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*Tennessee State University*

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Lovett: Tennessee State University: A Synopsis of “A Touch of Greatness,” 1912-2012  
**Tennessee State University: A Synopsis of “A Touch of Greatness,” 1912-2012**

Bobby L. Lovett<sup>1</sup>

Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace* (1869), wrote "The subject of history is the life of peoples and of humanity." He explained oppression and freedom this way: "I sit on a man's back, choking him, and making him carry me, and yet assure myself and others that I am very sorry for him and wish to ease his lot by any means possible, except getting off his back."<sup>2</sup>

Tennessee State University (TSU) is a microcosm of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) negotiating the treacherous journey from 1912 to 2012. "A *Touch of Greatness*," the story of Tennessee State University, also is similar to the history of typical American colleges and universities. The TSU story is about the freedom of an institution of higher education; about the complex economic, political, psychological, and social forces that affected the institution as they would affect any institution in a dynamic, multi-racial society. Yet, Tennessee State University has a unique combination of characteristics and a history that differentiates the University from others and shapes its current instructional, research, and service programs. From its conception in 1909 as a Jim Crow institution for Negroes, Tennessee State evolved to serve metropolitan Nashville, Middle Tennessee, the State of Tennessee, the nation, and the global community by the 21st century, and by 2012 maintains a student body, faculty, and staff that is culturally and geographically diverse. Since it opened with 250 students in June 1912 as a public normal school to Negro train teachers, Tennessee State has experienced several major transformations into a four-

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<sup>1</sup> Bobby L. Lovett, Ph.D., served as a history professor at Tennessee State University, 1973-2011. His books include *A Black Man's Dream: the Story of R. H. Boyd and the National Baptist Publishing Board* (Mega Press, 1993), *The African American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930: Elites and Dilemmas* (the University of Arkansas Press, 1999, 2010), *The Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee: A Narrative History* (the University of Tennessee Press, 2005), *How It Came to Be: the R. H. Boyd Family's Contributions to Black Religious Publishing* (Mega Corp., 2007), and *America's Black Colleges and Universities: A Narrative History, 1837-Present* (the Mercer University Press, 2011). His forthcoming book is tentatively titled *A "Touch of Greatness": A History of Tennessee State University, 1912-2012* (University Press, June 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy, *War and Peace* (New York: The Modern Library, 1977, 1869) 1101; *In Writings on Civil Disobedience and Violence* (1886) 1-120. Tolstoy (1828-1910) was a philosopher, writer, and social activist, who believed in freedom, love, and nonviolence.

year college in 1922, a liberal arts based accredited teacher education college by 1936, graduate programs by 1942, university status in 1951, and maturity into a comprehensive university that the Carnegie Corporation ranked as an Extensive Level I Doctoral Institution. The 100-year TSU story includes some teachable but excruciating chapters.

Tennessee (1796- ) was slow in providing public education to its citizens. The common school provision was part of the revision of the Tennessee constitution in 1835. But no funds were appropriated by the General Assembly.

Access to public education for black Tennesseans was an even more difficult journey, in particular leading to the opening of a public college for Negroes. In February-March 1865, the Republican Party-controlled General Assembly and the voters changed the state constitution to reflect the end of slavery in Tennessee. On December 18, 1865, the required number of states ratified the 13th Amendment that abolished slavery throughout the United States. The May 1-3, 1866 race riot by the whites left two whites and 46 Negroes dead in Memphis, causing a congressional investigating committee to descend on Memphis. The General Assembly granted some rights of citizenship to black Tennesseans, but made it clear that Jim Crow (racial segregation and white supremacy) would be law in Tennessee. Whereas sexual relations between black men and white women and black women and white men was common during slavery times, post-bellum state law said, "Inter-marriage between white persons with Negroes, mulattoes, or persons of mixed blood, descended from a Negro to the third generation inclusive of their living together as man and wife in the State is prohibited."<sup>3</sup>

Despite the Memphis race riot, Tennessee fixed its race relations enough so that Congress readmitted Tennessee into the Union in July 1866. Congressional passage of the Civil Rights Act (1866) granted equal protection of the laws, due process of law, and citizenship to blacks. In February 1867, the Republican controlled Tennessee General Assembly granted Negroes the right to vote. On February 28,

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<sup>3</sup> Bobby L. Lovett, *The African American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930: Elites and Dilemmas* (Fayetteville: the University of Arkansas Press, 1999, 2010) 1-314.

Lovett: Tennessee State University: A Synopsis of “A Touch of Greatness,” 1912-2012 Congress awarded Morrill Land Grant (1862) funds to the restored state of Tennessee. But Tennessee had no state college. The General Assembly restored the state office of superintendent of public instruction in 1867. On March 5, a Tennessee public education bill decreed education for all children, but on a racially segregated basis. On June 17, the Nashville city council voted to reopen the public schools the next September on a racially segregated basis. Negroes comprised 26 percent of Nashvillians. Northern white missionaries urged Negro parents to register their children for the public schools, but issued a warning in the Nashville *Republican Banner* (June 30, 31, 1867) that they would watch the situation to see that Negroes received an equal quality education. New York missionaries of the American Missionary Association then converted their Fisk Free School into Fisk University. Northern Baptist and Methodist missionaries converted their freedmen’s schools colleges into Nashville Theological and Normal Institute (Roger Williams University) and Central Tennessee College (Walden University). In December, leaders of the Nashville Colored Christian (Disciples of Christ) Church organized Tennessee Manual Labor University. The northern Presbyterians sold their freedmen’s school to Nashville and moved east to open Knoxville College (1875- ). Knoxville blacks comprised 30 percent of the city population. A freedmen’s college LeMoyne Institute (LeMoyne-Owen College, 1871- ) opened in Memphis where blacks comprised about half of the city.<sup>4</sup>

The Radical Republican Congress increased the protection of Negro-American citizens. The federal 14th Amendment (1868) made permanent the Civil Rights Act of 1866: due process, equal protection of laws, and citizenship. The 15th Amendment (1870) guaranteed and protected Negro citizens’ right to vote from intimidation and violence by white terrorists and others. The pro-Confederate Democrats and other Tennessee racial Conservatives who took political control of Tennessee by 1870

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 134-135, 150-151; Bobby L. Lovett, “Nashville’s Fort Negley: A Symbol of Blacks’ Involvement with the Union Army,” C. Van West, edited, *Tennessee in the Civil War: the Best of the Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 2011) 123-139; Jason M. Yeatts, “‘That We May Think Right, Vote Right, and Do Right’: Knoxville’s Black Community, 1865-1867,” *The Journal of East Tennessee History* 82 (2010): 76-100.

