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# Chocolate City Way Up South in Appalachia: Black Knoxville at the Intersection of Race, Place, and Region

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## Chapter 1: "I don't identify as being Appalachian…Mountain people are Appalachian"

*I don't identify as being Appalachian. I recognize that our culture and East Tennessee is influenced by Appalachia. I definitely recognize that is a part of it. I have an appreciation for the mountains, but I wouldn't consider myself as Appalachian. I can understand why people when they see where we are on the map…. Mountain people are Appalachian. Ah..Um…I understand. I went to Virginia to visit my aunt in high school, and I was there for a summer. I remember we were outside and whatever high schoolers do...just sitting outside like throwing rocks or something. And one of the kids was like do "y'all wear shoes?" They were asking me these random questions. They asked me if we wore shoes in Tennessee and in Knoxville were the roads paved (laughter) and I'm like were you really asking me that? And I had to explain…. yeah we wear shoes and we got paved roads. But there's still sometimes this perception that we backwoods country in East Tennessee. And I just think I would never have to explain in Virginia where is still technically part of the South that we wore shoes and we don't have dirt roads.*

*I think that we believe that we are from the South and I think that it takes an Appalachian or someone reference us as Appalachian for us to be reminded of that. Because I don't think that we think of us as being Appalachian…cause we don't think we are any different from Atlanta, Chattanooga, or Nashville. We think we're the same. Until an outsider comes in and says, "Something's different here" (Laughter)…. And they all do! They all do! Every new graduate student, black faculty member (I don't know what it is) (Laughing) they'll say to me I've never…. I've never been to a place like this…*

**(Jamie)**

## 1.0 Introduction

Speaker 1: He suggested that we make our proposal broader to include more places. That will make them more likely to give us the money to build the facility. He suggested maybe adding Appalachia.
Speaker 2: No, no.
Speaker 1: That's how we gonna get it done.
Speaker 3: No, don't say Appalachi. If you say Appalachia they gonna give the money to them white folks.

African Americans have long dwelled in Appalachia, as evident even today in remaining antebellum slave-built buildings and fences (Guy 2010). Slaves inhabited every county of Appalachia prior to the Civil War (Campbell 2011; Gardner 2014). For example, in 1860, in the city of Knoxville, Tennessee, Blacks were 20.3 percent of the population, and during the Union Army's occupation of the area, more Blacks flocked to Knoxville in search of jobs and new opportunities (Gardner 2014). In the early part of the twentieth century, Blacks also migrated to coal-mining areas of Kentucky, West Virginia, and Virginia in larger numbers to fill the voids in employment left by white men in the wake of World War I. Coal-mining companies were particularly aggressive in recruiting Black labor, and Appalachian coal fields became a migration destination for Black Southerners. By 1920, there were 80,841 Black residents in West Virginia alone, many of them coal miners (Coleman 2001). With the resulting Great Migration, large numbers of Blacks left Appalachia, joining others leaving the South. Nevertheless, in 1980, 1.3 million, or one in every fourteen Appalachians, were Black (Cabbell 1980) and in 2006, Blacks made up 8.2 percent of Appalachia's population (Myadze 2006).

Despite the long history and significant presence of African Americans in Appalachia, many people are surprised to learn that there are Blacks in the region. Blacks have largely been invisible in popular and scholarly presentations of Appalachia (including in Black and Appalachian studies), although Afrolachian Studies has emerged recently as an area of inquiry in sociology and other fields. The problem of invisibility is so pervasive that Griffin (2004) scolded

Appalachian studies scholars for continuing to suffer from a "color-blindness," which has resulted from and perpetuates the social construction of Appalachia as the making of whiteness. This race-making process has had profound consequence for the people of color in Appalachia. Because race is usually studied in the context of the presence of people of color—and that presence is relatively small in the Appalachia—issues of race and racism have been deemed irrelevant in Appalachia (Smith 2004). As a result, whites have been presented as having "racial innocence" (Smith 2004); the racial practices—overt or covert—structuring the lives of Blacks and other groups are seen as race-neutral or nonexistent, and the structures supporting white domination can prevail.

Traditionally, when Blacks are mentioned in an Appalachian context, there is a tendency to portray healthy race relations, as seen in such comments as, "Black coal miners in Appalachia fared better than their contemporaries in other industries" (Coleman 2001: http://www.wvculture.org/history/wvhs/wvhs1502.html). Mostly, race has been ignored in the nearly exclusive focus on class. Typically, scholars studying Appalachia highlight "exploitation, oppression, and redemptive collective action by victimized highlanders" (Griffin 2004:7). These highlanders, however, are presumed white; and even when scholars try to define class, status, and power dynamics in Appalachia, they fail to recognize Black experiences. Ultimately, the production of whiteness in Appalachia perpetuates whiteness as a generic identity—i.e., one that is "normal"—which serves to obscure a racial analysis of the region. But despite its invisibility, race—in both insidious and heroic ways—has shaped Appalachia (Griffin 2004). It is only through the exclusion of race and the invisibleness of Blacks from the Appalachian narrative that certain myths about Appalachia can be maintained (Griffin 2004). These myths include the idea that the number of Blacks in Appalachia is tiny, that people who live in the mountains are "poor,

white hillbillies," and that Appalachia has "white [poor] problems," not the race problems that the rest of America has.

This dissertation seeks to challenge those myths and contribute to the long-neglected but important inquiry of Black Appalachian scholarship. Beyond the dominant discourses that render Black people invisible in conceptions of Appalachia, I also grapple with the racial, structural, and cultural practices that have historically reproduced that invisibility. However, based on the understanding that race is produced through space, I argue that this invisibility, in both the regional and local contexts, is a very place-based experience; therefore, I am interested in understanding Black Appalachian experiences at the intersection of race and place—both at a contextual level as well as experiential level. I approach both race and place as socially constructed ideas that are inextricably linked such that race is spatialized and place is racialized (Lipsitz 2007). While Appalachia's racialization suggests a white space, Black places in the region are ignored, and Black people are subjected to cycles of displacement, dispassion, and other racialized and, therefore, spatialized experiences.

I recognize that Blackness is traditionally understood in the context of places with large Black populations, usually Northern migration destinations, like New York and Chicago, or Deep South locations, like Memphis and Atlanta. This dissertation draws on those understandings of Blackness but expands on them. However, my interests in studying Blackness in Appalachia is not simply to highlight another region; likewise, I am not satisfied with simply pointing out the region's diversity or making a place for Blacks in Appalachia's history. Though all of these tasks are important, I am more concerned with how centering the Black experience in studying this space may usher a reimagining and reconstruction of the region that contradict or otherwise complicate the region's racial exceptionalism. Further, I hope to demonstrate how the

common perception of Appalachia as a poor white place erases a complex Black experience in the region. Particularly, I am interested in how Black people, within their own geographies, i.e., Black neighborhoods, respond creatively to local structural inequalities and racial violence. Focusing specifically on the Black Appalachian experience in Knoxville, Tennessee, there are three primary questions that drive this research:

1. What are the historical, structural, racial, and cultural practices that have shaped the relationship between Blackness and place?
2. How might understanding Black experiences facilitate a reimagining of place?
3. How does Black place-making occur? /What are the major sites of Black place-making?

