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# Big-Band Jazz in Black West Virginia: 1930-1942

*Christopher Wilkinson*

All the bands were goin' through West Virginia because, you see, the coal mines were in operation and everybody was . . . employed.

—Herbert Hall, February 23, 1980

During the 1930s, saxophonist and clarinetist Herbert Hall, a Louisiana native, was a member of a black dance band based in San Antonio, Texas. Known variously as “Don Albert and His Ten Pals” and “Don Albert’s Music: America’s Greatest Swing Band,” the ensemble toured over much of the eastern two-thirds of the continental United States, performing at least twice in the Mountain State. Much later, while sharing his memories of those years with Sterlin Holmesley, a newspaperman in San Antonio, Hall explained the appeal of West Virginia to black dance bands of the period in the statement that serves as the epigraph of this essay.<sup>1</sup>

Hall’s comment directs attention to the existence of a remarkable musical culture in the Mountain State, the existence of which contrasts sharply with the popular image of West Virginia’s musical life. Not simply embracing old-timey and bluegrass music, as well as other music for string bands and their electronically amplified descendants, a variety of largely Protestant church musics, and still other lovingly-maintained folk traditions traceable to the British Isles, the state’s highly varied musical traditions reflected the fact that for more than a century it attracted a geographically diverse population. A case in point concerns the musical culture of the many African Americans who made West Virginia home. Though they shared with their white neighbors many musical practices and values, blacks enjoyed some musical styles which were not as widely embraced by other residents. Among these was big-band jazz and dance music which, during the 1930s, played a major role in the lives of black Mountaineers.

There were many elements to this musical life. Bands with national reputations performed in the state during tours that took them over much of the country, the most frequent visitor being the Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra which played nineteen engagements in West Virginia between 1934

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and 1942. In addition, local musicians put together bands which played for their neighbors. Moreover, students at each of the two state-supported black colleges, Bluefield State and West Virginia State, organized dance bands. One of these, Phil Edwards's Collegians, which originated at Bluefield State, would briefly acquire a regional reputation during the early 1930s.<sup>2</sup>

Dances were held in the state's larger towns, most often in national guard armories or in the gymnasias of black high schools. Occasionally, a night club that otherwise catered to whites was rented for an engagement. While most people attending these dances came from nearby communities, some were prepared to travel some distance to hear a particular favorite. When Duke Ellington performed in Charleston in March 1935, fans from Fairmont made what was then presumably a four-hour trip one way by car to hear his band. These dances were organized by local entrepreneurs, at least one of whom, George Morton of Beckley, served as the state's booking agent for one of the period's leading managers of dance orchestras in New York City, Joe Glaser of Associated Booking Artists.

The music that these and other bands played ran the gamut from highly-charged "hot" syncopated, swinging jazz, which accommodated spontaneously improvised solos by leading musicians, to unsyncopated, fully notated, and emotionally reserved "sweet" music. While some bands may have preferred one of these two styles, almost all were prepared to present a mix of both to please audiences with diverse tastes. All evidence suggests that African American audiences welcomed this stylistic mixture, since for some jazz in any form was morally suspect and for others sweet dance music was, for want of a better term, boring.

To understand both the formation and extent of this particular musical culture, as well as the national and local institutions that sustained it, requires consideration of four issues. First, I shall discuss the demography of African American Mountaineers: place of origin, place of residence in West Virginia, occupation, and use of free time. Second, I will analyze the evidence of a lively interest in big band jazz and dance music among black West Virginians. Third, I will address the ways in which they were connected to the national musical scene at a time when the music of the big bands constituted the principal style of American popular music. Finally, I will discuss the reasons for this music's popularity among African Americans in the Mountain State.

In the three decades immediately following emancipation, blacks began migrating into the state in gradually increasing numbers, some to help build the railroads to the developing coalfields, and others to do the



of Fayette, Kanawha, Logan, McDowell, Mercer, Mingo, and Raleigh were home to a far larger number of African Americans. In fact, 75 percent of the state's black population resided in just three of those counties: Kanawha, McDowell, and Raleigh. Of these, the most densely populated was McDowell where African Americans constituted one quarter of the population according to both the 1930 and 1940 censuses.<sup>4</sup>

Not only was the number of black Mountaineers residing in the coalfields considerable, so too was the number of black miners at work in the Mountain State. This was documented in the annual reports of the state's Department of Mines. The last of these censuses of miners and other coal industry workers based upon their "nationality" was published in the annual report for 1933. It is reproduced on the following pages. One of a total of thirty-six "nationalities," "Negro" miners are listed by county on line 23. The largest number, 5,566, worked in McDowell County, followed in descending order by Raleigh County, 3,426, and Logan County, 2,440. In the northern field, Marion County mines employed 1,178 African Americans.

The black population in these regions was not concentrated in any one place but was distributed throughout the hundreds of company towns, or "coal camps" in the vernacular, found adjacent to the mines. Thus there was a multitude of small communities of black miners and their families scattered throughout the northern and southern coalfields because the mines themselves were similarly scattered. In 1941, for example, along the main and branch lines of the Norfolk and Western Railway, which served the southernmost counties of the state, running from Bluefield through Welch to Williamson and on down the Tug Fork to Kenova where it crossed the Ohio River, ninety mines were in operation: twelve in Mercer County, fifty-six in McDowell County, and twenty-two in Mingo County.<sup>5</sup> By implication, there were as many company towns as there were mines, and African Americans resided in almost every one.

While much of the state's black population was dispersed among the coal camps, the swing music culture in black West Virginia was dependent upon a handful of larger towns in which were located venues that accommodated large crowds of dancers. Many of these people came in from the surrounding territory to socialize together in numbers that promised a profitable night for both the touring bands and the local promoters who engaged them. Most of these larger communities were the seats of the coalfield counties: Bluefield (seat of Mercer County), Welch (McDowell), Williamson (Mingo), Beckley (Raleigh), and Charleston (Kanawha); see Map 1. In addition, three of the state's largest cities, Huntington, Park-

ersburg, and Wheeling, all situated on the Ohio River, provided sites of dances for African Americans residing not only in West Virginia but also in adjacent states.

The authors of *West Virginia: A Guide to the Mountain State*, written under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration and published in 1940, provided a description of the seat of Raleigh County that illustrates the connection between coal camps and nearby towns: “Beckley . . . is the hub around which revolves the life of more than 200 small mining communities, farming communities, and railroad junctions. Called the ‘smokeless coal capital of the world,’ Beckley is the center of a large area, which annually produces 50 million tons of the finest steam and domestic coals.”<sup>6</sup> The life that “revolved” around Beckley and the other county seats included the social life of African Americans for which big bands provided the music.

That many black West Virginians were captivated by the sounds of the big bands is documented principally by the newspaper record. Newspapers published advertisements for upcoming dances, identifying the bands that would perform, the venues where dances took place, the price of admission, and often the name of the local entrepreneur who booked the bands. Equally important were brief articles that occasionally appeared following dances describing the audience’s reaction to the band, an estimate of the size of the crowd, and (though rarely) the distances some attendees had traveled.