dared re-institute an outright system of re-enslavement on black Tennesseans, but they imposed more Jim Crow (racial segregation) laws including the aforementioned anti-miscegenation clause in the 1870 Tennessee state constitution and poll tax provisions aimed at the new black citizens. Meanwhile, whereas Tennessee had no public higher education for whites or blacks, on January 16, 1869, the General Assembly assigned the federal Morrill Land Grant funds to private East Tennessee University (University of Tennessee). Tennessee law provided that no citizens of this state otherwise qualified shall be excluded from the privileges of a land grant university.<sup>5</sup> Congress and President Ulysses S. Grant (R) approved the Civil Rights Act of 1875 that forbid discrimination in public accommodation. And thus despite Tennessee's poll tax provision, some fourteen black men gained election to the Tennessee House of Representatives, 1872-1896. They persuaded the state to provide some of the federal Morrill land-grant money to be used for scholarships for Negro students to attend Tennessee's private HBCUs. Tennessee funded only about thirty Negro college scholarships by 1890.<sup>6</sup>

Congressional Republicans made one last attempt to force the Jim Crow states to provide equal education to the recently freed slaves and descendants. The Morrill Land Grant Amendment (1890) allowed the states to establish and maintain separate colleges for white and colored students. Tennessee's Negro scholarships ended, and in 1891 the University of Tennessee gave some of the Morrill land-grant funds to Knoxville College to operate the Industrial College for Colored Students in the name of UT. Knoxville College received \$3,526.64 (5.2 percent) of the \$67,640 in federal land-grant funds. The General Assembly provided state funds for secondary schools

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<sup>5</sup> Samuel H. Shannon, "Land-Grant College Legislation and Black Tennesseans: A Case Study in the Politics of Education," *History of Education Quarterly* (Summer 1982): 139-57; *Constitution of the State of Tennessee, 1870*, Article XI, Section 12; David C. Mills, "The Desegregation of Public Higher Education in Tennessee," unpublished undergraduate paper, University of Tennessee," Knoxville (TN) 1-26, in Lovett Papers, TSU Library, Special Collections (TSULSC); Stanley J. Folmsbee, *Tennessee Establishes a State University: First Years of the University of Tennessee, 1879-1887* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1961) 36, 1-214.

<sup>6</sup> Mingo Scott Jr., *The Negro in Tennessee Politics and Governmental Affairs, 1865-1965* (Nashville: Rich Printing, 1965) 1-352; James C. Napier, "Some Members of the Tennessee General Assembly during the Reconstruction and After," *Journal of Negro History* 5/1 (January 1920): 115-1; Tennessee Caucus of Black State Legislators, *Directory of Tennessee African American Legislators, 1873-1991* (Nashville: General Assembly, 1991) 1-52—note: After 1897 and until 1964, no blacks again served in the Tennessee General Assembly. Robert M. McBride and Dan M. Robinson, *Biographical Directory, Tennessee General Assembly, 1861-1901* (Nashville: TSLA and Tennessee Historical Commission, 1979) 239, 676.

Lovett: Tennessee State University: A Synopsis of “A Touch of Greatness,” 1912-2012 in 1891 but again did not attempt to equalize black and white Jim Crow education. The federal government did not investigate this discrimination. Instead, in 1896 the U.S. Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 sanctioned “separate but equal” racial practices and principles. In 1899, the General Assembly permitted the counties to levy a high school tax but required no dispensation of school funds on an equal racial basis.<sup>7</sup>

While Jim Crow officials in Tennessee busied themselves with resurrecting the Old South through a carefully constructed post-Civil War racial segregation system, the rest of America experienced a movement to expand higher education. Since 1880, the nation's number of high schools had increased from 800 to 5,500 and the number of high school graduates tripled. Tennessee officials and governors, many of them former Confederate Army officers, continued to follow the anti-intellectual traditions of the former slavocracy.<sup>8</sup>

The saviors for southern Negroes, including ones in Tennessee, were their own Negro leaders in education and northern missionaries, benevolent societies and wealthy philanthropists who invested millions of dollars in freedmen’s education. By 1900, there were 28,560 Negro teachers and 1.5 million Negro children in schools. Since 1828, some 2,000 Negroes had graduated from 4-year colleges. By 1900, 700 Negroes were attending 4-year colleges. Tennessee’s private HBCUs enrolled a few dozens of college students.<sup>9</sup>

Northern philanthropists held joint education reform conferences with southern leaders, delicately trying to find ways to jump-start the region into the 20th century in elementary, secondary, and higher education. Unless the southern region was brought into America’s education reform movement, the U.S. could *not* harness all of its human capital to compete in a new industrial world. Wealthy northern

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<sup>7</sup> Mills, “The Desegregation of Public Higher Education in Tennessee, 6-7. Note: Plessy principle of “separate but equal” was declared unconstitutional in May 1954.

<sup>8</sup> Sam D. Elliott, *Isham G. Harris of Tennessee: Confederate Governor and United States Senator* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010) 1-336; Kenneth W. Noe, *Reluctant Rebels: The Confederates Who Joined the Army after 1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) 1-336.

<sup>9</sup> Shannon, “Land-Grant College Legislation and Black Tennesseans,” 145; Note: Alcorn (1871- ) was the first among Negro land-grant colleges; Josephine M. Posey, *Against Great Odds: The History of Alcorn State University* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994) 1-216.

philanthropic agencies such as the General Education Fund, George Peabody Fund, Julius Rosenwald Fund, Anna T. Jeanes Fund, John Slater Fund, and the Southern Education Board began to use their huge industrial profits and wealth to finance the reform of southern education. They pushed southern officials to increase Negro access to public schools. Tennessee education agent S. L. Smith wrote, “There is not a single four-year high school for Negroes in Tennessee—either in the city or county system—and a very limited number of two-year high schools in the cities—none approved or accredited by any rating agency.”<sup>10</sup>

All the above history built the case for Negroes to demand equal access to public higher education. Tennessee State would play a major role in the erection of Negro schools in the state.