To answer these questions and otherwise conceive the Black Appalachian experience in Knoxville, I draw and expand on literature in the theoretical tradition of Black geography and urban Black sociology –specifically Chocolate City Sociology, which is an asset-based approach to understanding Black communities. These theoretical traditions are particularly suitable for understanding Blackness in a place context. While not ignoring the weight of structural inequality, these traditions are centered on Black geographic agency and the ways in which Black people construct, contest, and complicate their understanding of place. Furthermore, they uncover Black maps and other ways that Black people have made and remade particularly cities, despite and in spite of struggles against racism. I build on insights gained from these frameworks to argue that in the context of invisibility, erasure, and exclusion from narratives of Knoxville (Appalachia), Black Knoxvillians develop a sense of place characterized by a sense of being out of place. Due to a history of racial violence against Black neighborhoods, i.e. urban renewal and urban disinvestment, Blacks also develop a strong sense of loss of place in Knoxville. Still, it is

neighborhoods, not the region or the city, that are linked to Black Knoxvillians' collective identity. While vehicles of racial violence, Black neighborhoods simultaneously function as sites of Black safety and collective place-making. I develop the concept of Black safety—place-based safety predicated on freedom against white supremacy and from a perpetual white gaze—to demonstrate the necessity and importance of Chocolate Cities, black neighborhoods, enclaves, sides of town etc., in white-dominated places. In addition, I introduce Black schools as a major site of place-making within Black neighborhoods, or Chocolate Cities otherwise.

**Methods**

My dissertation is a case study of Black residents in Knoxville, Tennessee. Relative to the rest of the South, African Americans—due to their underrepresentation in the region— are very seldom associated with Appalachia. For many people, the term "Appalachia" usually invokes images of poor, white, rural people and places. However, there is a substantial number of Blacks, particularly in urban areas in Southern Appalachia. Knoxville, Tennessee is one such Appalachian city with a sizeable Black population. Knoxville is located in East Tennessee and is one of the state's largest cities. Although the populations of Blacks in Nashville (in middle Tennessee) and Memphis (in west Tennessee) are larger than its own, Knoxville, like these cities, has had a significant Black presence from the time it was settled by whites in the eighteenth century. Both freed and enslaved Blacks were among Knoxville's population prior to the Civil War. Following the Civil War and later with the onset of World War I, many Blacks from rural areas in the region, as well as throughout the Deep South, poured into Knoxville in search of employment.

Specifically, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the city boasted of peaceful relations among the whites and Blacks. Furthermore, Knoxville's leaders set the city

apart from the rest of the South by highlighting that in 1860, Black citizens could vote and hold public office, be police officers, and sit on juries (Lakin, 2000). From 1909 to 1919, Knoxville was also home to the region's largest Black newspaper, *The East Tennessee News*. In addition, Knoxville was the location of one of the earliest and regionally recognized Black educational institutions to be established after the Civil War, Knoxville College (KC). Knoxville College, in the heart of the historic African American neighborhood of Mechanicsville, functioned as a beacon in the city's Black community, not only educating and producing a professional class of Black workers but also playing a central role in community-organizing, producing cultural activities, supporting Black businesses, and recruiting Blacks to the region. KC maintained this role until it lost accreditation in the early 2000s. Today African Americans make up almost 17 percent of the city's population, and Knoxville and the Knoxville metropolitan area serve as a hub for Blacks in surrounding cities and counties.

Given the number of African Americans who call Knoxville home and the historical significance of the city for African Americans in Eastern Tennessee and surrounding areas, Knoxville presents an ideal city to conduct a case study of African American experiences and identity in Appalachia. Context is important in case study research; it provides the real-life setting within which the phenomenon being studied takes place (Yin 2003). My interest is in the Black Appalachian experience, but because of contested boundaries and changes in definition over time, as well as the physical size of the region—the contours of Appalachia being difficult to pinpoint and study—the case study is therefore a suitable approach for this research. It will allow me to study Black Appalachian experiences within the physical boundaries of the city of Knoxville, which is a space that is overwhelmingly understood to fall within the bounds of Appalachia due to its location and culture. As an Appalachian space, Knoxville is the context for

this research. My research questions once again are 1) What are the historical, structural, racial, and cultural practices that have shaped the relationship between Blackness and place? 2) How might understanding Black experiences facilitate a reimagining of place? and 3) How does Black place-making occur? /What are the major sites of Black place-making?

This dissertation draws on the epistemological foundations of Black sociologists and ethnographers, tracing back to W.E.B. DuBois. Accordingly, I designed the study as an investigation into everyday Black life and experiences in Knoxville. I structured my data collection primarily around two techniques, in-depth interviews and participant observation. I used semi-structured interviews for this research because while they allow for some structure in the interview process, there is a great deal of flexibility whereby the conversation is free to vary depending on the participants (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2010). This interview style acknowledges participants as experts of their own experience and thus are the best ones to report how they experienced a particular event or phenomenon (Darlington & Scott 2002). Observing Black neighborhoods and communities, as well as cultural and intellectual spaces where Blacks have participated in constructing or spaces to which Blacks have been restricted, provided insight into how Black identities are constructed, maintained, and contested in these spaces. Among other places, these data collection techniques often led me to three African American neighborhoods.

Like many cities in America, housing is racially segregated in Knoxville. There are three geographic spaces that have historically been associated with African Americans in the city, and they make up what I refer to as the East Knoxville-Mechanicsville-Lonsdale triad. East Knoxville is located immediately east of uptown Knoxville and is currently being annexed by the expansion of the uptown area. During the 1950s and 1960s, urban renewal projects in Downtown Knoxville displaced hundreds of African American residents, many of whom relocated to East

Knoxville, an area made up of several smaller neighborhoods that remain highly populated by African Americans of different class and generational backgrounds. This community is home to Vine Middle School and Austin-East High School, where many African Americans attended and continue to attend school. Mechanicsville is named for the large number of "mechanics" and other industrial workers who lived in the area in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and is to the immediate west of uptown. It is the oldest intact African American community in Knox County. Lonsdale is northwest of Mechanicsville. Both Mechanicsville and Lonsdale have also been affected by urban renewal since the 1980s and, as is the case for East Knoxville, "there is a mixture of incomes and types of housing in the [communities,] ranging from public housing projects to historical district homes" (Scott 1993:17). East Knoxville is separated from Mechanicsville by uptown, and Lonsdale is separated by Beaumont. These three communities have a common culture, and there is constant and significant contact between and among their residents; many are kin, schoolmates, and friends. In addition, many residents in each of these neighborhoods have generational ties to the neighborhoods.