While most read their local newspapers, for many black West Virginians the *Pittsburgh Courier* was, as one informant put it, “more or less *the* paper for the people of color.”<sup>7</sup> A weekly publication, it included regular coverage of engagements by national bands in major cities and on tours, often with particular attention paid to those bands’ future performances not only in western Pennsylvania but also in West Virginia and other nearby states. Of equal importance, the *Courier* also printed reports of activities, including dances, from black communities scattered all over, thus documenting performances by traveling bands in both the northern and southern regions of the state. Twice in the early 1930s, and again around 1940, the *Courier* sponsored contests to name the most popular band of the year. People voted by postcard or letter. Often the letters, several of which were published each week, included explanations for their authors’ preferences. Those from the Mountain State give insight into the tastes of individual residents.

While the *Courier’s* coverage provides an overview of the musical life of black Mountaineers, it was by no means exhaustive. Some newspapers from the coalfield counties also provided essential information, both in the form of advertisements and reportage.<sup>8</sup> Yet at the same time, the newspaper record

Table 1: Nationalities of Persons Employed in West Virginia Mines and Coke Ovens in 1933  
*Annual Report of the [West Virginia] Department of Mines, 1933, 114-17*

**NATIONALITIES OF PERSONS EMPLOYED AT THE MINES AND COKE OVENS, BY COUNTIES  
 FOR THE YEAR 1933**

Nationalities	Number of Mines Operated																
	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33
American (White)	858	1,037	12	200	525	60	75	1,075	80	1,301	4,121	35	1,875	2,166	264	107	9,081
American	74	41	1	17	4	24	34	48	35	101	40	2	29	100	22	10	25
British	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Belgian	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Polish	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Canadian	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Czech	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Swedish	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
French	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Irish	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
German	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Croat	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Yugoslav	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Italian	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Spanish	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Portuguese	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Other	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>525</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>1,075</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>1,301</b>	<b>4,121</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>1,875</b>	<b>2,446</b>	<b>1,175</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>14,368</b>

Number of Mines Operated		17	15	2	16	6	79	3	4	11	9	44	50	4	59	30	5	7	91
COUNTIES		Barbour	Boone	Braxton	Brooke	Clay	Fayette	Gilmer	Grant	Greenbrier	Hancock	Harrison	Kanawha	Lewis	Logan	Martinsburg	Marshall	Mason	McDowell
Portuguese.....							10			1		7	1		14	3			13
Romanian.....		2	5				17						5		95	19	6		29
Russian.....		13	8		53	2	68				1	33	16		63	163	45		146
Scotch.....		4	4		20	1	20					10	2	16		3	10		5
Serbian.....					21										11	9			8
Slavish.....		28	10		71	5	27			3		109	14		95	149	66		110
Spanish.....		10	10		1	2	104			12		10	5		121	41			148
Swedish.....					3							8			1				
Syrian.....												9							
Turks.....					3					1			1		1				1
Welsh.....					1		4					4			16	1			1
Other Nationalities.....		20			4	3	1					2			16	8	2		3
TOTALS.....		1,300	2,370	16	1,391	940	10,568	62	80	1,660	62	3,320	5,301	20,10,372	5,922	1,002		100,16,431	



Table 1: Nationalities of Persons Employed in West Virginia Mines and Coke Ovens in 1933  
*Annual Report of the [West Virginia] Department of Mines, 1933, 114-17 (continued)*

NATIONALITIES OF PERSONS EMPLOYED AT THE MINES AND COKE OVENS BY COUNTIES  
 FOR THE YEAR 1933—Continued

County	Nationalities												
	Am.	Can.	Eng.	Ger.	Pol.	Scot.	Slov.	Ukr.	Yug.	Other	Total	%	Total
Adams	1										1	100	1
Boone	1										1	100	1
Berkley	1										1	100	1
Bolton	1										1	100	1
Calhoun	1										1	100	1
Clay	1										1	100	1
Conaway	1										1	100	1
DeWitt	1										1	100	1
Franklin	1										1	100	1
Greenup	1										1	100	1
Lincoln	1										1	100	1
Mingo	1										1	100	1
Putnam	1										1	100	1
Roane	1										1	100	1
Summers	1										1	100	1
Taylor	1										1	100	1
Wayne	1										1	100	1
Wood	1										1	100	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>13</b>

Number of Mines Operated		22	18	25	41	17	33	6	4	78	19	16	6	4	1	10	13	765	
NATIONALITIES		Mercer	Mineral	Mingo	Monongalia	Nicholas	Ohio	Preston	Putnam	Raleigh	Randolph	Taylor	Tucker	Tupshur	Wayne	Webster	Wyoming	TOTALS	
Portuguese.....					1		7										1	58	
Romanian.....				2	9							3						198	
Russian.....	6	13	31	160	31		31	3		2	4	3					5	907	
Scottish.....	2			23	30		4			43			4				2	203	
Serbian.....				23	7					51		2						1	108
Slavish.....	8	8	15	217	61		2			53	8	59	16	5			2	1,147	
Spanish.....	11		44	11	15		12			227							10	782	
Swedish.....		1		10						3							3	47	
Syrian.....				3	10					2								32	
Turks.....	1				6					2								35	
Welsh.....				2						5							1	36	
Other Nationalities.....				6						1		1					1	66	
TOTALS.....	3,453	550	3,327	5,034	151	2,146	1,317	610	11,799	621	961	687	207	59	856	1,642	85,307		

does not do complete justice to the extent and nature of big band jazz and dance music in black West Virginia. Some publications chose not to report on the totality of black life, but only on allegations of black-on-white crime, lynchings, and black athletic accomplishments (the career of heavyweight boxer Joe Lewis was regularly highlighted). The newspaper record is also incomplete because black entrepreneurs used what were for their purposes more effective means of advertising in African American communities. Frances M. Flippen, the younger sister of George E. Morton of Beckley, one of the most prominent booking agents in the state between 1935 and 1940, recalled that her brother advertised dances using “placards in windows of shops, stores, and everything . . . and handbills, and placards they would nail on telegraph poles.”<sup>9</sup> Such advertising no doubt led to word-of-mouth communication within and between black communities as well.

The advantage of such targeted promotion to African Americans was that it would be seen by far more blacks than whites and at less cost than would newspaper advertising. In an era when public entertainment was racially segregated, dances were marketed either to African Americans or to European Americans (rarely both).<sup>10</sup> Add to that the fact that black housing was also segregated from that for whites, and one can see the virtues of focusing one’s advertising geographically and thus demographically. Under these circumstances, a placard in a black barbershop or grocery store would have been far more productive than a small announcement buried in the back pages of a local newspaper, as would a handbill placed under the windshield wipers of neighbors’ automobiles or in their letter boxes.

Beyond newspaper coverage of the activities of bands having at least regional, if not national, reputations, radio was also essential to keeping black West Virginians in touch with the larger musical culture. In the 1930s, radio programming included live broadcasts by major dance bands originating in one or another venue in the nation’s major cities: Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Kansas City, and on to the West Coast. The three radio networks enabled stations in or near West Virginia to transmit these performances. Such programs featured a band’s latest hits and gave exposure to its leading soloists. Between newspaper reports and broadcast performances, black bands were able to build a fan base upon which to capitalize during subsequent tours.