In 1907, education reformers introduced a normal school (teacher training institution) bill in the General Assembly. The bill failed. But Tennessee assumed responsibility for the private University of Tennessee for whites only.<sup>11</sup> When the normal school bill was re-introduced in 1909, Negro leaders petitioned the General Assembly to include a public Negro state college in the bill. The State Superintendent of Public Instruction R. L. Jones called for the legislation to include a Negro school. Jones assured Governor Malcolm R. Patterson (D)—a native of Alabama and son of a Confederate veteran—that the Negro school would not be like the existing private Negro colleges that prepared Negro students “to be no more than discontented propagators.”<sup>12</sup> Jones perhaps was referring to Fisk graduate (1888)

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<sup>10</sup> Wali Rashash Kharif and William L. Montel, *Reminiscences and Reflections: African Americans in the Kentucky-Tennessee Upper Cumberland since the Civil War* (London, KY: Janze Publications, 2005) 168.

<sup>11</sup> “Negro education,” *Nashville Globe*, January 18, 25, 1907, 1; Governor Isaac Cox, “Legislative Message,” January 7, 1907, Robert H. White, edited, *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee, 1899-1907* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1972) 363; Shannon, “Land-Grant College Legislation and Black Tennesseans,” 147; Milton M. Klein, “University of Tennessee,” C. Van West, edited, *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History & Culture* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998) 1010-12; note: By 1907, Tennessee had fourteen private HBCUs that provided mostly high school and two-year college programs. But only four of them had 4-year college programs and few college graduates.

<sup>12</sup> Raymond Lloyd, *Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State University, 1912-1962* (Nashville: Tennessee A. & I., 1962), 5, 1-73; *Acts of Tennessee* (Nashville: Tennessee General Assembly, 1909) chapter 264, section 7; Lester C. Lamon, *Black Tennesseans, 1900-1920* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977) 97; “State Normal,” *Globe*, March 12, 1909, 1; correspondence, box 1, Governor Malcolm R. Patterson (1861-1935) 1907-1911 Papers, GP35, TSLA, Nashville.

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William Edward B. Du Bois who published *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) that called for equal rights for Negro Americans.<sup>13</sup>

The words “Agricultural and Industrial” were inserted in the black institution’s name. The Negro school seemed to be designed to remain within the confines of Jim Crow rules and would not be a threat to the maintenance of white supremacy in Tennessee. The April 27, 1909, bill thus authorized the “Agricultural and Industrial State Normal School for Negroes,” along with three state normal schools for whites in the grand divisions of east, middle, and west Tennessee.<sup>14</sup> The localities bid on locating the four normal schools in their towns. Memphis, Murfreesboro, and Johnson City gained the normal schools for whites: West Tennessee State Normal School (University of Memphis); Middle Tennessee State Normal School (Middle Tennessee State University); and East Tennessee State Normal School (East Tennessee State University).

William Jasper Hale, a Chattanooga school principal, headed a drive to raise \$71,000 in pledges to attract the Negro school to Chattanooga-Hamilton County that had no HBCUs [until 1948]. Seventy percent of black Tennesseans lived in west Tennessee. But oppressive politics and black poverty rates obstructed efforts to locate the school in Memphis-Shelby County. Memphis had HBCUs Howe Institute and LeMoyne Institute (1871- ), but neither institution offered college degrees at the time. The Negro Methodists had Lane College (1881- ) in Jackson-Madison County not far from Memphis. Knoxville blacks seemed satisfied with Knoxville College. Nashville had college degree granting HBCUs: Walden University (1868-1928), Roger Williams University (1864-1929), Fisk University (1866- ), and Meharry Medical College (1876- ).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> William E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Penguin Books, 1903, 1989) 70, 1-247.

<sup>14</sup> Tennessee, *Appendix to the Senate and House Journals of the 56th General Assembly* (Nashville: General Assembly, 1909) 1-141; Alrutheus A. Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee, 1865-1880* (Washington, DC: Associated Negro Universities Press, 1941), 298, 1-300.

<sup>15</sup> Robert J. Booker, *Two Hundred Years of Black Culture in Knoxville, Tennessee, 1791-1991* ((Virginia Beach, VA: Donning Co. Publishers, 1993) 1-192; Robert J. Booker, *And There was Light! The 120-year History of Knoxville College, Knoxville, Tennessee 1875-1995* (Virginia Beach, VA: Donning Publishers, 1994) 27, 72, 1-192; Paul H. Bergeron, Stephen V. Ash, and Jeanette Keith, *Tennesseans and Their History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999) 223-24.

Negro leaders Henry Allen Boyd, James C. Napier, Richard H. Boyd, Benjamin Carr, Preston Taylor, and others nevertheless formed the Colored Normal School Association to lobby the legislature for locating the public Negro normal school in Nashville. These men were leaders of the Davidson County Negro Republican Club, the National Negro Business League Nashville chapter, and disciples of Booker T. Washington's conservative racial philosophy and emphasis on industrial (mechanical arts) manual labor education for the black masses. In 1909 they sponsored a statewide railroad speaking tour from Bristol to Memphis for Mr. Washington. And when Nashville's white leaders operated a booster campaign and a Nashville Board of Trade to improve the city, attract new businesses, and be a part of America's Progressive Reform Movement, in 1890-1915, these black leaders became a part of that movement by organizing a Negro Board of Trade. Afro-Nashville, the state's second largest Negro community, had two Negro banks, a line of black businesses on Cedar and Jefferson streets, four HBCUs, and a prosperous black elite-class. Nashville was poised to win the bid for Tennessee A. & I. State Normal School for Negroes.

In 1910, the Nashville *Globe* newspaper with a weekly circulation of about 20,000 subscribers and readers and the Colored Normal School Association called for community meetings in the Odd Fellows Hall on Thursday nights. Negro citizens agreed to raise money as a match to any bonds issued by Davidson County. Negro citizens held meetings in Preston Taylor's offices on 4th Avenue North. On March 18, they decided on a house-to-house canvassing campaign to raise more money. Negroes pledged more than \$40,000 to the effort. Davidson County voted a bond issue to help gain the school. But most white voters did not approve.<sup>16</sup>

By January 13, 1911, the State Board of Education (SBOE) decided to place the Tennessee A. & I. State Normal School for Negroes in Nashville-Davidson County. In March 1911, the SBOE selected William Jasper Hale to head the school. He began directing the construction of four buildings on a hill on Centennial Boulevard near

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<sup>16</sup> H. A. Boyd, "State Normal," *Nashville Globe*, December 31, 1909, 1.

