphis Sentinel ("Owned and Published in Memphis by Memphis Negroes") reported that African Americans were missing and a grand jury special session was scheduled for August 12, 1940. The NAACP notified high ranking government officials of the ongoing oppression of Brownsville's Black residents. Marshall Tip Hunter, who abducted Davis and Williams in the dark of night, was serving as Sheriff of Haywood County on September 1, 1940 even though the NAACP sent his name, with the names of other mob members, to the Department of Justice and President Roosevelt on July 1.³¹³

After local authorities failed to hold anyone responsible for the Williams murder, the NAACP continued to request that the state and federal government act in the case. Attorney Thurgood Marshall repeatedly contacted Department of Justice officials requesting justice for Williams. On September 3, the NAACP sent the Department of Justice a telegram requesting protection for Black Brownsville residents who wanted to

³¹³ NAACP, "F.D.R. Sent Mob's Names," *Crisis*, 09/1940, 1940, 291, <https://books.google.com/books?id=HIsEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA291&dq=john+rogge+elbert+williams&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiyw4q6-KSGAxXWM0QIHQJJAQgQ6AF6BAgEEAI#v=onepage&q=john%20rogge%20elbert%20williams&f=false>.

register to vote. Based on the reply from Assistant Attorney General O. John Rogge, on September 13, the NAACP issued a press release announcing that Brownsville chapter members were able to register at the courthouse with the protection of U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Tennessee William McClanahan who acted at the behest of the Department of Justice. African American newspapers across the nation reported the good news.³¹⁴ However, the NAACP received letters disputing Rogge's report by stating that no African Americans registered in Brownsville in September 1940. Three months after the Williams murder, Brownsville's Black community was still terrified by the threat of racial violence.³¹⁵ The ominous cloud of oppression had not lifted, and it continued to haunt Brownsville long enough for young Turner to discover the Williams lynching.

³¹⁴ California Eagle, "Tennessee Voters Register Under U.S. Protection," *California Eagle* (Los Angeles), 1940/09/19 1940, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/692880761/>.

³¹⁵ NAACP, "FBI Says It Protected Brownsville Citizens," *Crisis*, October, 1940, 324, <https://books.google.com/books?id=7FoEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA324&dq=%22fbi+says+it+protected+browns+ville+citizens&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwil-ebO-6SGAxXoC0QIHe2SBCAQ6AF6BAGgEAAI#v=onepage&q=%22fbi%20says%20it%20protected%20brown+sville%20citizens&f=false>.

Chapter 6 Tina Turner – Transformation

“She sang like her life depended on it.” *Rose Marie McCoy*

**“You don’t treat me tender no matter what I do. But I’m the great pretender.”
 (“Ask Me How I Feel,” *Foreign Affair*, 1989)**

Tina Turner habitually reinvented herself in search of her personal and professional goals. Born into hostile familial and cultural environments, during her childhood and teenage years she felt emotionally detached from many of the people around her. She maintained an energetic persona at home and school even though she felt that family members and some in the local White community treated her as if she were an outsider or inferior. Young Anna Mae Bullock renewed her energy, confidence, and faith by spending time in nature. She developed her creativity by reenacting scenes from movies viewed at the movie theater and by singing in the church choir. But she was born and raised in a deeply racist environment. The chronic terror of fascistic oppression eventually made its way to her doorstep.

Turner was a very young girl when she became personally acquainted with the intimidation that Sheriff Tip Hunter promulgated throughout the Black community in Haywood County. In her first memoir, she recalled a frightening experience that took place when she was living with her paternal grandparents. She saw two White men standing at the door, “looking down at us.”³¹⁶ Sheriff Tip Hunter and his brother Deputy Sheriff Jack Hunter came to the Bullock home to arrest Turner’s Uncle Gill who was

³¹⁶ Turner and Loder, *I, Tina*, 15–16.

wanted for the murder of another Black man. Tip Hunter was the ringleader of the White men who abducted Elisha Davis and Elbert Williams in 1940. He and two of his brothers established their authoritarian control over the county for more than four decades. Tip and Jack Hunter used a power-wielding strategy like that employed by Vladimir Putin who was Russia's acting president in 1999, served two terms as president, then circumvented the constitutional term limit by serving as Prime Minister to a puppet president until he could once again be elected to the top position in the government. In the Haywood County version of anti-democratic authoritarianism, Tip served as a peace officer from 1922 until his first election as sheriff in 1928.³¹⁷ He was elected to that position nine times between 1928 and 1964. His brother, Jack Hunter, served as deputy sheriff during Tip's tenure as sheriff from 1940 to 1946. Then when Jack was elected sheriff from 1946 to 1952 and from 1958 to 1959, Tip was Jack's deputy sheriff. When Jack was killed in 1959, Tip once again became Sheriff and served until 1966. The two men who between them held the top two law enforcement positions in Haywood County for four decades, stood before young Anna Mae Bullock on that day. Decades later, she wrote about the incident:

One was short and blond, sort of German-looking. The other was big and fat. We knew about the Hunters. Everybody did. They broke up so many corn-whiskey places around that area - I mean, these guys kicked ass. And now here they were looking for Uncle Gill. We were so afraid.³¹⁸

Turner's fear was warranted. Tip Hunter seemed to be invincible and dangerous. Although witnesses described the White mobs who abducted the Davis brothers and

³¹⁷ The Jackson Sun, "Sheriff Hunter Re-Elected In Brownsville," *The Jackson Sun* (Jackson, TN), 1963_08_02 1963, https://www.newspapers.com/image-view/282623288/?match=1&clipping_id=new.

³¹⁸ Turner and Loder, *I, Tina*, 16.

Elbert Williams in sworn depositions and newspaper accounts, Tip Hunter's denial of the existence of mobs in a local White owned newspaper's article was accepted as the truth. He claimed that Williams and another "Negro" were "picked up and held for questioning by city police" on June 20, the night Williams disappeared. Hunter stated, "I turned them loose and they both walked away from the station unmolested. I didn't see anything that looked like a lynching party, either White or colored."³¹⁹ Despite the accounts of Black witnesses to the contrary, Hunter's word, quite literally, was law.

Turner knew that the Brownsville community was aware of Tip Hunter's oftentimes cruel behavior. His participation in the violence directed at Elisha Davis, Tommy Davis, and Elbert Williams in 1940 was common knowledge in Haywood County. Another newsworthy incident corroborated his reputation for brutality. In 1932, Ernest Shaw shot Hunter during a gun battle in which a police officer was killed. Shaw spent ten years in prison for the murder of the policeman. Several years after Shaw's release, in 1946 while serving as Deputy Sheriff, Hunter fatally shot Ernest Shaw under suspicious circumstances. The only witness to the shooting was his brother, Officer Millard Hunter, who stated that while they were trying to serve a warrant to search Shaw's house, Shaw seemed to reach for a gun. In response, and supposedly in self-defense, Tip Hunter fatally shot Shaw. The subsequent investigation provoked doubt about the official story told about the incident because no gun was found near Shaw. If Shaw, a White man, died unfairly, Black folks in Haywood County understood that being in the crosshairs of the

³¹⁹ The Jackson Sun, "Lynched Negro Questioned Prior to Disappearance," *The Jackson Sun* (Jackson, TN), 1940_06_28 1940, https://www.newspapers.com/image-view/281963491/?match=1&clipping_id=new.

Hunter brothers authoritarian law enforcement tag-team was extremely dangerous. Furthermore, the vicious racism ubiquitous throughout the county unreasonably limited the options, opportunities, and civil liberties of its Black residents. In such an environment, the necessity to ‘pretend’ - to hide one’s authentic self behind a protective mask to survive injustices – becomes second nature. This practice permeated the Black community. Turner reported that Whites were friendly as long as “Blacks knew their place” but there was always “a tinge of fear.”³²⁰ In addition to the cultural pressure to conform and the clear message of rejection issued by the dominant White power structure and community of Haywood County, young Turner also endured a more personal repudiation, particularly pernicious because it came from close members of her family.

Even in her earliest recollections, Turner felt unwanted and unloved by her parents. She experienced “alienation, rejection,” and “could not communicate” with her mother



Figure 17 Turner and father, Floyd Richard Bullock

Zelma, whom Turner dearly loved. Her father Richard Bullock “didn’t seem to want me around.”³²¹ Zelma and Richard were not happily married. Turner and her older sister, Alline, endured disharmony, tension and witnessed domestic violence at home. Her parents



Figure 18 Alline, Tina, and Zelma

demonstrated their love for Alline. But Turner felt that they merely tolerated her. Zelma was trying to leave Richard when she became pregnant in 1939. Turner opined that had

³²⁰ Turner and Loder, *I, Tina*, 9.

³²¹ Turner and Loder, *I, Tina*, 10.

she been born a few decades later, her mother might have chosen to have an abortion instead of giving birth to another child. Sadly, Turner endured another deeply hurtful affront by those adults from whom she needed love and support. Turner's paternity was questioned by her father's side of the family. Her skin was lighter than her parents' and sister's, and Turner believed that uncertainty about her paternity may have been the reason her father's relatives "never cared" for her.³²² In 1942, when she was two years old, her parents isolated Turner from her sister Aline as they went to work at a Manhattan Project plant near Knoxville, TN. Aline was sent to live with her maternal grandparents; Turner was sent to her paternal grandparents' home for nearly two years. This was the first of several times she felt abandoned by her mother and father. Finally, after several attempts to leave her husband had failed, Zelma successfully relocated to St. Louis, Missouri in 1950, abandoning both her daughters. Once more, Turner was sent to live with her father's parents. Their suspicion of her paternity and her grandmother's strict Baptist religiosity created an uncomfortable living situation for the sensitive, creative pre-teen. Two years after Turner's mother left Tennessee, her father migrated to Detroit. Turner recalled, "Here I was, thirteen years old, with no mother, and now my father was gone too."³²³ Turner moved into a cousin's home and became "a real loner."³²⁴ She detailed her parents' abandonment:

You see, after my parents left, there was never any contact with either of them. When my mother left us, she didn't send back money for food or clothes or anything, not a card or a letter. And when Daddy left, it was pretty much the same...he sent money to Cousin Ella Vera [who took care of

³²² Turner and Loder, *I, Tina*, 11.

³²³ Turner and Loder, *I, Tina*, 27.

³²⁴ Turner and Loder, *I, Tina*, 28.

Turner] for a while, but it wasn't a lot. So we were forced to become independent.

Absent financial support from her parents, Tina needed an income. She had already earned money by singing on the street, picking cotton, and harvesting strawberries.³²⁵ She also earned money in an extremely unconventional and humiliating fashion. According to her cousin Joe Melvin Currie, White people occasionally offered him and his friend "a quarter each" to fight for thirty to forty minutes. When he became tired, his tomboy cousin Anna Mae would take over for him.³²⁶ This practice is the basis of the most frequently cited scene from *Invisible Man*. Howard Rambsy II wrote that it is "a powerful metaphor for how White people sometimes incline African Americans to harm themselves for the benefit of others."³²⁷ Turner's efforts to become self-sufficient eventually provided a steady income and introduced her to a more harmonious and attractive way of life when she took a job with a local White family.

During Turner's childhood she experienced two opposing examples of family life. Her parents' home was usually unhappy, and too often, violent. But she encountered an inspiring example of home life when she began working as a housekeeper for the Hendersons. Turner was delighted that Connie Henderson needed household help and offered to pay Turner the same rate that she would have earned working in the cotton fields. Turner accepted the job and later affirmed that the Hendersons "changed my

³²⁵ Turner and Loder, *I, Tina*, 23.

³²⁶ Joe Melvin Currie, "Headliners and Legends Tina Turner," interview by Matt Lauer, *Headliners and Legends*, Video, 2000_06_21, 1998, <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x4in6n0>.

³²⁷ Howard Rambsy II, "Battle Royal Scene From Invisible Man," *Black Lit Network* (2024). <https://blacklitnetwork.org/glossary/battle-royal-scene-from-invisible-man>.

life.”³²⁸ Mr. and Mrs. Henderson welcomed Turner into their home so warmly that she began staying with them over the weekends. Turner witnessed a loving, affectionate marriage for the first time in her life. Also, she discovered what she called “this other world – the White world, I guess – with magazines and books and culture.”³²⁹ She realized that she yearned for “that kind of affection and caring and commitment” that the Hendersons enjoyed.³³⁰ This teenaged Black girl, living in a chronically hostile Southern culture that typically discouraged egalitarian interracial bonds, found that kindness, love, and warmth could dissolve imaginary racial barriers.

Turner’s experience with abandonment informed her promise to Ike that she would not abandon him. Even when leaving him and his violent abuse would have been in her self-interest, she attempted to protect him. There is a correlation between warm, responsive parenting and a child’s positive self-esteem. People who feel loved and appreciated during their childhood experience less depression and anxiety in early adulthood than those who felt unloved.³³¹ Turner’s response to her parents’ inability to provide sustained emotional in her youth contributed to a delay in the development of a strong sense of self-worth as a young adult. Her tolerance of Ike’s domestic abuse for almost two decades – abuse so severe that she endured chronic depression and eventually attempted suicide – provides evidence of a delayed awareness of her self-

³²⁸ Turner and Loder, *I, Tina*, 29.

³²⁹ Turner and Loder, *I, Tina*, 29.

³³⁰ Turner and Loder, *I, Tina*, 30.

³³¹ Eva Neumann and Elke Rohmann, "Attachment-based retrospective classifications of parental caregiving in childhood related to psychological well-being and mental health in young adults," *Current Psychology* 43, no. 5 (2024/02/01 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-04621-1>, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-04621-1>.

worth that crystallized when she courageously declared her independence from Ike on July 3, 1976, when she was thirty-six years old. This arising of *amour de soi* eventually led to a healthy marriage and fueled her drive to phenomenal success as a solo artist. The stark differences between the unhappiness she felt in her parents' household and the happiness she experienced in the Henderson home suggested to an emotionally sensitive and vulnerable youngster that exploring and living in the White world might just have advantages beyond financial stability. That insight influenced the career choices that eventually led her to stardom. But first she had to develop inner strength and courage.