***Data***

Over the course of the study, I collected formal interviews with 35 native and long-term Black residents of Knoxville. I employed snowball sampling to recruit participants for this study. Having lived in Knoxville for the past six years, I relied on some of the networks I have built. I also took advantage of casual encounters with people I interacted with in everyday life or via social media in order to locate participants. In addition, I asked study participants to share my contact information and brief information about the study with others they believe might be interested in being study participants. I ended up with 9 individuals who identified as male and 26 who identified as female. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 86 years old, with most falling

between 25 and 45 years old. Because it was important for my analytical focus to understand urban renewal in Knoxville, I was intentional about interviewing participants who were old enough to have directly experienced urban renewal. Five of my participants had experienced one or more phases of urban renewal. There were 25 people who were native Knoxvillians and 10 who were long-term residents, having lived here for 10 years or longer. Of the long-term residents, one had been living in Knoxville since she was 3 years old but had Appalachian roots from Kentucky. Also with Kentucky Appalachian roots, the oldest person in my study has been in Knoxville since she was 16 years old. Others had moved to Knoxville mainly for job or school opportunities. Sixteen of my native Knoxvillian participants attended Black schools for elementary or secondary education, and 11 attended predominantly white schools for elementary and secondary education. Fifteen of my participants lived in Black neighborhoods, and 20 lived in other neighborhoods. Of those who lived in other neighborhoods, there were 5 who maintained strong ties and frequented Black neighborhoods either because their family home was there or they had a business in a Black neighborhood. There were others who maintained connections through going to church or participating in community work and social and cultural activities in the Black neighborhoods. Interviews lasted for as little as 30 minutes to as many as 4 hours, though most lasted for about 80 minutes. I conducted follow-up interviews with 10 participants, including one whom I met with over ten times. All interviews except the ones with one participant, the one I met with most frequently, were recorded with a standard Tape recorder. Interviews typically took place between only one participant and me and were conducted at either the participant's residence, my residence, or a common community space. After each interview, I recorded my own reflection.

I documented my participant observations in different ways. I audio- or video-recorded" public meetings such as community, school board, and city council meetings. I also carried a notebook with me and took handwritten notes during or after these meetings. For other meetings that were less public, I took handwritten notes from memory usually after the event in a more private environment. I also used talk-to-text and voice recording to take notes after observations. For cultural and social activities like neighborhood homecomings or sorority parties, I captured my observations with photographs, which was a part of an effort to comprehensively document Black places and place-making in Knoxville.

The study also relied on archival data, mainly newspapers and a range of supplementary data types, including content from social and public media. While conducting fieldwork, I collected print and/or digital copies of articles to supplement or triangulate interview data. This is particularly useful in my inquiry into urban renewal. Over the course of my study, I also collected newspaper articles that overlapped with my study or pertained to Black Knoxville generally. I also drew from Facebook posts, videos, and comments. These included video campaigns released by the city of Knoxville, e.g., a campaign by the mayor that illustrated the extent of Black invisibility in the city. Other things included community comments, posted in a community group page, on public works announcements or the comments of Black Knoxvillians concerned about defunding programs in Black schools.

**Researcher Reflexivity**

As a sociologist, I understand that who I am, my identity, the social locations I occupy, and my background in general shape my entire approach to this study. Even my decision to study Black Knoxville was shaped by my position. As an African American who grew up in Atlanta, when I moved to Knoxville to attend the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, I was immediately

shocked by the racial demographics of the city. Knoxville is one of the "whitest" places that I have experienced. I noticed soon after moving here that even though the Black population was so significant, Blacks lived in segregated neighborhoods. Even on the university campus, it was very common to go through a day without Black interaction. The few Black graduate students I encountered during my first few years were all just as eager as I was to complete their graduate education and leave Knoxville. Yet I noticed that race relations were seldom discussed, and the dominant narrative seemed to tell a story of healthy race relations between African Americans and whites. My research interest grew out of my wanting to understand what it meant to be Black in this context.

Once I began my field work, my social characteristics also impacted all of my field interactions. Being an African American gave me access to Black spaces without being perceived as an outsider. Similarly, it gave other Blacks I encountered at the grocery store and elsewhere a level of comfort around me that I sometimes took advantage of to find participants. Knoxville's Black community is very close-knit, and it can be very difficult to penetrate this closeness, even as a Black person. Therefore, whereas being Black often gave me initial acknowledgement, being a non-native, at times, made me stand out. However, my husband has been a long-term resident of Knoxville. Having attended Knoxville College, the historically Black college in Knoxville, and having taught in predominantly Black schools for several years, he was able to gain acceptance and insight into the Black community. I often leveraged his social capital in my encounters, especially with native Knoxvillians. In addition, my husband also relied on his networks to help me with recruiting participants. My interactions with non-natives, who had moved to Knoxville for work or school, were sometimes smoother as they perceived similarities between themselves and me. Over the course of my study, through interactions with

different individuals, groups, organizations, institutions, and initiatives, I too began to be accepted into Black Knoxville and often found myself in Black political, cultural, and other spaces.

Another thing that shaped my interactions with participants was my affiliation with the University of Tennessee. For some participants, the University of Tennessee was perceived as a respected and reputable institution in the region, so it legitimized me and my work. For other participants, the racist histories between Black communities and universities in general, as well as a specific disconnect between the University of Tennessee and Knoxville's Black community, were more apparent. These participants were more skeptical of me, my intentions, and the work that I was going to produce. Several of these participants ended up being reoccurring interviewers, and it often took them seeing me in different community spaces— particularly my involvement in community-organizing initiatives—for them to recognize that my research intentions and commitment to Black Knoxville transcended my dissertation. Regardless of which camp they fell in, I recognized that this particular aspect of my positionality is tied up in particular power dynamics, and at times I felt it influenced what participants shared. At times, they told me what they thought I wanted to hear, and at times I sensed that participants felt they needed to control the narrative and protect the image of Black Knoxville.

The final noteworthy way in which my position affected my interactions with participants is that, during a large part of my field research, I was either pregnant or had a baby. This experience, to my surprise, resulted in favorable outcomes with my participants. Women, especially mothers, connected with me over what they perceived to be a familiar experience, and many were expressively proud of me for what they perceived to be my commitment. Men, on the other hand, particularly older men, were protective of me and were more willing to meet at

places that were more convenient for me to do our interviews. Also, my child, who was born in Knoxville, was received well by participants as a Black Knoxvillian, and I often felt that the experience of having her allowed for a kinship to develop between some participants and me.

Throughout this process of data collection, I tried to remain cognizant not only of how my position affected my interaction with participants but also of how my power and privilege impacted the types of questions I asked, how I asked them, and my feelings about participants' responses. I tried to be mindful of my body language and subtle things that I may or may not have been communicating to participants in my speech, tone, etc. Furthermore, it was very important that I centered my participants' voices in my analysis, so in addition to reading transcripts, while writing my analysis, I also listened to recordings, and throughout this dissertation I intentionally flooded my pages with direct quotes from participants.