Lovett: Tennessee State University: A Synopsis of “A Touch of Greatness,” 1912-2012 the end of Jefferson Street and 28th Avenue North.<sup>17</sup> Hale had about \$96,000 for construction, supplies, equipment, and teaching personnel. On July 6, the General Assembly approved Tennessee A. & I. State Normal School for Negroes to receive funds based upon “the scholastic population of Negro children and the scholastic population of white children, giving each race . . . just and equitable proportion of the fund received annually by the State of Tennessee.”<sup>18</sup> But the University of Tennessee for whites received \$68,960 in federal Morrill funds and gave Knoxville College \$10,350 (15 percent) to service Tennessee's 21.7 percent Negro population.<sup>19</sup>

In a letter (December 18, 1911) to President William H. Taft (R), black Nashvillian James C. Napier the U.S. Register of the Treasury protested that Tennessee officials had denied black citizens any benefits from the Hatch Act (1887) federal funds. On January 12, 1912, Napier testified to the Agriculture and Forest Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives that Negro youth had no access to the agricultural experiment stations in Tennessee: “I personally found no Negro at Knoxville College that considered themselves a part of the University of Tennessee . . . We [Negroes] never have gotten a full portion of it [the Morrill funds].”<sup>20</sup> When the federal government granted federal funds under the Smith-Lever Act for extension activities, the University of Tennessee got \$639,496.31 and gave Tennessee A. & I. State Normal \$2,000 (0.3 percent).<sup>21</sup>

In late May 1912, Tennessee A. & I. State Normal School for Negroes was about ready to open its doors to students. The campus was rural, isolated, and rough. Rocks and debris from recent construction dominated the campus that had three buildings: the girls’ dormitory (West Hall), boys’ dormitory (East Hall), and a main building (“Old Main”). The three-story brick and stone women’s dormitory included 33 large bedrooms with closets. The men’s dorm was similar. The main building was a

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<sup>17</sup> “Negro school,” *Nashville Globe*, January 11, 18, 25, 1907, November 5, 1909; Samuel H. Shannon, “Agricultural and Industrial Education at Tennessee State University during the Normal School Phase, 1912-1922: a Case Study,” Ph.D. dissertation, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1974, 1-103.

<sup>18</sup> Letters, January 23, 1912, Washington, D.C., James C. Napier Papers, 1845-1940, Fisk University, Special Collections, Nashville.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> J. C. Napier to Pres. W. H. Taft, Washington, D.C., December 18, 1911, J. C. Napier Papers, 1845-1940, Box 2, Folder 2, Fisk University Library, Special Collections; Lamon, *Black Tennesseans*, 88, 101-02.

<sup>21</sup> Lamon, *Black Tennesseans, 1900-1930*, 122, 88.

modern brick and stone structure, three stories in height with offices, laboratories, recitation rooms, library, reading room, auditorium, dining hall, kitchen, and laundry—in all, forty rooms. The auditorium had a gallery and space for 700-800 persons. Most classrooms were furnished with modern desks and recitation seats. There were not enough chairs and furniture for the classrooms. The laboratories waited to be fully equipped with all needed apparatus and supplies. The President's Home ("Goodwill Manor") soon was completed. The 165- acre property was valued at \$200,000.<sup>22</sup> Hale recalled, "We had to solicit outside funds."<sup>23</sup>

On June 19-21, 1912, State Normal School for Negroes opened for a 2-week summer session. There were 13 instructors and 230 students (mostly schoolteachers from across the state). The students arrived by trains, a few cars, and even some two-horse wagons. Hale arranged for cars, horse-drawn wagons, and trucks to go to the turn-a-round next to Fisk University at 18th Avenue North and Jefferson Streets and to train stations to transport new arrivals to State Normal. Hale charged a fee of 15 or 20 cents. Late arrivals increased summer enrollment to 248, filling the dormitories to capacity. Local residents boarded some students for a fee. No one was turned away. The \$6 on-campus boarding fee seemed to be insufficient to cover costs. Each room had shades, iron beds, springs, mattresses, dresser, washstand, center table, straight chair, and a rocker. The excitement of having their own state school kept the crowd excited. State Normal with its buildings sitting on a rocky hill above the Cumberland River was a great contrast to one-room Negro school houses frequently made of rough wood or located in local churches.<sup>24</sup>

On Friday, July 4, a traditional Negro holiday, Tennessee A. & I. State Normal School held an elaborate closing program. Each county and state representative among the students gave three minutes of presentation on "how we appreciate State Normal." Professor William H. Singleton spoke on Hale's difficulties in opening

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<sup>22</sup> "State Normal School," Nashville *Globe*, September 1, 1912, 1.

<sup>23</sup> W. J. Hale to the Commissioner of the State Board of Education, State Board of Education, Record Group 92, Series XI, boxes 93-111, 148, 150, and see Record Group 273, boxes 131, 136, 147, 148, on Tennessee State and "Division of Negro Education:" Bobby L. Lovett, *The Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee: A Narrative History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005) 7, 57, 236, 338-40, 348, 377, 466.

<sup>24</sup> Lois C. McDougald, *A Time-Line Chronology of the Tennessee A & I. State College Campus 1909-1951* (Nashville: Tennessee State University, 1981) 1-205.

Lovett: Tennessee State University: A Synopsis of "A Touch of Greatness," 1912-2012 summer school. Other faculty consisted of Ben Carr, H. R. Merry, Howard H. Robinson, J. B. Hatte, Estizer Watson, Martha Brown, Ms. M. C. Hawes, Edwina Smith, Lillian Dean Allen, Laura Carey, Mrs. B. R. Parmenter, and Hattie Ewing Hodgkins. The students thanked Miss Brown and staff for such delicious and nutritious meals.<sup>25</sup>

Next door, the city had bought the remaining 37 acres and converted them into Hadley City Park for Negroes. The dedication of the park took place on July 4, 1912. Hale, the students, and teachers attended the ceremony. The Fisk Jubilee Singers and a band from Murfreesboro provided the music. Standing on the porch of the old plantation house was Nashville Mayor Hilary House, three park commissioners, other white officials, Benjamin Carr, black city councilman Solomon Parker Harris and other Negro leaders. Carr officiated the ceremonies and gave each person time to make remarks. The A. & I. group then headed to another outing.<sup>26</sup>

On September 16, 1912, the first fall quarter of the Negro State Normal opened with some 250 students from every part of the state. The new school was a regular beehive by Monday afternoon. A few of the students started their program in the grammar school department. Some 369 students arrived on campus. There was no tuition for Tennessee residents. The fees were \$2 each 12-week term; \$1 for summer term; meals, room, heat, light and bath cost nine dollars for 4 weeks; medical fee, \$1.50 a year, uniform for girls, \$13, uniform hat for girls, \$2; and every student had to give one hour's work each day. Boys needed a shirt and tie. A laundry was available.<sup>27</sup>

President Hale opened the session with great fanfare and formality, inviting the mayor and state dignitaries to the opening convocation. State Superintendent of Instruction J. W. Brister reminded the students that the emphasis would focus upon training the head, heart, and hand for a life of usefulness and hard work. President Hale later wrote to Brister, "Our watchword is 'Think, Work, and Serve.'"<sup>28</sup> Preston

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<sup>25</sup> "State Normal School," *Banner*, July 5, 1912, 1; "State Normal," *Banner*, July 5, 1912, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Lovett, *The African American History of Nashville*, 126, 231.