“I remember the girl in the fields with no name. She had a love ...” (“I Might Have Been Queen,” *Private Dancer*, 1984)

Turner worked assiduously to raise her confidence and self-esteem when she encountered and adopted Buddhism. She became intrigued with Buddhist chanting in 1973 when she was thirty-four years old. During a three-month period, three different people suggested that she try Buddhist chanting to “change her life.” Since this message came to her from three separate unrelated sources, she felt that the advice was significant and should be followed.³³² She started her exploration of Buddhism by reading the writings of Daisaku Ikeda, the third president of the Soka Gakkai, a religious organization founded in Japan in 1930. Soka Gakkai based its doctrine on the teachings of the Japanese Buddhist priest Nichiren. Of particular interest to Turner was the concept of Ten Worlds which describes internal life conditions that must be consciously examined to build

³³² Turner, Gold, and Curti, *Happiness Becomes You: a guide to changing your life for good*, 18–19.

success and happiness. The worlds are organized from lowest to highest. There are six lower paths that are dependent on impermanent external factors and four higher paths which are manifested through conscious inner effort. She described the lowest four worlds describe negative mindsets: *Hell* (suffering, despair); *Hunger* (controlled by desires); *Animality* (ruled by instinctive behaviors); and *Anger* (ego attachments, conflict, arrogance). The next two in the hierarchy from lowest to highest are *Tranquility* (relative calm) and *Heaven* (transitory elation derived from gratification of a desire). The four higher paths are also called the “noble paths.” The seventh and eighth paths seek truth through *Learning* (from others) and *Realization* (from inner work). The highest paths are *Bodhisattva* (aspiring to, and helping others achieve, enlightenment) and *Buddhahood* (unity with the universal life force, happiness, freedom).³³³ Turner attributed the realization that her level of self-esteem was low, that she was in denial about her own worth, and that she was handing over her own power to others to her discovery of the concept of the Ten Worlds and to her study and practice of Buddhism which included the daily chanting of the phrase “nam-myoho-rence-kyo.”³³⁴ Her personal and professional metamorphosis from shrinking violet to diva is illuminated by comparing several recordings she made early in her career with Ike to some she made later as a solo artist.

Throughout her career as a performer, Turner exuded an openness often experienced by fans as authenticity. She seemed to pour her soul into the singing so unreservedly that audiences spontaneously responded with the willing suspension of

³³³ Turner, Gold, and Curti, *Happiness Becomes You: a guide to changing your life for good*, 26–27.

³³⁴ Turner, Gold, and Curti, *Happiness Becomes You: a guide to changing your life for good*, 21.

disbelief required to empathize. Like Flip Wilson's alter-ego, Geraldine, who in the late 1960s was the network television archetype of an assertive, *uber*-confident Black woman, Turner also imparted a "what you see is what you get" persona. Close reading of two hit singles, the plaintive "Poor Fool" (1961) and the defiant "Better Be Good To Me" (1984), will demonstrate her evolution into an independent, solo artist. The differences between these two phases of her work are evident. In her early recordings, Tina's voice – and the storylines of the songs Ike chose to record – often communicated either victimhood/vulnerability or anger/distress. In "A Fool in Love" Turner is a naïve sufferer; in "Poor Fool" she plays the resentful lover.

Even early on, the messages conveyed in songs written by Ike Turner differ markedly from those in songs written by others, especially women. Between two products of Ike's predilection for disempowered women, was a much warmer and optimistic take on relationships. This second hit, a duet called "I Think It's Gonna Work Out Fine," was written by Rose Marie McCoy and Sylvia McKinney. (McKinney was actually Sylvia Robinson, the guitarist/vocalist who partnered with Mickey Baker to form the pop duo Mickey & Sylvia, known for their 1957 hit single "Love is Strange.") McCoy recalled that, at first, she did not like her song much but was surprised and excited when Ike ordered Turner to sing it in an *a capella* audition for the songwriters held backstage during the Turners' engagement at the Apollo Theater in New York. McCoy remembered, "She didn't say a word but she sang. She sang like her life depended on it."³³⁵

³³⁵ All About Jazz, "Music Legend Rose Marie McCoy To Receive Honor," *All About Jazz* (2008_04_13 2008). <https://www.allaboutjazz.com/news/music-legend-rose-marie-mccoy-to-receive-honor/>.