Were many West Virginians in a position to hear such broadcasts, and, if so, how might this be documented? Electricity was, of course, essential for radios to operate. As Map 2 shows, the state’s electrical grid overlapped the boundaries of both the northern and southern coalfields.

Mines required electricity, and power was also used to light homes in the adjacent coal camps. As early as 1925, 70 percent of company housing was electrified, even if there were few other amenities.<sup>11</sup> The testimonies of older African Americans confirm the importance of radios in their lives. One informant who as a child resided near Williamson reported that, although her family's company house had only outdoor plumbing and a cold water tap on the back porch, it had electricity. The family also owned a radio and listened to station WLW from Cincinnati, Ohio. Others from elsewhere in the coalfields have described similar circumstances and listened to the same station.<sup>12</sup>

WLW had definite advantages over much of its competition: it broadcast with 50,000 watts of power and was a clear-channel radio station; no other station occupied the same frequency, 700 on the AM dial. Thus, particularly at night, there was little to interfere with its signal. This was particularly advantageous for potential listeners in Logan, McDowell, and Mingo Counties in the southern coalfield counties for not before 1939 were stations established in their respective county seats: WLOG in Logan, WBRW in Welch, and WBTH in Williamson. None of these stations had powerful transmitters, thus limiting their audiences.

That WLW dominated the radio waves did not mean other stations had no role in disseminating the national culture of swing to the state's residents. The Columbia Broadcasting System included in its network five stations in operation in West Virginia as of 1940: WWVA in Wheeling, WMMN in Fairmont, WCHS in Charleston, WSAZ in Huntington, and WPAR in Parkersburg. Of these, WPAR was the decided latecomer, having gone on the air only in 1935, while the rest had been founded between 1926 and 1929.<sup>13</sup> The music programmed on the CBS network on Friday and Saturday nights featured a succession of big bands performing in various locations around the country. For those in a position to hear both WLW and the nearest CBS station, there was much to choose from. While no single evening could be regarded as representative of the period under consideration, the programs of Saturday, November 20, 1937, give a snapshot of the music broadcast. An evening of live music could begin as early as 7:00 p.m. with the program "Swing Session" on CBS. After a miscellany of other types of programs, at 10:00 p.m., WLW broadcast the dance band led by the African American composer and arranger Noble Sissle, a program opposite "Your Hit Parade" on CBS. At 11:00, one could choose among several minor dance bands, but at 11:30 on CBS, Benny Goodman, the "King of Swing," began a half-hour program after which one could "swing



“Don Albert and His Ten Pals: America’s Greatest Swing Band,” from San Antonio, Texas, played in Charleston and Beckley in November, 1935, one of the first bands to be booked by George E. Morton of Beckley.

Source: Author’s Collection.

and sway with Sammy Kaye,” the leader of a “sweet” society dance orchestra, a marked contrast to Goodman’s hot jazz sound.<sup>14</sup>

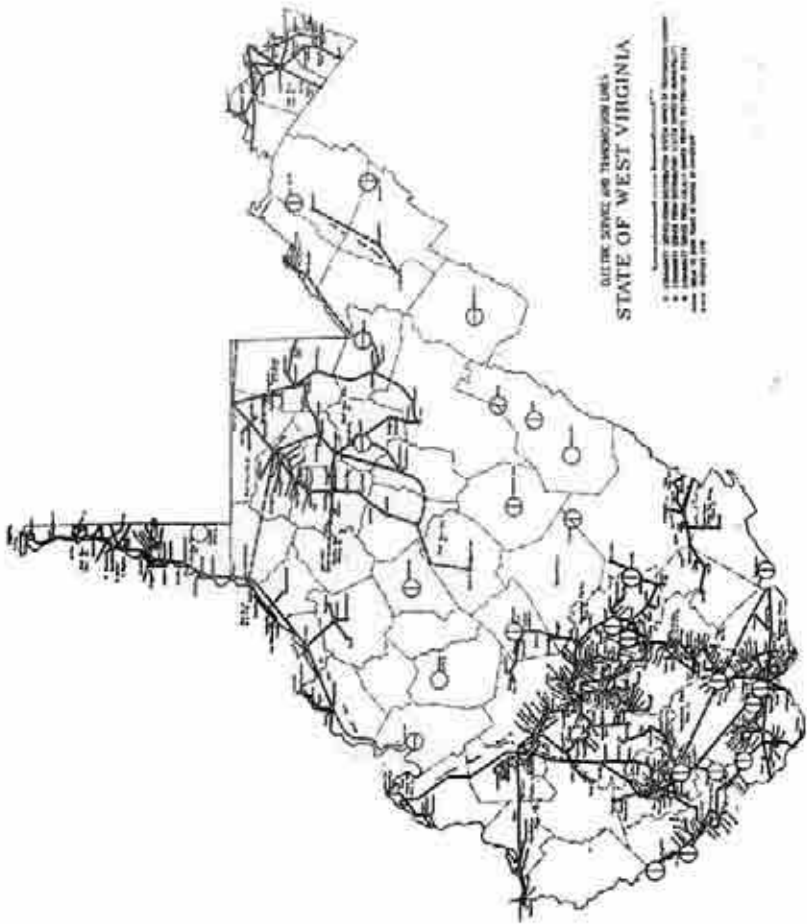
That black West Virginians were in fact listening to big band music on the radio is indicated by periodic newspaper articles. A report in the *Pittsburgh Courier* of a dance held in Fairmont on September 12, 1932, at the Elks Rest, a black social club, for which a local band provided music, concluded with the following: “Local well wishers of Bennie Moten’s Kansas City Orchestra may tune in on WLW every Saturday and Sunday evening at 10 o’clock.”<sup>15</sup> The *Courier*’s “radio editor,” Allen E. Eckstein, presided over a column entitled “Wave Lengths.” In a letter written to Eckstein in February 1932, a Mr. Redd, whose West Virginia residence was not identified, described himself as a “regular radio maniac,” who was always happy to hear the bands led by “Fatha” Hines, Don Redman, Cab Calloway, and Noble Sissle, but “if you want to give me an idea of Paradise kindly let me have an

occasional idea of the whereabouts of the incomparable Duke Ellington, the renowned Fletcher Henderson, and the one and only McKinney's Cotton Pickers . . . these three constitute the radio world's idea of heaven."<sup>16</sup>

Radio also provided music for private parties. On September 1, 1934, Fairmont's correspondent informed *Courier* readers that "a radio party was staged at 218 Jefferson Street on Monday evening by Ernest Owens. Noble Sissle, Wayne King, and Claude Hopkins entertained. Sissle was heard from the French Casino in Chicago, and Claude Hopkins was playing a dance in Charlotte, N.C." This surely was not the only such occasion either in Fairmont or in the state in that period.<sup>17</sup>

With the evidence of lively interest and continuous engagement with big band jazz documented both in print and in the memories of eyewitnesses, Herb Hall's memory that black bands in large numbers toured the Mountain State seems plausible. What should not be overlooked is his assertion that the reason for the bands' regular visits was not only a matter of African American Mountaineers' collective musical taste but also their economic well-being. What counted was that "everyone was employed."