<sup>27</sup> "State Normal," *Nashville Globe*, September 1, 1912, 1, September 5, 1913, 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

Taylor admitted the school free including transportation on his “pleasure wagons” to the Colored State Fair held at Greenwood Park. Friday was Clean up Day, with community persons invited to come out to the campus with tools in hand and bring mules, shovels, hoes, and picks to build gravel walks, pull weeds, and trim trees. After the students had spent the day building a coal bin and road beds, there was a recreational outing. Faculty and students held a social in the auditorium on Saturday. Classes began on Monday.<sup>29</sup>

Tennessee A. & I. State Normal School initially had three departments: Academic, Agriculture, and Mechanical. The curriculum was broad and innovative enough to accommodate the needs of a heterogeneous student body and fit the needs of a people, their children, and grandchildren only 47 years removed from slavery. Religion became a vital part of the program. Students were forced to leave the dormitories to make sure they went to chapel. W. S. Ellington served as the first dean of chapel. Half of the Tennessee A. & I. State Normal School founders were ministers of the Gospel. The curriculum included a wide variety of courses to satisfy elementary grades, high school, and two-year college studies. The English curriculum included manual training and remedial work, grammar, composition, inflection, syntax and prosody, and sentence analysis courses; and composition and rhetoric, English literature, American literature, teacher’s grammar, public school literature, and children’s literature. Education courses included psychology, pedagogy, methods for teacher’s grades 1-8, school management, practice teaching, and child study (psychology). History included American, Tennessee, English, industrial, ancient, medieval, and modern history; and civil government and history review. The mathematics curriculum included arithmetic, algebra in factoring, fractions, simple equations, high school algebra graphics, theory of exponents,

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<sup>29</sup> A. & I. *Bulletin*, 1912, 1, Tennessee State University Library, Special Collections (TSULSC); W. J. Hale to J. W. Brister, Tennessee A. & I. State Normal School Report, 1912, *Annual State Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction for Tennessee for the Scholastic Year Ending June 30, 1911* (Nashville: Williams Printing Co., 1912) 54, 82-83, 340-343.

Lovett: Tennessee State University: A Synopsis of “A Touch of Greatness,” 1912-2012 radicals, quadratic equations, inequalities and binomial theorem, and geometry to develop reasoning skills. Teaching method was taught in the fourth year.<sup>30</sup>

The music curriculum was limited to note-reading, chorus, and piano and harmony lessons. Students had to pay a \$2 per month music fee for the lessons. The domestic art courses (for grades 4, 5, and 6) included dress-making, stitching, sewing, and tailoring. To accommodate the locals, part-time courses were offered two hours a day, two days a week, over nine months, and the students received a certificate upon completion of the courses. The home economics courses included dietary standards, cooking, sewing supervision, nutrition, food production, canning and preserving food, and practice teaching. The Academic Department accepted grade school students and prepared them for the academic and normal courses. They could take electives in teaching, agriculture, home economics, trades, and business. The Mechanical Department consisted of carpentry, blacksmithing, wheelwright (building carts, farm wagons and carriages), painting, bricklaying, plastering, plumbing, shoemaking, cabinetmaking, and mechanical drawing to prepare foremen, workers, and teachers of the trades. The Boys Trades Building (1914) included spacious shops, an office, washroom, and a near vacant top floor for the Industrial Department.<sup>31</sup>

The Academic [high school] Course consisted of four years of high school. Year one included advanced arithmetic, elementary algebra, trades, manual training, grammar and composition, American history, agriculture, physical geography, cooking and sewing, spelling, drawing and writing, music, and physical training. Year two consisted of advanced algebra, rhetoric and composition, medieval and modern history, botany and zoology, trades, manual training, cooking and sewing, spelling, drawing and writing, vocal music, and physical training. Year three included geography, English literature and composition, industrial history, physics, drawing and writing, trades, manual training, cooking and sewing, spelling, vocal music, and physical training. Year four included geometry, American literature and

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<sup>30</sup> “The first year,” Tennessee A. & I. State Normal School, *The Bulletin*, 1/4, July 1913, 1-10.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

composition, English history, government, school management, methods and practice teaching, chemistry, history of education, four reading courses, trades, manual training, cooking and sewing, and vocal music.<sup>32</sup>

The Normal Course was the top curriculum. It was designed to be the equivalent to two years of freshman-sophomore college courses designed to prepare students with a permanent license to teach high school and continue their studies at a four-year college. In the first year, students enrolled in psychology, agriculture, methods, school management and review of English, trades, manual training, cooking, and sewing. The second year consisted of history of education, child study, practice teaching, public school literature, economics and sociology, reading, trades, manual labor, cooking, and sewing. Students engaged trades and manual labor in the morning and academic classes in the afternoons or vice versa.<sup>33</sup> Some of them would be teaching these subjects, too. Training in the Model School prepared students for teaching grades 1-8. The students engaged courses in theory, typing lessons, and one year of practice teaching under “an experienced wide awake teacher who will criticize the work of her student teacher and train them into efficiency.” The Model Training School for grades 1-4 included reading, language, art, numbers, geography, reading, language, arithmetic, history, domestic science, geography, art, music, and manual training. Textbooks included rural economics, conservation of the child, public school methods, teaching reading/ poetry, teaching methods, and using library materials.<sup>34</sup>