**Chapter Outline**

Chapter 1 introduces the study by interrogating Appalachia's whiteness and offers a racial analysis that emphasizes place as important for reconstructing Appalachia and understanding Blackness in this context. Chapter 2 explores the theoretical traditions that inform my work: urban Black sociology's "Chocolate Cities" and Black geography. In this chapter, I explore the debates between structure and agency in social science literature that has informed how we understand Black experiences in America. I expand particularly on the more agency-based work housed in the traditions of Black geography and Chocolate City sociology by bringing Appalachia into understandings of Blackness. Chapter 3 traces the history of Blacks in Appalachia's challenging narratives of racial homogeneity and idea of Appalachian's "distinctiveness" and "racial exceptionalism." This chapter departs from the rural, coal-mining narratives of Appalachia in order to emphasize an urban Appalachian experience as a context for

understanding Black experiences in the region. Finally, in the chapter, I provide a brief history of Blacks in Knoxville. Chapter 4 deals with Black people's sense of place in Knoxville. In this chapter, I argue that negative experiences have shaped Blacks' sense of place, characterized by feelings of being out of place and a loss of place or placeless-ness. I argue that the stress of being such a large minority and being subjected to an invisibility in social, economic, political, and other arenas have produced a sense of being out of place for Blacks in Knoxville. I also situate urban renewal as a critical juncture that set into motion traumatizing structural and social changes—cycles of displacement, dispossession, and disinvestment—that reverberate over generations in a collective sense of Black placeless-ness within Knoxville generally.

Chapter 5 shows that Black neighborhoods in Knoxville are places where, despite cycles of structural violence and trauma, Black people experience a type of safety they do not otherwise experience in greater Knoxville. I advance "Black safety" as an idea of safety predicated on freedom that goes beyond more carceral understandings of safety. Chapter 6 positions Black neighborhoods as distinct places. In the Black collective consciousness, they are separated from the city of Knoxville and operate as Black-life worlds. The chapter explores how Black schools function as major sites of place-making within these neighborhoods. Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation by considering how a racial analysis might uncover parallel stories of Appalachia that can reshape how the region is depicted and perceived by America in general. Such a reimagining of Appalachia is important in its own right, but in the face of a poor region, it can also have implications for more equitable approaches to the region's problems.

## Chapter 2: 400 Mulvaney Street

### Except from "400 Mulvaney Street"

When we were growing up Knoxville didn't have television, let alone an airport. It finally got TV but the airport is in Alcoa. And is now called Tyson Field. Right? Small towns are funny. Knoxville even has a zip code and seven-digit phone numbers. All of which seems strange to me since I mostly remember Mrs. Flora Ford's white cake with white icing and Miss Delaney's blue furs and Armetine Picket's being the sharpest woman in town—she attended our church—and Miss Brooks wearing tight sweaters and Carter-Roberts Drug Store sending out Modern Jazz Quartet sounds of *Fontessa* and my introduction to Nina Simone by David Cherry, dropping a nickel in the jukebox and *Porgy* coming out. I mostly remember Vine Street, which I was not allowed to walk to get to school, though Grandmother didn't want me to take Paine Street either because Jay Manning lived on it and he was home from the army and very beautiful with his Black face and two dimples. Not that I was going to do anything, because I didn't do anything enough even to think in terms of not doing anything, but according to small-town logic "It looks bad."

The Gem Theatre was on the corner of Vine and a street that runs parallel to the creek, and for ten cents you could sit all day and see a double feature, five cartoons, and two serials plus previews for the next two weeks. And I remember Frankie Lennon would come in with her gang and sit behind me and I wanted to say, "Hi. Can I sit with you?" but thought they were too snooty, and they, I found out later, thought I was too northern and stuck-up. All of that is gone now. Something called progress killed my grandmother. Mulvaney Street looked like a camel's back with both humps bulging-up and down-and we lived in the down part. At the top of the left hill a lady made ice balls and would mix the flavors for you for just a nickel. Across the street from her was the Negro center, where the guys played indoor basketball and the little kids went for stories and nap time. Down in the valley part were the tennis courts, the creek, the bulk of the park, and the beginning of the right hill. To enter or leave the street you went either up or down. I used to think of it as a fort, especially when it snowed, and the enemy would always try to sneak through the underbrush nurtured by the creek and through the park trees, but we always spotted strangers and dealt. As you came down the left hill the houses were up on its side; then people got regular flat front yards; then the right hill started and ran all the way into Vine and Mulvaney was gone and the big apartment building didn't have a yard at all.

Grandmother and Grandpapa had lived at 400 since they'd left Georgia. And Mommy had been a baby there and Anto and Aunt Agnes were born there. And dated there and sat on the swing on the front porch and fussed there, and our good and our bad were recorded there. That little frame house duplicated twice more which overlooked the soft-voiced people passing by with "Evening, 'Fessor Watson, Miz Watson," and the grass wouldn't grow between our house and Edith and Clarence White's house. It was said that he had something to do with numbers. When the man tried to get between the two houses and

the cinder crunched a warning to us, both houses lit up and the man was caught between Mr. White's shotgun and Grandfather's revolver, trying to explain he was lost. Grandpapa would never pull a gun unless he intended to shoot and would only shoot to kill. I think when he reached Knoxville he was just tired of running.

…

Gay Street is to Knoxville what Fifth Avenue is to New York. Something special, yes? And it looked the same. But Vine Street, where I would sneak to the drugstore to buy *Screen Stories* and watch the men drink wine and play pool-all gone. A wide, clean military-looking highway has taken its place. Austin Homes is cordoned off. It looked like a big prison. The Gem Theatre is now some sort of nightclub and Mulvaney Street is gone. Completely wiped out. Assassinated along with the old people who made it live. I looked over and saw that the lady who used to cry "Hot fish! Good hot fish!" no longer had a Cal Johnson Park to come to and set up her stove in. Grandmother would not say, "Edith White! I think I'll send Gary for a sandwich. You want one?" Mrs. Abrum and her reverend husband from rural Tennessee wouldn't bring us any more goose eggs from across the street. And Leroy wouldn't chase his mother's boyfriend on Saturday night down the back alley anymore. All gone, not even to a major highway but to a cutoff of a cutoff. All the old people who died from lack of adjustment died for a cutoff of a cutoff.

…

And I went to Knoxville looking for Frankie and the Gem and Carter-Roberts or something and they were all gone. And 400 Mulvaney Street, like a majestic king dethroned, put naked in the streets to beg, stood there just a mere skeleton of itself. The cellar that had been so mysterious was now exposed. The fireplaces stood. And I saw the kitchen light hanging and the peach butter put up on the back porch and I wondered why they were still there. She was dead. And I heard the daily soap operas from the radio we had given her one birthday and saw the string beans cooking in the deep well and thought how odd, since there was no stove, and I wanted to ask how Babbi was doing since I hadn't heard or seen *Brighter Day* in so long but no one would show himself. The roses in the front yard were blooming and it seemed a disgrace. Probably the tomatoes came up that year. She always had fantastic luck with tomatoes. But I was just too tired to walk up the front steps to see. Edith White had died. Mr. Ector had died, I heard. Grandmother had died. The park was not yet gone but the trees looked naked and scared. The wind sang to them but they wouldn't smile. The playground where I had swung. The courts where I played my first game of tennis. The creek where our balls were lost. "Hot fish! Good hot fish!" The hill where the car speeding down almost hit me. Walking barefoot up the hill to the center to hear stories and my feet burning. All gone.