As part of the Roosevelt administration's initiatives to cope with the impact of the Depression on the U.S. economy, Congress passed the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 which in part led to the coal industry's agreement to conduct business according to standards enumerated in what was known as "the Bituminous Coal Code." These two policies encouraged the mining industry to resume production to an extent that resulted in relatively high employment and in wages of a level unknown since the Crash of 1929. The Coal Code set minimum wages for "inside work," both the actual mining of coal and related activities, as well as maximum work hours by day, week, and month. It also implicitly supported efforts by the United Mine Workers to organize miners and negotiate union contracts guaranteeing wages higher than the minimums set by the legislation by stipulating that where any labor contract resulted in wages higher than those minimums, "the contract rates shall govern." The Coal Code also addressed the industry's concerns about unfair competition by proposing the establishment of a fair-market price for various grades of coal based upon a consensus of two-thirds of the coal producers in each of fifteen districts. It went on to state that anyone found to be selling coal at less than the fair-market price would lead to "a prima facie presumption that such person is engaged in destructive price cutting and unfair competition." Such policies, as well as partial recovery from the worst of the Depression, meant that the mid-1930s were a time of comparative prosperity in the coalfields. Not



Map 2

Electric Service and Transmission Lines, State of West Virginia [1927]

Source: West Virginia, *West Virginia, One of America's Most Astounding Concentrations of Power-Wealth-Opportunity* (1929), 12. Pamphlet 927. West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia Collection.

only was there a relatively high level of employment, but at times certain localities reported a labor shortage.<sup>18</sup>

In this period, mining was essentially piece-work labor, as each miner was paid by the tonnage he dug out of the coal seam. Thanks in part to union contracts and also to the competition for labor, there was no discrimination in wages between black and white miners, something that would come with increased mechanization of the industry at the end of the decade. Thus, compared to virtually all other rural settings where blacks lived in significant numbers during the Depression, most obviously the Deep South, black Mountaineers living and working in the coalfields were doing relatively well.

The evidence that their financial well-being translated into profitable engagements for touring bands is limited but compelling. The fact that numerous bands toured the state's coalfields, many returning more than once, indicates that there was money to be made in playing for dances in these regions. Concrete evidence to support that conclusion is provided in a remarkable and, quite possibly, unique document: a professional musician's diary kept by Paul D. Barnes of New Orleans. Almost all of its entries document performances in which Barnes participated; therefore, it seems logical to adopt the term "gig book," which jazz musicians have associated with such a text. In the present context, what is important are the entries he recorded while a member of Joe "King" Oliver's dance band, specifically from September 30, 1934, to February 28, 1935, when the band was based in Huntington, West Virginia.

Barnes was one of the legion of sidemen to come out of New Orleans, highly capable—"full of elegance and impeccable taste," was how one biographer characterized his playing—but an individual whose career does not loom large in jazz history. Known to many by his nickname "Polo," Paul Barnes, born in 1901, was a saxophonist and clarinetist, a "reed man" in other words. Most of his career was played out in the Crescent City and elsewhere in Louisiana. He was a member of King Oliver's "Victor Recording Orchestra" during three separate periods: 1927, 1931, and 1934-1935. In 1932, between those latter stints with Oliver, he led his own band, the Paul D. Barnes Orchestra. After he left Oliver in 1935, he returned to New Orleans, and, beginning in the 1950s, divided his time between California and his hometown, ultimately playing at Preservation Hall. He retired in 1977, and died four years later.<sup>19</sup>

Barnes merits our attention for what his gig book tells about daily life in one black band in the mid-1930s with particular attention to its



experience in the Mountain State. This text, consisting of most of two accountants' ledger books, covered the period from 1933 to 1952. The dimensions of each volume, twelve inches high and seven and a half inches wide, suggest that each could have fit into one of his instrument cases. The first of these volumes covers the period from 1933 to early October 1935, while the second volume documents the period between October 10, 1935, to August 2, 1952, but in far less detail.<sup>20</sup> What motivated Barnes to maintain such a document may be in part inferred from the fact that the initial entries were made during the period in which he led his own band in New Orleans between 1933 and 1934. Having kept records of his own operation during that time, he appears to have maintained the habit when he joined Oliver.

That Barnes's gig book documents the Oliver band's extended stay in Huntington beginning on September 30, 1934, raises the question: why Huntington? Several reasons suggest themselves. By 1930, it was the largest city both in the state and in the Ohio valley between Cincinnati and Pittsburgh with a population of 75,572. Its size may have been an attraction; a concentrated population might result in some engagements. Its black community, though small, could provide accommodations for the band. Among its residents was a business man, Sylvester Massey, who operated a hotel and a restaurant catering to African Americans. Massey was quite familiar with the music business. In 1930 he had acted as regional booking agent for a band led by Alphonso Trent of Dallas, Texas, a group that was then one of the leading black dance bands of the south-central United States. Possibly Joe Oliver or his manager, Ross McConnell, knew of Massey's activities which were occasionally reported in the *Pittsburgh Courier*.

From a logistical standpoint, Huntington had other attractions. West of the highest ridges of the mountains, and lying on the south side of the Ohio River, it was the junction of three important east-west highways through the Appalachians. Perhaps the most important was U.S. Highway 52, which from Huntington on the west to Bluefield on the east, crossed West Virginia through the heart of the southern coalfields. Other highways running west, north, and south from Huntington provided equally easy access to Kentucky and Ohio as well, including U.S. 23, which linked the city to the coalfields of eastern Kentucky, and U.S. 60 which connected it with the central part of that state.

Locating itself in a community that seemed to offer many advantages, Oliver's band sought engagements in the region. Barnes's gig book documents its varying degrees of success and the challenges it faced. While

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1934

Christmas Day Tuesday

Dec 25th Orchestra leave Huntington and play some  
 at Ashland Ky. Colored @ \$5.00 William Purcell  
 joins Orchestra - Busk returns to Huntington W. Va.  
 Wed Dec 26th Orchestra plays Welch (W. Va.)  
 white ~~at~~ World War Veteran Hall - @ \$4.00  
 reside over night

Thursday Dec 27th Orchestra plays Williamson W. Va.  
 (Col.) @ \$4.00 on this trip (to Williamson) From Welch  
 the left front wheel of the bus was coming off. Elderly  
 who was riding on the out side saw it in time to prevent an  
 injury - Busk hires truck and takes to town about 3 miles

Friday Dec 28th Orchestra hires taxi to Kermit W. Va.  
 Kermit W. Va. - white - @ \$4.75 - tips included - James  
 Bob goes on train - Busk brings the bus afterward  
 and get it stalled near dance place. ~~Busk~~ gets  
 truck to Park Bus which get it started

A portion of page 68 of Paul D. Barnes’s “Gig Book,” showing entries for December 25-28, 1934, concerning engagements in Ashland, KY, as well as in Welch, Williamson, and Kermit. Note descriptions of problems posed by the poor conditions of the band’s bus. Gig book in possession of the Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University. Reprinted by permission from Richard B. Allen.

his entries varied in length, with only a few omissions, they provided the following information: the name of the town in which the band played; with only a few omissions, the race of the audience (either “colored” or “white”); as well as the amount of money paid to each member of the band. Accompanying many entries were annotations describing various incidents that occurred during the band’s tour, from quarrels among musicians to breakdowns of the band’s bus.