The physical training program consisted of courses to promote physical development and “secure ease and grace of carriage, general development of shoulders, chest and body.” Students engaged “recess time” in front of Old Main and participated in games and group exercises. The Athletic Association was organized in 1912 and required a fee for membership and equipment.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid; on the library, see The Lois H. Daniel Collection Papers, 1945-, boxes 1-5, TSULSC.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State Normal School was officially dedicated on January 16, 1913. On stage in the main Academic Building were representatives from the University of Tennessee, East Tennessee State Normal School, Middle Tennessee State Normal School, Davidson County Schools, Fisk University, Meharry Medical College, Pearl High School, Roger Williams University, Hampton Normal Institute, and Shelby County Schools. Judge Robert Ewing, George Haynes, Andrew N. Johnson, J. W. Johnson, Preston Taylor, Charles V. Roman, John W. Work, and Chancellor J. H. Kirkland of Vanderbilt University were among special guests. Councilman Solomon P. Harris spoke for Negro citizens of Nashville. Governor Ben W. Hooper (R) spoke favorably about State Normal. State superintendent of public instruction J. W. Brister assured the audience that the industrial side of education is being emphasized. S. H. Thomas hoped that this school will be in time for Tennessee what Hampton and Tuskegee are for the nation. Hale claimed a telegraph from Booker T. Washington praised President Hale for advancing State Normal in so short a time. Reportedly, on March 7, 1913, Booker T. Washington did stop by A. & I. State Normal School, while visiting Fisk, and spoke to students: "In the girls dormitory everything is neat but tidy, although a few tooth brushes are missing here and there. A tooth brush shows signs of civilization. I went to a Negro college and saw Greek signs on the walls and grease signs on the floor. I could not get the connection."<sup>36</sup> In February, the General Assembly again acknowledged *a portion* of the federal land grant funds should go to Tennessee A. & I. State Normal School.<sup>37</sup> But there was no equitable distribution.

The first Commencement Week at Tennessee A. & I. State Normal School took place on May 18-23, 1913. The Rev. W. T. Ellington gave the Sunday baccalaureate

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<sup>36</sup> J. W. Hale letter to Gov. Ben W. Hooper, November 29, 1911, Hooper telegram to Hale, December 1, 1911, b4/f9, 1912, Governor Ben W. Hooper (1870-1957) Papers, GP 36, TSLA; Lovett, *The Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee*, 29-30; Bergeron, et al., *Tennesseans and Their History*, 194-99; Lovett, *African American History of Nashville*, 169-172; Louis R. Harlan and Raymond W. Smock, edited, *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, 1912-14, vol. 12 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982) 46-48, 113, 302; McDougald, *A Time-Line Chronology*, 5, 7-8.

<sup>37</sup> Editorial Staff, "A Survey of Negro Education," Lamon, *Black Tennesseans*, 103; *Journal of Negro Education*, 2/3 (July 1933): 423-25; U.S., *Survey of Negro Colleges and Universities*, *Bulletin No. 7* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Education, 1928) 1-120; U.S., *Land-Grant College Education, 1910-1920*, *Bulletin No. 30* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Education, 1924) 1-120; Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro in our History* (DC: Associated Publishers, 1932) 392, 836.

sermon titled "A Noble Purpose." Other programs were held, including presentations by the students. The lower graduation exercise took place on Wednesday, May 21. Programs were held for the Preparatory Department. The Fourth Year students had their commencement on Friday, May 23, with Professor H. Beach of Vanderbilt University giving the address. Hale passed the certificates to the graduates with the same pomp and circumstance as a college commencement. Large audiences attended the events. Hazel Thompson (music) played the processional march. The college chorus sang "All hail you Ye Free." The Girls Glee Club sang "De Little Pickannies Gone to Sleep." The Young Men's Glee Club rendered three songs after the main address. On the next day, the teachers and the students left on a sightseeing tour on the Tennessee Central Railroad, heading to Chattanooga, with W. J. Hale guiding them into his city. They attended the Wiley Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church on Sunday morning. W. H. Young preached the sermon. On Monday evening after tours of the incline railroad and Lookout Mountain, the Negro citizens of Chattanooga housed and entertained the State Normal party.<sup>38</sup>

A six-member state education committee soon visited the Negro school to check on its progress. Enrollment in 1912-1913 was 369 in regular term, 441 in summer; for 1913-14, it was 547 in regular term and 594 in summer. By 1914, of 650 students, 258 of them were in the Agriculture Department and another 384 in Domestic Art and Domestic Science. The school had 21 Normal School graduates, including 15 in teaching; two supervising vocational education, two enrolled in colleges, and two reenrolled at Tennessee A. & I., whose attraction of out-of-state students was growing rapidly. Some 175 students lived in the 66 dormitory rooms. They ate in a dining hall built for 132 persons. In 1917, State Normal had departments of education, English, classics and expression, history, mathematics, music, science, agriculture, and mechanical trades. In the academic courses, the faculty often proscribed the textbooks at the college level to challenge the high school students. The Preparatory Department continued to teach students in grades 5, 6, 7, and 8,

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<sup>38</sup> A. & I. *Bulletin*, 1913, 1-2, TSUL-SC.

Lovett: Tennessee State University: A Synopsis of “A Touch of Greatness,” 1912-2012 including remediation for those children from areas with short school terms and low-grade standards. Because of the lack of quality public schools for Negroes, the Training School taught grades 3 and 4 and served as the Model (practice) School for students in the Normal Department. The students observed classes for two terms, practiced teaching for one term in the junior year, and did practice teaching for two more terms in the senior year. The catalog said teacher education majors were trained carefully to prepare and organize clear lessons, teach secondary students to study and act independently, conduct recitations, manage children, and maintain personal health and fitness and professional attitude. The faculty quietly transformed the Industrial History course into a class with emphasis on the Negro: The Negro in History and Literature course including a textbook by Howard University’s Benjamin Brawley.<sup>39</sup>

By 1920, Tennessee’s four state normal schools including A. & I. began to move toward offering college degrees. The A. & I. State *Bulletin* (1919) already listed “Junior College and Normal Departments” with 33 courses in the junior year and 31 courses for the senior year. The *Bulletin* (1920-1922) listed a College and Normal Course that aimed to “meet the needs of those who plan to pursue professional work. The two concentrations consisted of science and classics. The student must have completed the Academic Course [high school], or have a high school diploma. Students are admitted to the College Department who show aptitude for that work and who give evidence of a desire to pursue that work with profit to themselves. Students will be given a try-out in the department for which their credentials call but the school reserves the right to re-classify all students if the best interests of the school make it necessary.”<sup>40</sup>

Tennessee A. & I. State Normal School included Goodwill Manor (1912), Women’s Dormitory (1912), Men’s Dormitory (1912), Main Academic Building

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<sup>39</sup> John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, 6th edition (Chicago: Knopf, 1988) 332; Benjamin Brawley, *A Social History of the American Negro* (New York: New Publishers, 1921) 1-121, included African origins, Civil War and Emancipation, and Negro problems including disfranchisement, peonage, and lynching.