…

So they took me up what would have been Vine Street past what would have been Mulvaney, and I thought there may be a reason we lack a collective historical memory. And I was taken out to the beautiful homes on Brooks Road where we considered the

> folks “so swell, don't cha know.” And I was exhausted but feeling quite high from being once again in a place where no matter what I belong. And Knoxville belongs to me. I was born there in Old Knoxville General and I am buried there with Louvenia…. Mommy’s old bridge club, Les Pas Si Betes, gave me beads, and that's the kind of thing that happens in small towns where people aren't afraid to be warm. And I looked out and saw Miss Delaney in her blue furs. And was reminded life continues. And I saw the young brothers and sisters who never even knew me or my family and I saw my grandmother’s friends who shouldn't even have been out that late at night. And they had come to say *welcome home*. And I thought Tommy, my son, must know about this. He must know we come from somewhere. That we belong.

**Introduction**

When one of my respondents suggested I read an essay by Nikki Giovanni for a better understanding of how Black neighborhoods in Knoxville were destroyed, I am not sure what I expected. I had heard that her roots were in Knoxville and that she had attended Austin High school, but apart from a short piece she had written called “Knoxville,” I didn’t know much about the author. I figured that, at best, the essay would give me a good quote or two about urban renewal. I was not expecting Giovanni to identify so strongly with Knoxville, nor was I expecting that, in its engagement of themes of space and place, this piece would resonate so strongly with my research.

The concepts of space and place and their relationship to had long interested me. Informed particularly by research traditions in sociology of urban Black America, where there has been a resurgence in scholarship that emphasizes place matters, I sought to explore the dialectic relationship between people and place. However, when I began this study, it was Appalachia broadly and Knoxville specifically that drove my inquiry into space and place. I wanted to understand how structural practices had shaped Black experiences in the context of Appalachia and how Blacks in Knoxville conceive and navigate their racial identity in a place where their race had made them largely invisible. Over the course of the study, space and place began to emerge as important themes for understanding the Black experience *in* Knoxville. I

began to realize that to understand what it means to be Black in Knoxville was to understand Black people's relationship to place. As I grappled with the realization that Black life was inseparable from the production of place and that "Black matters are spatial matters" (McKittrick 2006), my dissertation was taking form. I was therefore thrilled to find in Giovanni's essay that at the center of her reflection on Knoxville then and now, on her grandparents' migration from Georgia to East Tennessee, on the sights and sounds of her old neighborhood, on the memories of her family's home, and on the shape, size, and structure of Mulvaney Street, Giovanni had provided a well-documented and richly detailed illustration of the "[s]patiality, territoriality and locality" (Hanafi 2018:267) that is so necessary in the formation of Black life.

Nikki Giovanni's "400 Mulvaney Street," published in her 1971 *Gemini*, is a literary expression that bolsters Black place, the production of Black geographic knowledge, and Black place-making practices. My research provides the theoretical and empirical components that complement this essay. I draw on traditions in Black geographies—a relatively new tradition in the discipline of geography that focuses on the spatial knowledge and practices of Black communities throughout the diaspora—that contribute to the production of space and place (McKittrick 2006; McKittrick and Woods 2007). I also utilize insights taken from Hunter and Robinson's (2018) Chocolate Cities sociology, also a new approach, which examines how in spite or in response to institutional discrimination, Black people have made and lived in their own maps. These traditions allowed me to explore Black geographic knowledge and Black place-making, on the one hand, while grounding the discussion in the discourse of urban Black America, on the other hand. The outcome of these explorations is a better understanding of the relationship between Blackness and place that can facilitate the reimagining of Black spatial imagery and Black place.

To understand why such a project would be necessary, it is important to understand the social construction of space and place and the role of race in this construction. In this chapter, I offer an overview of the conceptualization of space and place as social constructions imbued with power-reflecting societal dynamics; then, I add race to the analysis, focusing specifically on the major themes that have defined the relationship between Blackness and place. Next, I introduce Black geographies and Chocolate City sociology as theoretical traditions that can offer alternative understandings of the relationship between Blackness and place. Finally, I situate Appalachia as an important site on the Chocolate Map, from which insight can be garnered for a more nuanced understanding of urban Black America.

**Conceptualization of Space and Place**

The concepts of space and place and their relationship to people have increasingly been explored by researchers in various disciplines (Creswell 2004). These concepts are not easily defined, and though they are often used in the same context and almost interchangeably, researchers distinguish between them. The consensus especially in human geography is that space, detached from material form and cultural interpretation, is value-free, undifferentiated, unrecognized, and abstract in nature (Gieryn 2000; Hanafi 2018). Place, on the other hand, imbued with meaning and value (Tuan 1977), is a "distinct spatial unit and setting within which social relationships transpire" (Lobao 1996:78). Essentially, a space becomes a place when meaning is attached to it. It is through human interaction that these meanings are established, and while meaning-making processes are complex, generally, the meanings people attach to a place are determined by the things that shape how they experience that place individually or collectively. In addition to meanings, through human interactions, places also take on histories and identities. They become entities that can be interpreted, perceived, narrated, felt,

remembered, experienced, understood, and imagined (Gieryn 2000). But in the same way that people shape places, places also shape people. Research suggests that due to the nature of the human-place interaction, place becomes an anchor of people's identity (Hay 1998). Moreover, through their interaction with place, over time people acquire experiences that shape their sense of place or how they relate to a place. It is important to note, however, that place and how people feel about it, having emerged out of the interworking of materiality and culture, can change over time and in different locations. Additionally, their meanings can be contested politically.

This understanding of place as a product of individual and community meaning-making processes is informed by a social constructionist analytical tradition. This approach "addresses historical, cultural, and political processes by which humans seek out, create, evaluate, and contest specific place meanings" (Williams 2000:77 as cited in Trentelman 2009: 83). One aspect scholars of this approach underscore is that place is constructed through power, exclusion, and systems of inequality. Geographer David Harvey (1993) contends that place, by no means, occurs naturally; rather, it is constructed by materiality and power dynamics. More specifically, he suggests that the decisions related to how a place is built, designed, and used is made by those in power, and it is usually organized to serve their needs and interests. Those who have power are the ones who assign meaning to places, usually done in a manner that excludes some people and what they represent. Similarly, Massey (1994) explains that within social relations, space and place are "inevitably and everywhere imbued with power and meaning and symbolism" (3).

Essentially, place operates as a tool of the social, political, and economic elite whereby certain articulations of place have been used discursively to control those that are deemed "out-of-place" (Allen, Lawhon, and Pierce 2018). Having identified space as one of the most important predictors of uneven development and social access (Smith 1984), scholars find that a

spatial analysis of the social order can teach us things we cannot know by other means. Because the organization of space and how people are situated within it reflect social hierarchies such as race (Shabazz 2015), scholars have increasingly employed a spatial analysis of the American racial project.

