ATHENS OF THE SOUTH:

COLLEGE LIFE IN NASHVILLE, A NEW SOUTH CITY, 1897-1917

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ABSTRACT

The Progressive Era affected the South in different ways from other regions of the United States. Because Southern society was more entrenched in patriarchy and traditional social strictures, Nashville provides an excellent lens in which to assess the vision of a New South city. Known as "Athens of the South," Nashville legitimized this title with the emergence of several colleges and universities of regional and national prominence in the 1880s and 1890s. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, Nashville's universities solidified their status as reputable institutions, with Vanderbilt and Fisk Universities garnering national prominence. Within Nashville, local colleges, including Ward Belmont College, David Lipscomb University, Peabody College, Roger Williams University, and Meharry Medical College shaped and were shaped by the growing city. Higher education and urbanization created a dialectic that produced a new generation and a new monied class of young adults who thought and acted differently

from their parents. Moreover, women became more active participants in public spheres because of opportunities provided by higher education. In most cases, Nashville's women continued to use their husband's prominence to earn greater success. In regard to race, the city's African American colleges helped to produce men and women who formed the backbone of the rising black middle class and elite in the South.

Nashville endured great change, formally beginning with the 1897 Tennessee Centennial Exposition, whereby the city's trajectory followed a more modern approach, albeit southern style. Higher education played a large role in the direction of the city, both literally and figuratively. Shifts in attitude toward race, gender, and leisure combined to create a new youth culture. Young women and men socialized on and off campus through a variety of new forms of recreation. The experience of "college life" was more than attending classes but rather a fluid phase beginning with youthfulness and ending with adulthood. Social interaction increasingly became a major component of college life; the city of Nashville simply provided the stage. By U.S. entrance into World War I, Nashville had legitimized its position as a Southern urban center of entertainment and higher education.

INDEX WORDS:

Education, Nashville, Tennessee, Gilded/ Progressive, New South, African American, Race, Gender, Leisure, Recreation, Urbanization, College, University, Vanderbilt, Belmont, Ward Belmont, Fisk, Meharry, Lipscomb, Peabody, College sports, Physical education, Women's education, Ryman Auditorium, Public parks, Entertainment, Suburbs, Curriculum