<sup>40</sup> “College and Normal Courses,” *The Bulletin*, 8/10-11, June 1920, 1-10; W. J. Hale, “Report to the State,” 58th General Assembly, January 6, 1913, 59th General Assembly, January 4, 1915, 60th General Assembly, January 1, 1917, essay by TSU special collections staff, TSULSC, 1-4.

*Engaged: The journal of Tennessee State University, Vol. 1 [2013], Art. 11* (1912), and Boys' Trades Building (1914). Old Main's auditorium (the Chapel) was expanded to 1,000 seats including a balcony, stage curtains, and movie screen and foot lights. The campus farm, dairy barn, farmhouses, greenhouses, and out buildings were valued at \$16,000. Two teachers' cottages were built in 1921 on the east campus facing south on Centennial.<sup>41</sup> William J. Hale recalled, "The year 1922 marks the beginning of the institution as a senior college."<sup>42</sup> But the institution needed several more buildings, teachers, and equipment to expand into a 4-year baccalaureate college.

In 1922, the State Board of Education and the General Assembly raised the institution along with the three white state normal schools to the status of a four-year teacher's college. A dean of the college then was selected. Eight students (seven men and one woman) constituted Tennessee A. & I. State Normal School's first graduating class with the A. B. degree in summer 1924. In 1925 the institution became known as Tennessee A. & I. State Normal Teachers College.

President Hale, with SBOE approval, gained funding for the first college-level buildings: Memorial Library (1927), W. J. Hale Dormitory for Women (1927), P. L. Harned Science Hall (1927), Women's Building (1931), the Industrial Arts Building for men (1932), and the Administration, Physical Education and Recreation Building (1934). The campus expanded to the south side of Centennial Boulevard. The Administration Building included a swimming pool in the basement, a basketball and physical education court on the stage of the auditorium, classrooms, and administrative offices. The principal northern philanthropic agencies that contributed millions of dollars to build facilities to upgrade Tennessee State to collegiate grade included the General Education Board (Rockefeller Foundation of New York) and the Julius Rosenwald Fund of Chicago. The word *Normal* was dropped from the institutional title in 1927.

In 1930, Tennessee A. & I. State Teachers College discontinued the preparatory and grammar diplomas. In 1930, along with several other HBCUs, the American

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> "The History," 1935, W. J. Hale Papers, an incomplete manuscript, TSULSC.

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Medical Association approved Tennessee A. & I. to offer a pre-medical curriculum. Tennessee A. & I. became one the first two Negro colleges to be granted initial membership into the American Association of Teachers Colleges in 1933. A. & I. administrators helped to organize the National Association of Collegiate Deans and Registrars in 1933. The Julius Rosenwald Fund employed Robert E. Clay on the A. & I. campus to direct the erection of hundreds of Rosenwald buildings to serve black and white Tennessee children. Rosenwald funds helped build 5,000 schools across the South.<sup>43</sup>

The institution became a member of the Mid-Western Athletic Conference in 1934. Tennessee A. & I. State Teachers College began listing a few graduate courses in 1935, but state officials prohibited the offerings and ordered an outside accreditation review. After more Negro high schools came on line, Tennessee A. & I. State Teachers College discontinued the high school department and became Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College in 1936. Also in the 1930s, the federal New Deal’s Works Progress Administration funded improvements to the stadium, tennis courts, limestone walls, grounds, and built other facilities at Tennessee A. & I.

The Negro teachers’ 1935 request to have access to graduate programs at A. & I. continued to pressure Tennessee officials and ultimately helped the institution to gain a graduate school. After state officials disapproved the offering of graduate courses at A. & I., some NAACP lawyers, including Z. Alexander Looby a part-time teacher at A. & I., filed the case of *William B. Redmond v. University of Tennessee* (1937) to force UT to admit this Negro graduate student. Tennessee mimicked Missouri and resorted to out-of-state fellowships for Negro graduate students. William B. Redmond, a graduate of A. & I., thus lost his appeal in 1939. A law suit against UT by six black students in Knoxville was filed in 1941. This new case caused the General Assembly to authorize the establishment of a graduate school at Tennessee A. & I. State College. Also in response to the barrage of NAACP law suits, in 1941 the General Assembly mandated that Tennessee A. & I. State College for Negroes be

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<sup>43</sup> This organization was last hosted in its annual meeting by Tennessee State University, 2009.

made “equivalent to University of Tennessee for white students.” A. & I. graduate Clarence B. Robinson and his black teachers’ union in Chattanooga won a federal court case to gain equal pay for Negro teachers. The SBOE established the graduate school at Tennessee A. & I. State College in June 1942 and investigated the possibility of establishing a law school there. But the UT team of visitors complained that President W. J. Hale was uncooperative. Hale was succeeded by Walter S. Davis on September 1, 1943. Tennessee A. & I. State College’s first master’s degree student graduated in June 1944.

President Davis (1931) worked closely with SBOE officials to realize the 1941 General Assembly mandate to make Tennessee A. & I. equal “to UT for white students.” Davis began to upgrade facilities, faculty credentials and research, and meet standards for approval by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), which granted an “A” rating approval in 1946.<sup>44</sup> Davis organized Tennessee A. & I. State College into a School of Arts and Sciences, School of Education, School of Engineering, School of Agriculture and Home Economics, Graduate School, Division of Business, Division of Extension and Continuing Education, and the Department of Aerospace Studies.

The institution became Tennessee A. & I. State University in 1951. The institution gained full, non-Jim Crow membership into SACS on December 4, 1958. And in August 1958, the SBOE elevated Tennessee State A. & I. University to *full* land-grant status to exercise the functions of extension, research, and teaching. Walter S. Davis began the *Touch of Greatness* tradition in collegiate sports, doubling the number of facilities, and expanding the arts, humanities, and sciences. The Civil Rights Movements’ postwar phase became intensified, sweeping the institution, the students, and Davis within its turbulent waters. Tennessee State students supplied the majority of “foot soldiers” for the sit-in demonstrations, Freedom Rides, and student rebellions of 1966-1967. State officials ordered the expulsion of participating

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<sup>44</sup> The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) founded in 1895 refused to recognize any HBCUs until 1930 when Fisk University gained approval. SACS did this under pressure from northern philanthropic agencies that controlled lots of money flowing into southern education. SACS developed categories of “A” and “B” approval instead of granting HBCUs equal membership with the white institutions of SACS; this Jim Crow designation remained until after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).