***Race, Space, and Place***

As a "fundamental category of (dis)empowerment," race functions as a central organizing principle in social life, deeply structuring political, economic, and social relations (e.g., how people interact with the state, social institutions, other groups, and their in-group; Omi and Winant 2015:2; Robinson 2014). Thus, despite not carrying any biological significance, racial categories, which are socially constructed, have real consequences for the life experiences and life consequences of people, particularly those in subordinated racial groups. Also socially constructed, place has operated historically as an element of the creation and maintenance of racial inequality. Scholars highlight the process of imperialism as a demonstration of how the racialization of people and groups has always been linked to the control of space. Moreover, this connection between race, place, and power is rooted in policies and practices ranging from "Indian removal in the age of westward expansion; restrictive covenants during the industrial era; and urban renewal and urban restructuring in the late industrial and early post-industrial periods" (Lipsitz 2007:12). Through these racializing processes that have also been spatializing processes, scholars highlight the monopolization of space by whites and the spatial control of non-whites. Sociologist George Lipsitz (2011), for example, points out that whiteness in America has become less of a color and more of a condition, meaning it is "a structured advantage that channels unfair gains and unjust enrichments to whites while imposing unearned and unjust obligations in the way of Blacks" (2011:3). As a function of this condition and also

reproducing this condition, Lipsitz (2011) describes two distinct spatial imageries for Black and white Americans, suggesting that these groups experience place differently.

**Where the Relationship between Blackness and Place Is Full of Structure**

Three main features have characterized mainstream understandings of the relationship between Blackness and place. The first is that, through residential and other forms of segregation, Blacks have been confined to separate spaces, resulting in a sense of place shaped by negative experiences. This denial of the freedom to choose their space has solidified Blacks as a marginalized group and has also led to the second feature, which is the stigmatization of places that have been racialized or designated as Black spaces. The last feature is that space is not for Blacks; not only do Blacks not have possession of place, but they have no geographic knowledge.

Research particularly in the field of urban sociology, going as far back as W.E.B. Du Bois' *The Philadelphia Negro (1899)*, has been prolific in its exploration of African American experiences, specifically in cities. Hunter and Robinson (2016) offer a thorough review of sociological research on urban Black America since the late nineteenth century. This literature spans post-Emancipation life in the urban South, Black life in migration destinations, and the transformation of Black life in the wake of deindustrialization and neoliberalism (Hunter and Robinson 2016). Even though not directly focused on place, research in this tradition explores how, through interpersonal, institutional, and community-level processes, space has been a tool of Black subjugation and the (re)production of racial inequalities in American cities. Much of the work in the sociology of urban Black America fits into what Hunter and Robinson (2016) call the deficit frame of understanding Black urban life. The deficit frame, they clarify, "is a structural approach emphasizing the consequences for Black mobility and quality of life of societal

systems and policies such as institutional racism… post-World War II uneven urban development … racial residential segregation, and the disappearance of manufacturing and other forms of work in urban America" (387). The dominant narrative coming out of the deficit frame is centered on the systematic segregation of African Americans and how concentrated poverty in segregated neighborhoods has created harsh outcomes for Blacks in American cities.

Research by Massey and Denton (1993) states that historically Blacks have been and remain the most residentially segregated racial group in the United States. Residential segregation has not primarily resulted from choice; rather, the state and institutional actors such as real estate agents, insurers, mortgage leaders, and appraisers have all played a fundamental role in limiting Blacks spatially. During the Great Migration, for example, tens of thousands of Black Americans left the rural South for various urban areas in the South and beyond in search of safety, freedom, employment, and generally a better life. Upon arrival to their destinations, however, redlining and steering practices confined Blacks to undesirable and often hazardous neighborhoods (Shabaz 2015). Further, not only were Blacks relegated to under-resourced, densely populated, and high-poverty Black enclaves with poor and limited housing, but in many cases the land itself was taken from Black people through eminent domain policies like urban renewal (Fullilove 2016).

While focusing on how living in segregated, high-poverty neighborhoods affects the "quality of schools, security, appreciation of property values, political clout, and availability of desirable amenities" (Patillio 2013:30), the deficit frame failed to provide an account of cultural life in these spaces. Nevertheless, it has been effective in influencing popular understandings of urban America and advocating for policy intervention at the local, state, and/or federal level (Hunter and Robinson 2016). Additionally, coming out of this analysis of Black urban life is an

understanding of the types of experiences that shape Black people's sense of place in American cities. In emphasizing the structures that negatively impact Black urban life, the deficit frame has provided a context for understanding not only that Black sense of place is distinct from white sense of place but also that sense of place can be shaped by negative experiences, which is not usually the focus of research concerned with the development of sense of place. Further, in works emphasizing neighborhood effects, not only does Black agency get downplayed but also Black space, rendered fixed, is denigrated.

The work of William J. Wilson (1978; 1987), as well as that of Wilson and Kelling (1982), profoundly impacted the stigmatization of Black neighborhoods. In the wake of the growth and suburbanization of a Black middle class in the post-civil rights period, Wilson drew attention to the lives of poor Blacks left behind in segregated, divested urban neighborhoods. He claims that the Black underclass, or truly disadvantaged (Wilson 1987), were trapped in urban neighborhoods where manufacturing jobs had disappeared and low-wage service sector jobs were on the rise. With no skills and little to no job prospects and trapped in extreme racial isolation, the Black poor adopted a "culture of poverty" which included the expansion of an underground economy. Wilson and Kelling (1982), in their "broken window" theory, further constructed Black urban neighborhoods as sites of deviance. In these neighborhoods, they argue, the appearance of "broken windows,"—graffiti, public intoxication, garbage, and abandoned and damaged properties—reinforces the ideas that people who reside in these places are indifferent to their place and therefore invite further disorder and serious crime. In works emphasizing neighborhood effects, not only did Black agency get downplayed but Black places became synonymous with slums, ghettos, violence, and crime.

In the context of a racially hierarchical society, studies like these helped to reproduce popular stereotypes that link urban Blacks to social images of crime, violence, disorder, welfare, and otherwise undesirability. These stereotypes, however, are not limited to working-class Blacks or people in poor Black neighborhoods. African Americans of all class backgrounds are readily believed to be violent and criminal. Furthermore, whereas urban sociologists like Wilson (1987) have argued that residential segregation is a matter of economic status, research on middle-class Blacks has proven this claim false. Disparities in Black and white experiences extend beyond high-poverty neighborhoods, and "Blacks of all socioeconomic statuses tend to be confined to a limited geographic space" (Lacy 2007; Pattillo 2007; 2013:25). According to sociologist Mary Pattillo (2013), a majority of Blacks in large cities live in predominantly Black neighborhoods, and these spaces have been "formally designated by the discriminatory practices of banks, insurance companies, and urban planners" (25). Patillio's work demonstrates that even when middle-class Blacks try to integrate white neighborhoods, they still end up living in predominantly Black neighborhoods as "whites consistently move out of neighborhoods with growing Black populations" (Schelling 1971; as cited in Quillian and Pager 2001:719 ). Moreover, a study by Quillian and Pager (2001) found that the percentage of a neighborhood's Black population, particularly Black males, is significantly linked with perceptions of the amount of crime in that neighborhood. So regardless of the economic status of the people in the neighborhood, the construction of Black places is "epitomized by the urban ghetto, as the hub of all social ills and negativity, the source of violence, danger and criminality; the sign of human degradation and debasement; a containment zone for the undesirable, outcast, and disposable segment of the population; and the residential location of the other" (Hanafi 2018:282).