In the five-month period from the beginning of October 1934, to the end of February of the next year, it played a total of fifty-three engagements: twenty-two in West Virginia, thirty-one in seven other states. Table 2 arranges these figures by month (reading from left to right) and by state (reading from top to bottom).

As these data indicate, the most extensive traveling the band did during this period was in October, before winter would make travel through central Appalachia uncertain even with the best of vehicles at one's disposal. The most frequently visited state outside West Virginia throughout this period was Kentucky where the band performed eight times: once each in Harlan, Jenkins, Lexington, twice in Maysville, and three times in Ashland. With the sole exception of the Harlan engagement, the audiences for the band's Kentucky appearances were African American, and, apart from the Lexington and Maysville gigs, all of the engagements were in or very close to the eastern Kentucky coalfields.

Of perhaps greatest importance to this study is the fact that Barnes's gig book provides confirmation of Herb Hall's recollection "that everyone was employed" in the coalfields and, by implication, why "all the bands were goin' through West Virginia" in that period. The data that appears below show the significant difference in compensation for Oliver's musicians when they played in the Mountain State compared to what they earned from engagements in adjacent states. Tables 3 and 4 enumerate the wages paid to Oliver's players, and, where Barnes was able to determine this, the amount the band received for a particular engagement during the five months of the Huntington residency. As Barnes neglected to identify the race of patrons of one dance in West Virginia and two elsewhere, these tables document only fifty of the Oliver band's fifty-three engagements in this period: twenty-one in West Virginia, the rest in other states.

Both tables provide the month and date of each engagement, the town in which each dance took place, the race of the audience, what Ross McConnell received on behalf of the band, referred to as the "total earnings" where Barnes discovered this, costs for overhead when Barnes knew those, and, most importantly because this was the most consistent data recorded, the amount each player received for that engagement. The last column, somewhat awkwardly titled "Minimum Total to Band," simply identifies the sum the band would have had to receive for each of its twelve members to receive the individual income Barnes recorded. Unknown is whether Oliver was paid separately and in what amount. Even without that information, meaningful conclusions are possible with the data in hand.

Comparisons between what the band earned in West Virginia with its income in the other states it visited during its Huntington residency are most quickly made by referring to the summaries that appear at the bottom of each table. The data are divided by the race of the audience. Table 3 summarizes the proceeds of fifteen black dances for which each musician

earned a total of \$39.44 or \$2.63 per gig. There were six white dances in West Virginia with total individual earnings of \$22.31 or \$3.72 per dance. By comparison, the summaries for the other states, Table 4, are dramatically different. For twenty black dances, each player earned \$24.17 or \$1.20 per dance. The nine white dances paid a total of \$8.11 or just 90 cents per dance. One final comparison: for the total of twenty-one dances played in West Virginia between October and February, the Oliver band received at least \$741.00. Playing twenty-nine dances in the other states earned them just \$399.76, or just 54 percent of what they made in the Mountain State. Since at the present time Barnes's numbers are all we have to go on, it is to be hoped that they were both accurate and representative of the earnings of most black bands touring West Virginia in the 1930s. If so, then they explain why bands came to the state with such regularity and corroborate Herbert Hall's statement that introduced this essay.

The collective newspaper record for the period from 1930 to August 1942 documents a total of 256 public dances for black Mountaineers.<sup>21</sup> These were not put on uniformly throughout a given year, nor were there the same number of dances presented in every year. The greatest number of dances occurred in five of the twelve months of the year: February, April, July, November, and December, which averaged more than two dances each. January and August were the quiet months with an average of less than one dance apiece. The data for the remaining months averages out to between one and two dances each. Most dances were held in April (2.5 on average), perhaps because following Easter the constraints of Lent were no longer a factor and because the weather was more conducive for travel by bands and audience members. December with its holiday season constituted the second "dancing-est" month (2.41) for obvious reasons. February was third (2.33), because winter might have been loosening its grip, perhaps anticipation of the expectations of Lent encouraged some to "step out" one last time, and, if one were needed, Valentine's Day provided a good excuse to hold a dance. November, like December but with somewhat fewer instances, was the next month in terms of the average number of dances (2.16). Did the impetus of Thanksgiving as an occasion of social life come up against the fact that November was a good time to go hunting? Summer was the time for bands with national reputations or aspirations for such status to travel, possibly accounting for the fact that the average of 2.08 dances in July made it one of the five months in which more than two dances regularly occurred.

Six of the twelve years that this study considers included more than twenty dances each. The year 1934 stands out because forty dances took

**Table 2**  
**Summary of Engagements Played by King Oliver's Brunswick Recording Orchestra**  
**during the period of the Huntington, West Virginia, "Residency,"**  
**October 1934 to February 1935.**

Gigs by State	October	November	December	January	February	Totals
WV	2	8	6	1	5	22
IN				1		1
KY	2		2	2	2	8
NC	3					3
OH	2			1		3
SC	5					5
TN		4				4
VA	2	2	1		2	7
Gigs per Month	16	14	9	5	9	53

Source: Compiled by author.

place. One reason might be that the mining industry was getting back on its feet and this encouraged miners and others to conclude that, after several years of uncertain income, they had earned the right to go out and have a good time and had the resources to devote to doing so. More than twenty dances occurred as well in 1935 and 1936 (28 dances in each year), 1941 (26), 1937 (23), and 1939 (20). The quietest year was 1933, when Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal was just being formulated, and the economic crisis was still acute; only six dances can be documented. Between thirteen and fifteen dances took place in the remaining years of the period: 1930, 1931, and 1932 when the country again slipped into a recession, in 1938 and 1940, and 1942 when by midsummer the imposition of the rationing of gasoline and rubber brought an abrupt end to the tours of black dance bands and with that the demise of many of them.