Written by women from a woman's perspective, the song paints a markedly different picture of male-female relationship, expressing optimism about an equal, loving relationship destined to be successful.³³⁶ The story begins with the female singer's confession that she is falling in love and wants to marry the man she is singing to; although he used to be called "Dapper Dan" and had been a ladies' man, now she will be all he needs. Although taken aback by her interest in marriage, the man does not reject her. These playfully romantic lyrics are supported by an upbeat blend of R&B and rock & roll, and a distinctive, syncopated guitar riff (with tremolo) that repeats through the song over an eighth-note groove. The female background voices are increasingly drenched in reverb during the outro as Tina boldly effuses, in a raspy, vocal timbre reminiscent of James Brown, that this relationship will work. She projects an effusive confidence - in herself and her relationship - that is in marked contradistinction to the dejection expressed by the plaintive woman who sings in the songs written by Ike.

Like most of the songs Ike wrote for their first two albums, "Poor Fool" depicts a woman in crisis. It was the third single (on their second album, *Dynamite!*), to reach two *Billboard* charts: Hot R&B Sides and Hot 100 charts. Like "A Fool in Love," it begins with a spoken prologue to the typical verse-chorus pattern that sets up the storyline. "A Fool in Love" opened with Turner begging her backup singers to tell her what might be wrong with her relationship; in "Poor Fool" Turner is openly hostile: "I want to tell all of you that ain't doin' nothin' for me, and can't do nothing for me, you should tend to your business and leave mine alone." She is on the defensive about her rocky relationship with "her"

³³⁶ See Appendix B

man. As before, the background vocals confirm that Turner is fooling herself, retorting, “you’ve been a fool too long.”

“Poor Fool” is one of many Ike and Tina tracks that depict a beleaguered female protagonist. Eleven of the twelve tracks on *The Soul of Ike and Tina Turner* (1961), their first studio album, are songs about painful, unrequited love (“I Idolize You,” “If,” “Sleepless,” “A Letter from Tina,” “You’re My Baby,” “The Way You Love Me,” “Chances Are,” “A Fool in Love”) and jealousy (“I’m Jealous,” “You Can’t Love Two,” “You Can’t Blame Me”). The one tune in which the lyrics suggest that Turner’s romantic partner has a positive effect on her life is “I Had a Notion;” it was also the only song definitively credited to a songwriter other than Ike. But even this song begins with Turner singing that she was desperately unhappy and on the verge of jumping “into the ocean” until her knight in shining armor found her and persuaded her to change her mind. “Whaaa, but my baby came along and he convinced me I was wrong.”

Turner’s élan vital, constrained and diminished in this early album with Ike, was liberated and powerful in the works she produced as a solo artist. “Better Be Good to Me” (*Private Dancer*, 1984) is a prime example of the way Tina Turner reclaimed her power.³³⁷ Turner was at the peak of her professional power in the United States in 1985 when she garnered three Grammy awards for tunes from her *What’s Love Got to Do With It* album. Although the title song won two high-profile Grammys (Best Pop Vocal, Female and Record of the Year), her most telling, and arguably most personally significant, win was Best Rock Vocal Performance, Female for “Better Be Good to Me.” Evidently Tina had

³³⁷ See Appendix E for “Better Be Good to Me” lyrics.

been right to combine her rhythm and blues origins with her love of rock, despite the commonly held sexist belief that the two genres were too dissimilar to fuse into a popular music vocal style, *especially* for a woman.

“Better Be Good to Me” earned the first of four Grammys that Turner won in the rock vocal category – a feat that tied Pat Benatar’s record and was later matched by just one other female artist, Sheryl Crow. The song’s official video opens with Turner staring directly into the camera. Her facial expression communicates seriousness and determination. In the next frame, a marquee at “The Beverly” (invoking the wealth and status of Beverly Hills) announces Turner’s show is “Sold Out” in large red letters implying that she is popular, successful, and therefore, someone to be reckoned with. (She would indeed sell out the (admittedly small) venue two months later.) Before she performs, the message has already been conveyed that this is a formidable woman who is comfortable and in charge of her life.

The music begins just as forcefully with the bang of a piano chord, a drum fill, and cymbal crash introducing a driving sixteenth note introductory groove. A shadow of Turner holding her arms and hands up cat-like in front of a bright moon is followed by a graphic of a fearsome yellow-eyed, red-tongued tiger. Both images suggest the danger of crossing paths with Turner, the tigress. The music settles into a quarter-note groove as Turner admits to being “A prisoner of your love entangled in your web” who is “captured” by her partner’s “spell.” This might have been the opening for yet another song about the torture of unrequited love for an abusive man, but Turner’s insistent vocal tone and body language tell a different story. Dressed in black leather, the paradigmatic “rock and roll” attire, Turner exudes power, authority, and a rebellious freedom as she demands to be

treated *right*. Many of Turner's followers knew about her recurring battles for respect and consideration, so the lyrical content was openly reminiscent of the trials she faced in many of her previous recordings. Having played the victim so often in her early (Ike) years, in her solo career her frame of mind was strengthened by an awareness and acceptance of personal power. During the early years with Ike, Turner pleaded for mercy through the lyrics she sang, relinquishing her physical and emotional sovereignty to another person. Often this person was portrayed as an insensitive lover. By 1984, forty-four-year-old Turner had claimed her professional power and was involved in the first long-term personal relationship in which she felt seen and appreciated. Her personal growth in the areas of self-awareness, self-esteem, self-respect are reflected in the demeanor of the woman commanding that her lover "better be good to me." *Amour de soi* prevails!