While research, primarily in the deficit frame, provided for an understanding of Black urban life that emphasized Black spatial isolation and the denigration of Black space, opportunities were missed to explore the very paramount spatial aspect of Black cultural and social life. Furthermore, the last feature of the relationship between Blackness and place is that Blackness has historically been de-spatialized. European conquest, colonialism, and transatlantic slavery were spatial processes that, among other things, have situated Blacks outside of mainstream understandings of the people-place dialectic. As a result, Black populations, and their attendant geographies, have been deemed "ungeographic" (McKittrick 2006). Transatlantic slavery disrupted Black people's connection to Africa, the place they were rooted, and subsequently deemed them property and therefore incapable of owning place. The legacy of this dehumanizing process has involved various practices of spatialized violence that have produced and reproduced the erasure of a Black-centered understanding of place. Moreover, since European conquest of America, "space was and continues to be, racially identified as white unless otherwise specified; and any attempt at transgressing or defying this norm has been generally met with stiff resistance and retaliation from whites" (Hanafi 2018:280). Not only are whites the only ones capable of having and controlling space but they also have been the subjects of the study of people's relationship to place. As a result, McKittrick (2006) points out that Black people and places have been understood as subjects and sites of containment rather than sources of important geographic information. In the section that follows, I explore how insights from Black Geographies and Chocolate City Sociology have provided an asset-based framework for understanding the relationship between blackness and place in Urban Black America.

**Mapping Black Agency in Chocolate Cities and Black Geographies**

Hunter and Robinson (2016) highlight the asset frame in sociology of urban Black America as a counter-frame that emerged to challenge the monolithic view of Black life and focus on the cultural contributions of urban Black America. Work in this tradition attempted to find balance between structure and agency and provide a more complete depiction of Black urban life. Thus, this work has largely been concerned with collective efficacy and informal social networks that Black people have relied on for survival in marginalized neighborhoods. Hunter and Robinson (2016) note that, in many of this tradition's earlier works, research has tended to reject but also reinforce the deficit frame, and often asset-based research devolved into discussions of deviant subcultures that resulted from Blacks' living in marginal structural conditions. However, through several iterations, the asset frame has produced particularly ethnographic research, often emphasizing place, that demonstrates processes of Black agency. Hunter and Robinson (2016), in collaboration as well as independently, are among scholars of urban Black sociology who are doing asset-based ethnographic research that is focused specifically on place in their examination of urban Black life. These scholars are among new sociologists drawing on the sociology of W. E. B. Du Bois and Ida B. Wells and other early Black ethnographers to illuminate the intersection of race and place. Their work emphasizes Black peacemaking and city-making as fundamental to our understanding of how Black urban life straddles the lines of structure and agency. In claiming that structure and agency are mutually constructed, they propose Chocolate City sociology to understand how Black Americans have "exploited as much as possible the assets of particular places; exerting individual and collective energies to remake the structures intended to constrain them" (Hunter and Robinson 2016:398). The type of understanding of Black urban life that the Chocolate City framework proposes

requires a reconceptualization and reimagining of Black people's relationship to place. Such a process is conceived out of a Black geographies framework.

Black geographies is a theoretical and empirical framework that drew insights from urban studies in its development of the idea that "Black matters are spatial matters" (McKittrick 2006:xiv). It is concerned with the relationship between Black populations and geographies, which it defines as "spaces, places and location in their physical, materiality and imaginative configuration" (McKittrick 2006:x). Scholars of this tradition understand that there are different ways of knowing the world and call for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary interventions. McKittrick notes Kathleen Kirby's (1996) call specifically for a reconceptualization of geography's language and concreteness along with its overlapping physical, metaphorical, theoretical, and experiential contours. As a geographer, McKittrick answers this call, suggesting that Black lives and Black histories can be conceptualized and discussed in new ways within geography. She draws on Black histories, Black people, and Black places to make visible and contest how Blackness has been de-placed, displaced, and otherwise rendered ungeographic. Ultimately, her work emphasizes that Black people are not only shaped by but are also constantly challenging geographic arrangements and, therefore, should be understood as possessing and engaging spatial knowledge and practices. With McKittrick as a pioneering scholar, Black geographies emerged as a framework of uncovering geographic agency (Allen, Lawhon, and Pierce 2018) of Black diasporic communities, centering a Black sense of place, and promoting the humanization of Black place (Eaves 2017). Much of Black geographies' work relies on non-traditional sources such as the body, creative work, spiritual text, etc. for insight, and the emphasis is always on Black life and humanity.

Because Black geographies is not just a body of work but also an ontological practice (Eaves 2017), it provides for the comprehensive re-understanding of Black communities that Chocolate City sociology undertakes. Hunter and Robinson's (2018) *Chocolate Cities* is a remapping project. It suggests that the current maps of US Black life are incorrect and completely overhauls how we discuss and understand Black places and the United States in general. One of the fundamental tenants of Chocolate Cities framework is that "the South" is central to understanding Black geographies. Hunter and Robinson (2016) conceptualize the South not just as a physical geographic location below the Mason-Dixie Line but also as an embodiment of patterns of racism, white domination, and oppression. They claim however, in line with Malcom X's proclamation that the South is everything under the Canadian border, that the entire United Sates is the South. There might be some regional variations, but the United States as the South is one large territory, rooted historically in a set of practices that we generally think of as characteristic of the "Jim Crow south: racism, residential segregation, disparate incarceration rates, poverty and violence" (Hunter and Robinson 2018:4). Chocolate Cities framework allows for an exploration of how, alongside the racial domination that has created the South, Black Americans have found infinite ways to invent place and, in doing so, change American cities. Beyond the timeframe demarked as the Great Migration, Black populations have been moving across the United States in a constant quest for equity, opportunity, safety, and freedom. Along the way of these different journeys, many of which began in the southern states of the United States, not only have Blacks taken the South, but they have also set up Chocolate Cities, which are Black towns, neighborhoods, sides of the track, etc. where "Black people have made and live within their own maps whether in response to or in spite of institutional discrimination" (Hunter and Robinson 2018:19). Hunter and Robinson (2018) do not ignore that

Blackness is diverse, but they pull stories from the chocolate map to suggest that Black people "share a critical epistemology of space and place born of language, culture, experience and resistance" (30).