The bands that played for African Americans in the state came mostly from New York City, where they were managed by one of the major corporations in the entertainment industry. The most frequent visitor, as noted previously, was the Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra, which played its first dance in the state on September 18, 1934, in Fairmont and its nineteenth and last on April 25, 1942, in Huntington. Thanks to Paul Barnes's gig book, we know that the Joe Oliver band played fifteen engagements for black Mountaineers. Andy Kirk and his Twelve Clouds of Joy made ten appearances between 1936 and 1941. Chick Webb's band, which after his death was led

**Table 3**  
**Financial Data and Analysis of 21 West Virginia Dances (10/1/34-2/25/35) for which Joe Oliver's Band provided music**

	Month/ Date	City	Race of Audience	Total Earnings	Overhead	Amt per Player	Minimum Total Paid to Band
1	10/1	Montgomery	Colored	\$76.88		\$5.17	\$61.92
2	10/6	Charleston	Colored			\$5.00	\$60.00
3	11/3	Bluefield	Colored	\$150.00		\$4.45	\$53.40
4	11/6	Huntington	Colored			\$1.00	\$12.00
5	11/21	Huntington	White			\$0.00	\$0.00
6	11/22	Montgomery	Colored			\$0.25	\$3.00
7	11/23	Welch	Colored			\$6.00	\$72.00
8	11/28	Bluefield	White	\$75.00	\$22.06	\$3.00	\$36.00
9	11/29	Bluefield	Colored	\$100.00	\$19.00	\$4.00	\$48.00
10	12/7	Huntington	White			\$4.70	\$56.40
11	12/24	Charleston	Colored			\$0.00	\$0.00
12	12/26	Welch	White			\$4.00	\$48.00
13	12/27	Williamson	Colored			\$4.00	\$48.00
14	12/28	Kermit	White			\$4.71 <sup>1</sup>	\$56.52
15	12/31	Huntington	White (Jews) <sup>2</sup>	\$100.00		\$5.90	\$70.80
16	1/31	Huntington	Colored			\$2.08	\$24.96
17	2/4	Parkersburg	Colored			\$0.36	\$4.32
18	2/8	Williamson	Colored			\$0.36	\$4.32
19	2/13	Huntington	Colored			\$1.50	\$18.00
20	2/15	Williamson	Colored			\$2.28	\$27.36
21	2/25	Beckley	Colored			\$3.00	\$36.00

Summary of Financial Data

# of Colored Dances	Total Earnings	Average	# of White Dances	Total Earnings	Average
15	\$39.44	\$2.63	6	\$22.31	\$3.72
Total Minimum Band Receipts	Average Minimum	Average Minimum Colored	Average Minimum White		
\$741.00	\$35.28	\$31.55	\$44.62		

1. Barnes noted that the earnings per musician at the end of the engagement in Kermit included tips.  
 2. Barnes's reference to "Jews" was explained by a report in the *Huntington Advertiser*, December 31, 1934, that the Oliver Band was performing for a dance sponsored by the local chapter of B'nai B'rith held at the Spring Valley Country Club just outside of Huntington.

Source: Compiled by the author.

**Table 4**  
**Financial Data and Analysis of the 29 Dances outside of West Virginia (10/1/34-2/25/35) for which Joe Oliver's Band provided music**

	<b>Month/ Date</b>	<b>City/State</b>	<b>Race of Audience</b>	<b>Total Earnings</b>	<b>Over- head</b>	<b>Amt. per Player</b>	<b>Mini- mum Paid to Band</b>
1	10/3	Portsmouth, OH	Colored			\$0.50	\$6.00
2	10/5	Middleport, OH	White			\$0.75	\$9.00
3	10/12	Jenkins, KY	Colored			\$1.00	\$12.00
4	10/13	Harlan, KY	White			\$1.60	\$19.20
5	10/15	Greenville, SC	Colored			\$0.50	\$6.00
6	10/16	Greenville, SC	White			\$1.60	\$19.60
7	10/19	Charlotte, NC	Colored			\$0.00 <sup>1</sup>	\$00.00
8	10/21	Greenville, SC	Colored			\$0.25	\$3.00
9	10/22	Flat Rock, NC	Colored			\$0.25	\$3.00
10	10/25	High Point, NC	Colored			\$0.25	\$3.00
11	10/28	Greenville, SC	Colored			\$0.15	\$1.80
12	10/29	Lexington, VA	Colored			\$2.00	\$24.00
13	10/30	Staunton, VA	Colored			\$2.00	\$24.00
14	11/8	Kingsport, TN	White			\$0.60	\$19.20
15	11/9	Knoxville, TN	Colored			\$0.00	\$00.00
16	11/10	Knoxville, TN	White		\$55.00	\$1.00	\$12.00
17	11/12	Kingsport, TN	Colored			\$3.00	\$36.00
18	11/16	Big Stone Gap, VA	White		\$75.00	\$1.00	\$12.00
19	11/30	Big Stone Gap, VA	White			\$0.00	\$00.00
20	12/1	Big Stone Gap, VA	White		\$35.00	\$0.80	\$9.60
21	12/25	Ashland, KY	Colored			\$5.00	\$60.00
22	1/16	Portsmouth, OH	Colored			\$0.00	\$00.00
23	1/20	Indianapolis, IN	Colored		\$75.00	\$1.65	\$19.80
24	1/25	Lexington, KY	Colored			\$0.75	\$9.00

**Table 4 (continued)**

Month/ Date	City/State	Race of Audience	Total Earnings	Over- head	Amt. per- Player	Mini- mum Paid to Band	
25	1/28	Mayfield, KY	Colored		\$21.35	\$1.00	\$12.00
26	2/12	Ashland, KY	Colored			\$1.89	\$22.68
27	2/14	Mayfield, KY	Colored			\$0.62	\$7.44
28	2/22	Big Stone Gap, VA	Colored		\$56.00	\$3.36	\$40.32
29	2/23	Big Stone Gap, VA	White			\$0.76	\$9.12
# of Colored Dances			Total Earnings@		Average		
20			\$24.17		\$1.20		
# of White Dances			Total Earnings@		Average		
9			\$8.11		\$0.90		
Total Minimum Band Receipts	Average Minimum		Average Minimum		Average Minimum		
\$399.76	\$13.78		Colored \$14.50		White \$12.19		
From Colored			From White				
\$290.04			\$109.72				

1. Entry in Barnes's diary for October 19, 1934, included the following: "School dance played by [Jimmie Gunn's] Orch. Killed our dance." Jimmie Gunn led a very popular black dance band based in Charlotte, North Carolina, in this period.

Source: Compiled by author.

by the band's singer Ella Fitzgerald, performed nine times between 1931 and 1942. The Erskine Hawkins Orchestra also visited the state nine times but within a much shorter period: between August 19, 1939, and July 25, 1942. The bands, led respectively by Don Redman, Earl "Fatha" Hines, and Thomas "Fats" Waller, played seven engagements in West Virginia. Among the remaining dance orchestras of enduring historical reputation to perform for black Mountaineers were those led respectively by Count Basie, Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, and Fletcher Henderson.

Bands from other parts of the country also came to the Mountain State. The dance orchestras of Erskine Tate and Walter Barnes based in Chicago played a combined total of eight engagements. From Florida came the Sunset Royal Serenaders, Billy Stewart's Floridians, and the Society Syncopators. Zack Whyte and His Chocolate Beau Brummels visited from Cincinnati, as did Speed Webb from Indianapolis. Bennie Moten's Kansas City Orchestra made an appearance as well.