Epilogue

In an undated video interview, Tina acknowledges that she wanted to emulate Sam Cooke's style and recalled seeing and meeting him. Tina and an Ikette attended Cooke's performance at Washington's Howard Theater. She was so "mesmerized" by his "cool" demeanor that she had to be prevented from walking onto the stage. She recalled meeting him later at a hotel in Miami.

He was swimming and he came over and sat down and talked to me and that was very special because I didn't even know that Sam Cooke knew me. Still don't know if he knew me. I just think he was being nice, you know, as some people can see if someone is sad or something. And I was very sad at the time. And he sat down. He made my week. It was so great! ... but the sad thing is two weeks later, a month later I heard of his death. Really, so I had that moment of seeing him on stage, of him sitting

and talking with me poolside, *making me happy*, and then he left the planet.³³⁸

³³⁸ Proud Nutbush, *Tina Turner talks about meeting her idol, Sam Cooke. Then hearing of his death two weeks later* (2011).

Conclusion

Soul music crossed the color line in the middle decades of the 20th century when the struggle for non-White Americans to enjoy equal opportunities and rights was already decades old. The Civil Rights Movement made significant progress toward the goals of equality and integration between the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) that prohibited segregation in schools and the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (Fair Housing Act) that attempted to end discrimination in housing. Both federal actions united Americans across racial lines in a new way. It was during this period that Sam Cooke, Aretha Franklin, and Tina Turner began their professional singing careers, took a leap of faith, and brought gospel traditions to secular music. Their innate talents, their devoted years of hard work developing music skills and learning the entertainment business, and their courage in confronting the dangers of the industry, contributed mightily to their successes. An unflinching belief in their worthiness – *amour de soi* - was a key factor that sustained them as they created an exciting new musical genre called “soul.” After Cooke pioneered “soul” in the late 1950s by creating a sound and a persona that attracted crossover fandom, Franklin’s emotional vocables and masterful gospel riffs continued to popularize the genre. At Turner’s mid-life transformation, after her acceptance of Buddhist philosophy, she applied her soul roots to the rock genre that she dearly loved and created a soul-rock subgenre that captivated the world.

In the Sixties, as American culture hastened its advance toward its stated political goals of equality and recognition of the human rights of all people, the popularity of soul music soared. A multiracial fandom supported the mainstream financial success of Motown, Stax, and King (James Brown’s label). Radio stations that had once played only

a few songs by Black artists added soul music to their rotations. White music stars like the Righteous Brothers expressed their appreciation of soul artists. The Rolling Stones covered soul releases like The Valentinos' "It's All Over Now" and incorporated soul in the rock genre.

The leap of faith taken by these three talented artists – the King and Queen of Soul and the Queen of Rock & Roll - was no easy task given the dangers of working the organized-crime infested music industry and the obstacles presented by racism, sexism, and ageism. The deeply rooted associations among crime, sex work, gambling, and the entertainment industry created a dangerous working environment for professional vocalists. Besides these dangers, Franklin and Turner faced the obstacle of a male dominated industry that complicated the attempts of female vocalists to establish a sustainable career. Moreover, Turner had to overcome the challenge of ageism to successfully manage the midlife career ascension that led to international acclaim and stardom.

This project discusses the artists, their psychologies, professional strategies, influences, and music. Through the lens of their lives and careers, African American history and the contributions of Black musicians are explored in hope of furthering understanding through the bringing to light of events and histories that had been shrouded in darkness. These artists personified courage as they ventured into precarious and sometimes perilous waters to give birth to, and nurture, the soul music genre. In so doing, they demonstrated the power of faith, discipline, self-respect, and a healthy self-love. *Amour de soi!*

Appendix A "A Fool in Love" (1960)

Songwriter: Ike Turner

Single released by Ike & Tina Turner from the album *Dynamite!*

I love this man and I don't know why
I think I'd feel this way 'til the day I die
Now how come?
You're just a fool, you know you're in love (tell me one more time)
You've got to face it to live in this world
You take the good along with the bad (tell me, tell me how come)
Sometimes you're happy, and sometimes you're sad (one more time)
You know you love him, but you can't understand
How come he treats you like he do, when he's such a good man (listen to me)