Lovett: Tennessee State University: A Synopsis of “A Touch of Greatness,” 1912-2012 students and imposed an out-of-state enrollment limit that devastated the institution’s budget. President Walter S. Davis suffered a debilitating illness in December 1967. While Davis was on sick leave, a biracial group of citizens and two Tennessee A. & I. faculty members filed *Rita Sanders (Geier) v. Governor Ellington* (May 1968) to stop the University of Tennessee and state officials from completing the erection of a UT-Nashville campus at 10th Avenue North and Charlotte. UT-Nashville began in 1947 as a whites-only extension center of the University of Tennessee. This center was empowered by the UT Board of Trustees to offer two years of resident credit in 1960, three years of resident credit in 1963, and soon became a four-year degree granting school. The Rita Geier plaintiffs aimed for better treatment of TSU and desegregation of all higher education in the state of Tennessee. President Davis resigned, effective September 1, 1968.

The succeeding President Andrew P. Torrence (1948) managed to build additional facilities, but spent an ordinate amount of his time fighting the *Geier* case and opposing the efforts of white officials to limit the role and scope of Tennessee State University. On December 18, 1968, the SBOE approved the name Tennessee State University. The General Assembly passed the enabling legislation on May 8, 1969. On July 1, 1972, the new State Board of Regents replaced the State Board of Education as governing body for TSU and the other state colleges, except University of Tennessee. In 1972, Tennessee State University and the other 19 land-grant HBCUs began receiving more equitable federal land-grant funds through an act of Congress and President Richard M. Nixon (R). After nearly six years of fighting state officials over the *Geier* case and about inadequate funding of TSU, President Torrence resigned effective June 30, 1974.

The next President Frederick S. Humphries tried to make progress. He tried to stabilize TSU, but Board of Regents officials fought him every step of the way because of the *Geier* case and his protests about under-funding for Tennessee State. In 1977, the federal district judge ordered the merger of UT-Nashville and Tennessee State University under the auspices of the State Board of Regents TSU’s governing board on July 1, 1979. Humphries and TSU began to suffer punitive actions by state

officials, especially after the *Geier Settlement* (1984). The Humphries years saw the erection of a huge physical education, recreation, and convocation center; a new engineering building; a business school building; a new library; renovations of several facilities, and the start of the first doctoral program. Frederick S. Humphries resigned effective June 30, 1985, to become president of Florida A. & M. University, his *alma mater*.

From 1912 to 2012, the faculty and staff carried Herculean tasks and worked under adverse conditions, often with low salaries, to carry Tennessee State through its five stages of history. Even though the state denied them adequate and equal facilities and resources, the faculty/staff "made chicken salad out of chicken feathers." After the laborious years of Presidents Hale and Davis, President Torrence and President Humphries carried TSU forward during difficult and turbulent times. Under succeeding leaders Acting President Roy P. Peterson and President Otis L. Floyd, the institution experienced instability until President James A. Hefner (1991-2005) ushered in more progress in academic programming and completion of the 1989-2000 Facilities Master Plan that began under Floyd. President Hefner left the University in March 2005. Tennessee State University entered another phase of instability and uncertainty under President Melvin Johnson and Acting President Portia Shields, but both of these leaders exhibited characteristics of tenacity and energetic efforts to turn the institution back to the main stream.

TSU's lion-hearted students especially played crucial roles in TSU's history. They attacked and helped dismantle Tennessee's unequal and unfair Jim Crow system. Students fought persistently for their own human and constitutional rights and against the state's maltreatment of Tennessee State. They devoted their freedom, the safety of their bodies, and jeopardized their careers even by going to jails to defeat Jim Crow. And student athletes maintained that "Touch of Greatness," winning the American record for consecutive national basketball championships under the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics: 1957, 1958, and 1959. TSU football teams won more than a half dozen national titles by 1983. Since 1948

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TSU student athletes—coached by great men and women—have won more than 30 gold, silver, and bronze Olympic medals.

Since 1912, the institution has graduated some 80,000 people. By the 21st century, Tennessee State University has ranked among the top ten producers of black college graduates in the USA. Its research and external funding ranked in the top three research-level universities in Tennessee. The *Statement of Vision, Mission, and Core Values* (July 26, 2007) read in part:

Tennessee State University aspires to achieve national and international prominence, building on its heritage and preparing leaders for a global society. Tennessee State University, a Historically Black College/University (HBCU), fosters scholarly inquiry and research, life-long learning, and a commitment to service. . . . Tennessee State University, an HBCU and 1890 land grant institution, is a major state-supported urban and comprehensive university. This unique combination of characteristics differentiates the University from others and shapes its instructional, research, and service programs designed to serve Metropolitan Nashville, Middle Tennessee, the state of Tennessee, the nation and global community. The University is committed to maintaining its diverse student body, faculty and staff. . . . Tennessee State projects itself to its students, faculty, and alumni and to the citizens of the State through the motto, ‘Think, Work, Serve.’

On July 1, 2011, Tennessee State University reorganized into the College and Agriculture, Human and Natural Sciences; College of Business; College of Education; College of Engineering; College of Graduate Studies and Research; College of Health Sciences; College of Liberal Arts; College of Public Service and Urban Affairs; and Online Degree Programs. The main campus consisted of 500 acres with more than 65 buildings in a residential setting, the Avon N. Williams Jr. downtown campus, and an agricultural campus in McMinnville, Tennessee.

Tennessee State University has had seven presidents: William J. Hale (1911-1943); Walter S. Davis (1943-1968); Andrew P. Torrence (1968-1974); Frederick S. Humphries (1975-1985); Otis F. Floyd (1986-1990); James A. Hefner (1991-2005 );

Melvin N. Johnson (2005- ). Additionally, five acting presidents Charles B. Fancher (July 1-December 30, 1975); Roy P. Peterson (July 1, 1985-June 30, 1986); Otis L. Floyd (July 1, 1986-March 1987); George W. Cox (July 1990-April 1991); and Portia Shields (January 5, 2011-2012 ) have served the institution. All these individuals served Tennessee State with distinction and with “A Touch of Greatness.”