West Virginia also had native talent to contribute to the cultivation of dance music among which were bands based at the two black colleges in the state. The initial purpose of these ensembles was to accompany the colleges' football teams to play for postgame dances. In short order, they were playing for other occasions as well, both on and off their respective campuses. West Virginia State College had at least two student bands, "The Campus Revelers" led by Chappie Willet and, later, "The West Virginia State Collegians." Earlier, in the late 1920s, Phil Edwards, an alumnus of Bluefield State College, formed a band he called "Phil Edwards and His Collegians." It was made up mostly of students and alumni of the college as well as graduates of other institutions, principally West Virginia State. Such was its reputation in 1931 that it earned eighth place in the *Pittsburgh Courier's* Most Popular Band Contest, during a period when it was the house band at the Graystone Hotel in Cincinnati. For more than a year, it had been broadcasting at least once a week over radio station WLW. Its presence on the airwaves no doubt led to its reputation as reflected in its standing in the *Courier's* contest. In 1932 and 1933, still led by Edwards, but managed by Frank Fairfax, a West Virginia State alumnus, the Collegians made an extensive tour of the southeastern United States. By September of that year Chappie Willet assumed leadership and subsequently took the band to his hometown of Philadelphia. Regrettably, by 1934 the band broke up. Whether this was a consequence of too much competition from resident bands and an uncertain economy in the black community of Philadelphia or because its members developed new professional agendas is unclear.<sup>22</sup>

The evidence provided by Paul Barnes, the memory of Herbert Hall and other informants, the newspaper record, and other studies demonstrates that big-band jazz and dance music was very popular among black Mountaineers, but why? There are several reasons, one fairly obvious, the others perhaps less so. The first is simply that it was great music. It was great for dancing; it provided a show case for distinguished collective and solo performances; it contributed to a convivial social atmosphere. No wonder that during the 1930s and into the early 1940s, the prevailing popular music of the nation as a whole, not just of African America, was big band jazz and dance music. If the 1920s constituted the "Jazz Age," the 1930s was "the Swing Era."

A second reason of equal importance is that this music and the musicians who played it represented to black audiences a level of sophistication and talent which many admired. The best of these bands displayed a high level of artistry, and they looked good. Well-groomed and dressed in formal



Phil Edwards's Collegians on the road.

Source: Reprinted by permission from the Eastern Regional and Coal Archives, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, WV.

attire, the players personified a high level of accomplishment, one praised around the country. Though none might have made this association, it is logical to suggest that these musicians were a visual representation of W.E.B. DuBois's concept of a Talented Tenth who would lift up the rest of the race by their own distinguished achievement.

A third reason was that the dances themselves provided an opportunity to experience a life vastly different from that of the company towns. Just as the players were well turned out, so too were the attendees. June Glover of Williamson recalled seeing elegantly dressed women coming out of their houses in the coal camp of Aflax, on the Kentucky side of the Tug Fork River, and being carried one by one across the river by a man who would then drive them on Route 52 to Welch or Bluefield for a dance. On other occasions, they might take the train.<sup>23</sup>

To place this musical culture within the larger experience of black West Virginians also requires awareness of distinctive elements of their lives. In the Mountain State, African Americans had the right to vote as guaranteed by the state's constitution. Their political clout resulted in legislation that banned segregation by race on passenger trains within the state's boundaries; the Jim Crow car which the railroad provided would remain empty. As previously noted, the National Industrial Recovery Act and attendant coal industry agreements meant not only equal pay for equal productivity, but also better wages than blacks earned in the industrial cities of the North.

By certain measures, African American Mountaineers might be said to have been doing pretty well and better than many elsewhere. However, it must also be borne in mind that the same state constitution that guaranteed the right to vote also mandated racially segregated schools. While in certain areas, coal companies reportedly subsidized the budgets of the county schools in an effort to retain black teachers and thus benefit from a better-educated workforce, getting to the black schools often required far longer travel than white children had to endure, and the counties' investments in black education were not necessarily on a par with those for whites.<sup>24</sup>

The segregation of the schools was matched by the segregation of housing both in the company towns and in the larger communities. There were many other ways, large and small, by which white Mountaineers afflicted with what Duke Ellington would later refer to as "the skin disease" could, with tacit approval of the larger community, seek to diminish the standing of their African American neighbors. No black doctor was allowed to make use of the facilities of the hospital in Welch, for instance. Its small number of rooms set aside for black patients were on the top floor, presumably chilly in winter and stifling in the summer. Restaurants and other public accommodations made known their policies regarding potential black patronage with signs in their windows reading "no colored."

Within this social context, the musical culture of big-band jazz in black West Virginia takes on an added meaning. Surely, no matter how bad things might have been in the larger world, the combination of the music performed, the artistry of the musicians performing it, and the social environment created, albeit temporarily, in the gymnasium of a black high school, within a national guard armory, or in a night club rented for the occasion, affirmed the values and interests of all who were present. The dances represented a sanctuary in which one was temporarily free of the burden not only of the day's work but also the annoyances and inconveniences resulting from living in a segregated society of unequal opportunities. Furthermore, those dances were major social occasions, with at least two generations in attendance. No doubt, even as the music was playing, folks got caught up on each other's news, courting by members of the younger generation took place under the watchful eyes of their parents, and solutions to the problems of the world were proposed and debated. Simply put, those dances provided a public space for the authentic expression of what it meant to be a human being on one's own terms, and the music gave voice to that humanity.

The end of this musical world came with an unusual suddenness and finality. One can date its climax with precision. On June 1, 1942, gasoline

and rubber were strictly rationed in the United States because they were essential to the war effort. As black dance bands routinely traveled by bus while on tour (with the exception of Duke Ellington's which used leased railroad equipment), this eliminated almost all possibilities of engagements in West Virginia. A few bands attempted to continue tours by traveling in private automobiles, but this proved impractical since long-distance trips would have quickly exhausted the four-gallon-per-week gas ration for each vehicle and because, as tires wore out, they were not be easily replaced. Despite efforts by some in the music industry to obtain some relief from these constraints, the exigencies of the war could not be overcome. In his column of June 6, 1942, the theatrical editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, Billy Rowe, correctly prophesied: "The new transportation problem coupled with many others which will take a heavy toll on the huge band business will kill many of the small bands." Many bands did fold while a few prominent ones sought "location jobs," extended engagements in one or another venue in New York, Chicago, or another of the nation's major cities, which precluded any need for travel.<sup>25</sup>

Just as bands were not traveling, their fans' movements were curtailed as well. Those who might have thought little of driving from Williamson to Welch or from Huntington to Charleston to attend a dance during peacetime, now had to be mindful of the limited fuel supply. Train travel remained a possibility to be sure, but seemingly frivolous travel during wartime was frowned upon as well. Concurrently, the coal industry was also in transformation as mechanization of mining operations increased. African Americans found themselves passed over for assignments to operate the new machinery, and, as the number of miners required at a particular operation shrank, it was the black miners who were the first to be laid off in many instances.<sup>26</sup> The extensive out-migration of residents of the southern coalfields that characterized the state's history after World War II was anticipated by out-of-work African American miners before the war. As mechanization pushed these men and their families out of West Virginia, the heavy industries in Pittsburgh and other nearby northern cities pulled them in. Thus, the economic basis of the musical culture of big band jazz and dance music was being destroyed, even as the war precluded many from participating in it, be they Mountaineers or visiting musicians.

By V-J Day, much had changed in America including its social customs. Returning veterans had a different agenda than they had prior to the war. Completing their educations, securing employment, and starting families were of greatest importance. Few were inclined to go dining and

dancing as had been the custom in the 1930s. Big bands found themselves facing dramatically increased costs to operate, and, with relatively few people inclined to attend public dances, many of the bands that had survived the war by one means or another now broke up in the absence of a market.