He's got me smiling when I should be ashamed
Got me laughing when my heart is in pain
Oh, oh no, I must be a fool
'Cause I do anything he wants me to do
Now tell me how come
You're just a fool (oh yeah), you know you're in love (tell me, tell me one more time)
You've got to face it to live in this world
You take the good along with the bad
Sometimes you're happy, and sometimes you're sad (one more time)
You know you love him, but you can't understand
How come he treats you like he do, when he's such a good man (now)

Without my man, I swear I don't wanna live
You think I'm lying, but I'm telling you like it is
Got my nose open and that's no lie, but
I'm gonna keep him satisfied
Now tell me how come
You're just a fool (tell me), you know you're in love (tell me one more time)
You've got to face it to live in this world
You take the good along with the bad
Sometimes you're happy (alright), and sometimes you're sad (tell me one more time)
You know you love him, but you can't understand
How come he treats you like he do, when he's such a good man (now)

Wave of action speaks louder than words
That's the truest saying I think, that I ever heard
I trust my man in everything he do

And I'll do anything he wants me to do
Now tell me how come
You're just a fool, you know you're in love (tell me one more time)
You've got to face it to live in this world
You take the good along with the bad (oh, tell me one more time)
Sometimes you're happy (alright), and sometimes you're sad (one more time)
You know you love him, but you can't understand
How come he treats you like he do, when he's such a good man
(Come on, come on, come on, tell me one more time)
You're just a fool (yeah), you know you're in love (tell me one more time)
You've got to face it to live in this world
You take the good

Appendix B “I Think It’s Gonna Work Out Fine” (1961)

Songwriters: Rose Marie McCoy (as James Lee) and Sylvia McKinney (as Joe Seneca)
Single released by Ike & Tina Turner from the album *Dynamite!*

Darling (yes, Tina) you’re starting to get next to me
(Honey, that was my plan from the very beginning)
Darling (uh-huh) I never thought that this could be
(What do you mean) oh yeah

Your lips set my soul on fire
You fulfilled my one desire
Oh darling (yes, yes) I think it’s gonna work out fine
(It’s gonna work out fine)
I wanna tell you something, Ike

Ike (uh-huh) I went to see the preacher man
(A preacher man, you must be losing your mind)
I started (started what?) started making wedding plans
(Oh really?) oh yeah

If your love is half as true
As the love I offer you
Oh darling (yes, yes) I think it’s gonna work out fine
(It’s gonna work out fine)

I keep a telling ya (I think it’s gonna work out fine)
I can feel it’s gonna (feel it’s gonna work out)
I keep on telling you (I know it’s gonna work out fine)
Ah, I’m so glad that you’re mine, all mine

Remember (remember what?) They used to call you Dapper Dan
(Yes, those were the good old days)
The Thriller (the Killer, honey) the every-ready loving man (that’s me) oh yeah

A whole lot of girls used to be your speed
But now, pretty daddy, I’m all you need
Oh darling (yes, yes) I know it’s gonna work out fine
(It’s gonna work out fine)

I keep a telling ya (I think it’s gonna work out fine)
I can feel it’s gonna (feel it’s gonna work out)
I keep on telling you (I know it’s gonna work out fine)
I know it’s gonna work (know it’s gonna work out fine)
I want you to know it’s gonna work out (know it’s gonna work out)

Yeah, yeah, it's gotta work out (know it's gonna work out fine)
I want to tell you it will work (know it's gonna work out fine)
I got to tell you it will work (know it's gonna work out)
Got to work and work and work (know it's gonna work out fine)
I know, I know it's gonna work out (know it's gonna work out)
Oh, it's gonna work (know it's gonna work out fine)

Appendix C "Poor Fool" (1961)

Songwriter: Ike Turner

Single released by Ike & Tina Turner from the album *Dynamite!*

(Spoken): I want to tell all of you that ain't doin' nothin' for me
And can't do nothing for me
You should tend to your business and leave mine alone
Because as far as this man is concerned

(Sung): I wanna tell you he's mine (you've been a fool too long)
Now let me tell ya he's mine (wake up and he's gone)
Yeh yeh yeh yeh yeh yeh yeh yeh (we know how you feel)
Yeh yeh yeh yeh yeh yeh yeh he's mine (but is it love for real)
I'm not ashamed (poor fool) 'cause he's my man (says who?)
And he's mine (you've been a fool too long)

Now listen, this man is mine, he's my every thought
I'd give him Russia if it could be bought
I'm not ashamed of nothing I do
I'd ride a missile if he told me to

'Cause he's mine (poor fool)
I know he's mine (says who?)
The man is mine (you've been a fool too long)

And listen, if I make my bed hard
That's where I'm gonna sleep
You people talking means nothing to me
I'll work my fingers right down to the bone
Do anything to please him right or wrong