**Way Up South on the Chocolate Map**

One of the central arguments Hunter and Robinson (2018) make in their conception of the Chocolate City framework is that "our current maps of Black life are wrong" (3). Rejecting the commonly understood linear progression of Blacks from the rural South to the urban North, they propose the chocolate map alternative as a conception of a United States made up of multiple Souths. The chocolate map, for them, is a more accurate reflection of the lived experience of Black Americans. It highlights Black neighborhoods, cities, enclaves, etc. as "windows into Black migration, urbanization, rural and suburban life and racial inequality" and emphasizes the connections between Black people across place and time (Hunter and Robinson 2018:4). Moreover, it is these Chocolate Cities, in their respective locations across America, that Hunter and Robinson (2018) use to remap and reanalyze geography and inequality in United States. Chocolate maps, informed by the movements, histories, and lived-experience of Black Americans, are therefore alternatives to traditional US maps. The authors' main configuration of the chocolate map offers a regional restructuring of America comprising of six regions. Instead of the traditional North, South, Midwest, Northwest, and West regions, the chocolate map consists of Up South, Down South, Deep South, Mid South, Out South, and West South. However, even as Hunter and Robinson, in this remapping of America, draw on Black life in places often excluded from traditional urban Black America research—which emphasizes northern migration destinations—there are places excluded from their map and analysis that can provide a more nuanced understanding of Black geographic agency. In this dissertation, I present

Appalachia as one such place and expand the Chocolate City framework to incorporate the region.

Though at times it may seem to overlap with the traditional Deep South, Appalachia — consisting of parts of 13 states and 420 counties—has a particular regional (or sub-regional) identity shaped by political, economic, and cultural power dynamics that often position it as distinct from the "South." Moreover, particularly as it relates to race and racial inequality, Appalachia has been constructed in opposition to the Deep South, owing to the regions' topographical characteristics and isolation in the highlands—both of which are suggested to have impacted the region's involvement with transatlantic slavery, the underground railroad, the subsequent Civil War, and the overall underpopulation of African Americans in the region. Accordingly, despite always having had a Black presence and a history of slavery in the region, Appalachia has been represented and perceived as a white space, and seldom is the Black Appalachian experience highlighted. But even without a designation as a place for understanding racial dynamics and the larger Black experience, Appalachia has long been a place where particular insights into the Black American experience could be gained. For example, sociologist Karida Brown (2018) has argued, in line with Hunter and Robinson's (2018) claim that, contrary to how it is often presented, the Great Migration was not always a direct south to north movement; rather for some Blacks—including Nikki Giovanni's family, who came from rural Georgia to Knoxville before moving on to Ohio a generation later—this mass movement of Blacks was often a multigenerational process. Over the course of several decades, Blacks moved from rural towns to semi-industrial cities where they gathered resources before moving on to larger cities. Brown (2018) explores this migration pattern, situating Appalachia as a layover destination for many Blacks, particular those in Lynch, Kentucky.

In my inquiry into Black life in Knoxville and the intersection of race and place in the region, I draw on Chocolate City as a framework to argue that insights born from Black people and Black places can provide for a reimagining of Appalachia that brings it into the chocolate map as one of the many Souths. Thus, I offer Appalachia as the seventh South on the chocolate map: Way Up South. Not only does this reconceptualization of Appalachia as Way Up South depart from an emphasis on regional differences, but it also hones in on how patterns of racism, white domination, and oppression have created inhospitable and unequal circumstances for Blacks historically, shaping their sense of place in the region. Simultaneously, this analysis makes visible Black people and places in Appalachia, reiterating their presence, redefining them around Black experiences, and ultimately connecting them to understandings of Black culture, power, and place-making throughout America. This brings me back to Giovanni's "400 Mulvaney Street."

Without the familiar tools of maps and charts, in "400 Mulvaney Street," Nikki Giovanni grapples with two seemingly conflicting, place-based experiences and, in doing so, illuminates Black geographic sensibilities and the complexity of Black people's relationship with place in Knoxville. On one hand, Giovanni is dealing with a sense of place shaped by loss of place; on the other hand, through the memories of her childhood home and neighborhood, she is acknowledging Knoxville as home. As she describes the people, the places, and the activities that were so important in her understanding of Knoxville, she gives life to and retells the story of a neighborhood that was deemed valueless and erased from the map of a city. However, this retelling could have been a memory of Chocolate City, Anywhere, America. The migration story, the displacement, and the sights and sounds of Blackness ring true to Black places throughout America. Yet in this artistic, literary, and cultural expression, Giovanni gives us a

Chocolate City Way Up South in Appalachia. She is intentional and clear about her claims to Knoxville and, in doing so, moves the lines of the chocolate maps into the highlands. Her Chocolate City story—her expression of sense of place—challenges traditional physical, material, and imaginative geographic formulations of Black spaces but more importantly of Knoxville and therefore Appalachia. I graciously included excerpts from this piece in an attempt to emphasize the importance of this work not only for my dissertation but also for the Black people and places in Knoxville and Appalachia that exist almost invisibly.

Like Giovanni's piece, in addition to expanding the chocolate map to include Way UP South, my analysis makes visible Black people and places in Appalachia, reiterating their presence, redefining them to reflect Black experiences, and ultimately connecting them to understandings of Black culture, power, and place-making throughout America. I argue that in the context of invisibility, erasure, and exclusion from Appalachian narratives, it is neighborhoods, not the region or the city, that become a dominant feature in Black Knoxvillians' understanding of the relationship between Blackness and place. I draw on Black geographies' ideas of a Black sense of place as distinct to demonstrate how a sense of being out of place shapes Black people's relationship to the city of Knoxville generally. I also seek to demonstrate how there is often a sense of loss of place associated with Black neighborhoods (and other places) because, as we see in Giovanni's "400 Mulvaney Street," Black neighborhoods function as sites of racial violence against Black communities through practices such as urban renewal and urban disinvestment. However, also as Giovanni shows, these neighborhoods simultaneously are sites where Black safety is experienced and place-making is facilitated by a collective Black identity. To introduce the concept of Black safety, I draw on the Chocolate Cities framework's understanding of Black neighborhoods as not being solely defined by the historical and

contemporary racial processes that structure and confine them. Based on insight gained from centering Black voices in the reimagining of Black neighborhoods in Knoxville, I argue that Black safety is a place-based conception of safety that is predicated on freedom against white supremacy. In developing this concept, I provide foundational insight into an understanding of why in the context of white-dominated spaces like Knoxville or Appalachia, where the white gaze is relentless, it is necessary and important for Chocolate Cities to exist. My analysis of a Chocolate City Way Up South in Appalachia also provides a concrete depiction of the concept of place-making that Hunter and Robinson (2016; 2018) introduce. It introduces the Black school as a major site of place-making within Chocolate Cities. This analysis is particularly useful in the context of understanding the larger urban Black experiences, as Black schools throughout the chocolate map of America are threatened with shuttering (Hunter and Robinson 2018). I highlight the Black geographic agency that is experienced in attending Black schools and other ways that Black schools are involved in the processes of defining and refining Black spaces and places generally.