Jazz itself underwent stylistic changes that yielded a new style, known colloquially as “bebop,” which was not intended to be a dance music. As a consequence, it lost much of its audience, both black and white. Many African Americans, including those continuing to reside in West Virginia, were drawn to a newly emerging blues-based dance music that came to be known as Rhythm & Blues. By the mid-1950s, through clever marketing and repackaging, R & B was sold to white audiences, primarily adolescents, under the name Rock ‘n Roll.

Beyond the fact of its existence, the musical culture of big band jazz and dance music in black West Virginia reveals another important dimension of African American culture in the Mountain State: its close ties to the urban North. As blacks took up residence in the state, it is reasonable to suppose that they looked back to their places of origin as sources of personal and cultural identity, just as they might regularly return to “the homeplace” in, say, Virginia, North Carolina, or Kentucky for family reunions.

The company towns themselves, though adjacent to the heavy industry that mines represented, were semi-agricultural in that their residents maintained many of the habits of their earlier lives, including hunting, gardening, and close social contacts with neighbors of all ethnicities. At the same time, the Great Migration after World War I created large black communities in northern cities: Bronzeville in Chicago, the Hill in Pittsburgh, and, of course, Harlem in New York, among others. These communities became sources of the latest and presumably most sophisticated developments in musical style, literature, and fashion, among many other cultural artifacts. Newspapers and the radio brought word of these developments to the coalfields.

As a consequence African Americans in West Virginia balanced the rural life of the southern coalfields and a form of northern urban cultural experience created anew every time a band came to play. Viewed retrospectively, it is easy to conclude that, in a sense, black Mountaineers were preparing for their later relocation to the North necessitated by changes in the mining industry by participating in at least one component of big-city life, the public dance accompanied by a big band. On the other hand, viewed prospectively, it is accurate to say that African American West Virginians had successfully created lives containing the best of both rural and urban experience during a period of severe national economic hardship.

## Notes

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1. Herbert Hall, interview by Sterlin Holmesley, Feb. 23, 1980, Research Library, Institute of Texan Cultures, San Antonio, TX.
2. The Collegians' reputation in the area is documented by the series of reports published in the *Pittsburgh Courier* between Aug. 8, and Dec. 12, 1931, during the course of the newspaper's "Most Popular Orchestra" contest. Initially, thirty-one bands were nominated, but by the end of the contest on Dec. 5, 1931, Edwards's Collegians ranked eighth with 27,000 votes, ahead of Bennie Moten's Kansas City Orchestra (the forerunner of the Count Basie Orchestra) with 25,007 votes and behind Louis Armstrong's Orchestra which received 30,000. The winner was Duke Ellington with 50,000 votes. *Pittsburgh Courier*, Dec. 12, 1931.
3. Other states whose residents migrated to West Virginia in this period include Illinois, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Missouri. Joe William Trotter Jr., *Coal, Class, and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia: 1915 -1932* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 64-76; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*, vol. 3, pt. 2 (Washington, DC, 1932), 1268-72.
4. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940. Population, Second Series: Characteristics of the Population: West Virginia* (Washington, DC, 1932), 40-43, Table 21. Beyond the coalfield, the black population of the state was reportedly sparse. Some counties reported no African American residents, and others fewer than a dozen.
5. "Norfolk and Western Railway: Coal Districts and Mines" [Map], *List of Coal and Coke Operations on the Norfolk and Western Railway #13—Issued June 1, 1941* (Roanoke, VA: Norfolk and Western Railway, 1941).
6. The West Virginia Writers Project, *West Virginia: A Guide to the Mountain State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), 458.
7. Frances Morton Flippen and J. Bryan Flippen, interview by Christopher Wilkinson, Oct. 8, 2005, Bethesda, MD, Author's collection.
8. The following state newspapers provided relevant coverage in varying degrees: *Beckley Post-Herald*, *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, *Charleston Daily Mail*, *Charleston*

*Gazette, Fairmont Times, Fairmont Times-West Virginian, Fairmont West Virginian, Huntington Advertiser, Logan Banner, Welch Daily News, West Virginia Weekly.* Of these, only the *West Virginia Weekly*, published in Charleston, was a black newspaper. The other black newspaper of the period, the *McDowell Times*, published in Keystone, was both socially and culturally conservative; consequently, it included no reports of dances or comparable entertainment for African Americans in McDowell or neighboring counties.

9. Flippen, interview.
10. The exceptions to racial targeting of dances, when they did occur, offered one race the opportunity to observe a dance intended for the other. In the *West Virginian* of Oct. 3, 1934, the following sentence was included in a brief article reporting on a dance to be played by Don Redman's Orchestra in the Fairmont Armory the following evening: "Because of Redman's popularity among the white folks, arrangements have been made to seat approximately 100 spectators in the balcony." On Nov. 22, 1934, Joe Oliver's Victor Recording Orchestra played an engagement in Montgomery in which a curtain separated white and black patrons, according to an entry on page 64 of the diary of Paul D. Barnes, one of the band's members.
11. "Rural Electrification in West Virginia, June 30, 1939," *1939 Report of Rural Electrification Administration* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1940), 332.
12. June Glover, June 15, 2005, Williamson, West Virginia. Corroborating her recollections were E. Ray and Christine N. Williams, July 13, 2005, Welch, West Virginia, and Thomas H. Mack, July 14, 2005, Bluefield, West Virginia. Interviews by Christopher Wilkinson, Author's collection.
13. Ivan R. Tribe, "Tune In: Radio to 1942," *Mountaineer Jamboree: Country Music in West Virginia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), chap. 4, 73-109.
14. *Cincinnati Enquirer*, Nov. 20, 1937.
15. *Pittsburgh Courier*, Sept. 17, 1932.
16. *Pittsburgh Courier*, Feb. 20, 1932.
17. *Pittsburgh Courier*, Sept. 1, 1934.
18. The Code was reprinted in the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, Sept. 8, 1933.
19. *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., s.v. "Barnes, Polo."
20. The two volumes are on deposit in a safe in the Hogan Jazz Archive at Tulane University, placed there by Richard B. Allen, former associate curator of the archive, who was entrusted with their care by Barnes's widow until such time as they were to find a permanent home. That I was able to see them was with Allen's expressed consent.



21. The seven in-state newspapers cited in note 8 plus the *Pittsburgh Courier* constitute the sources of documentation of the dances under discussion.
22. John D. Wriggle, "Chappie Willet, Frank Fairfax, and Phil Edwards' Collegians: From West Virginia to Philadelphia." *Black Music Research Journal* 27, no. 1 (forthcoming).
23. Glover, interview.
24. David A. Corbin, "Class over Caste: Interracial Solidarity in the Company Town," *Blacks in Appalachia*, ed. William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 101-3.
25. *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 6, 1942.
26. Ronald L. Lewis provided a summary of the impact of mechanization on coal operations in West Virginia with particular attention to its impact upon black miners in *Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class, and Community Conflict, 1780-1980* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 167-90.