'Cause he's mine (poor fool)
I know he's mine (says who?)
The man is mine (you've been a fool too long)
Ohh he's mine (you've been a fool too long)
And let me tell you he's mine
(wake up and he's gone)
Yeh yeh yeh yeh yeh yeh yeh yeh (we know how you feel)
Yeh yeh yeh yeh yeh he mine (but is it love for real?)
I'm not ashamed (poor fool) 'cause he's my man (says who?)
And he's mine (you've been a fool too long)

And listen, I'm with my man in every way
Gonna keep him happy each and every day

I'll never hurt him or make him frown
I'm with my man if he's up or down

'Cause he's mine (poor fool)
I know he's mine (says who?)
The man is mine (you've been a fool too long)
And ohhhhhhhh he's a mine (you've been a fool too long)
Now let me tell you he's mine (wake up and he's gone)
Yeh yeh yeh yeh yeh yeh yeh (we know how you feel)

Appendix D "Chances Are" (aka "Puppy Love") (1961)

Songwriter: Ike Turner

Single released by Ike & Tina Turner from the album *The Soul of Ike & Tina Turner*

Chances are, you'll be needing little me again
I don't know how, and baby, I can't say when
You're gonna need my love someday
I'm gonna be too far away
And chances are, you'll be needing little me again...

(He makes her blue, neglects her too - What can she do?
He's growing cold, her love is old, he's getting bored)

To you, it's just a puppy love;
You never cared how much you broke my heart...
But one day, you'll stop and say
"Why did I treat little Tina that way?"
And chances are, you'll be needing little me again...

(He makes her blue, neglects her too - What can she do?
He's growing cold, her love is old, he's getting bored)

To really love me, that you've never done
All you did was hurt me and cause me scars
Right now, you think you're on top
But one day, you might slip and flop
And chances are, you'll be needing little me again

(He makes her blue, neglects her too - What can she do?
He's growing cold, her love is old, he's getting bored)

Sympathy is all you have for me
You might as well go on and let me be
You think you don't need me around
But it's the talk all over this town
But chances are, you'll be needing little me again

(He makes her blue) ahh.. (neglects her too) ah-ah-ah-ah (What can she do?) oo
(He's growing cold) oo-oo (her love is old) oo-oo-oo-oo, (he's getting bored)

Appendix E "Better Be Good to Me" (1984)

Songwriters: Mike Chapman, Holly Knight, Nicky Chinn
Single released by Tina Turner from the album *Private Dancer*

A prisoner of your love
Entangled in your web
Hot whispers in the night
I'm captured by your spell (captured)
Oh yes, I'm touched by this show of emotion
Should I be fractured by your lack of devotion?
Should I?
Should I?

Oh, you better be good to me
That's how it's gotta be now
'Cause I don't have no use
For what you loosely call the truth
And you better be good to me
Yeah, better be good, mm

Come on, come on, be good to me
I think it's oh so right
That we don't need to fight
We stand face to face
And you present your case
Yes, I know you keep telling me that you love me
And I really do wanna believe
But did you think I'd just accept you in blind faith?
Oh sure babe, anything to please you

But you better be good to me
That's how it's gotta be now
'Cause I don't have the time for your overloaded lies
You better be good to me
Yeah, you better be good
Good to me

Be good to me, uh
And I really don't see
Why it's so hard to be good to me
And you know I don't understand what's your plan
That you can't be good to me

Well, I can't feel, I'd surely cannot see
Why can't you be good to me
And if it's not real, I do not wish to see
Why don't you be good to me

Why can't you be good to me?
Why can't you be good to me?
Why can't you be good to me?
Why can't you be good to me?
Why can't you be good to me?
Be good (why can't you be good to me?), be good to me

'Cause I don't have no use for what you loosely call the truth
And I don't have the time for your overloaded lies
So you better be good to me
Yeah, you better be good
Better be good to me (why can't you be good to me?)
Better be good (why can't you be good to me?)

'Cause I don't have the time for your overloaded lies
And I don't have no use for what you loosely call the truth
And you better be good to me (why can't you be good to me?)
Be good to me (why can't you be good to me?)
Be good (why can't you be good to me?)
Be good to me (why can't you be good to me?)

'Cause I don't have no use for what you loosely call the truth
And I don't have the time for your overloaded lines
You better be good to me (why can't you be) good to me (good to me?)
Better be (why can't you be) good to me (good to me?)
Be good (why can't you be) be good to me (good to me?)
(Why can't you be) good to me (good to me)
Why can't you be (why can't you be) good to me? (Good to me?)
Why can't you be (why can't you be) good to me? (Good to me?)
C'mon (why can't you be) c'mon
C'mon, c'mon (why can't you be) c'mon, c'mon, c'mon, c'mon, c'mon (good to me?)
Be good to me (why can't you be) good to me (good to me?)

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