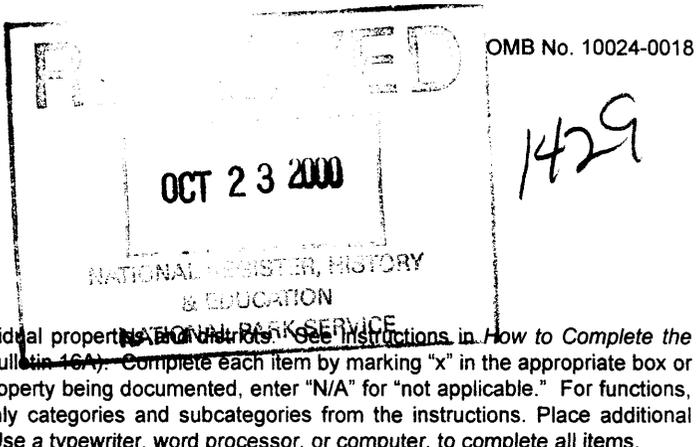


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Mid-South Coliseum  
other names/site number NA

2. Location

street & number 996 Early Maxwell Boulevard NA  not for publication  
city or town Memphis NA  vicinity  
state Tennessee code TN county Shelby code 157 zip code 38104

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally,  statewide  locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Herbert L. Hays 10/18/00  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:  
 entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet  
 determined eligible for the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet  
 determined not eligible for the National Register  
 removed from the National Register.  
 other,  
(explain:)

Signature of the Keeper [Signature] Date of Action 12/6/2000

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Mid-South Coliseum  
Name of Property

Shelby County, Tennessee  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in count)

- private
- public - local
- public - State
- public - Federal
- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: auditorium

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: auditorium

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE  
walls CONCRETE, BRICK  
roof METAL  
other GLASS, METAL

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations N/A**

(Mark "x" in all boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** moved from its original location.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property
- G** less than 50 year of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION/ENTERTAINMENT  
SOCIAL HISTORY

**Period of Significance**

1964-1974

**Significant Dates**

NA

**Significant Person**

(complete if Criterion B is marked)

NA

**Cultural Affiliation**

NA

**Architect/Builder**

Ehrman, Merrill G.  
Hall, Robert Lee

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:  
Mid-South Coliseum

Mid-South Coliseum  
Name of Property

Shelby County, Tennessee  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** Approximately 22 acres Southeast Memphis 409 SW

**UTM References**

(place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>16</u>	<u>228610</u>	<u>3890070</u>	3	<u>16</u>	<u>228190</u>	<u>3889760</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u>16</u>	<u>228340</u>	<u>3889760</u>	4	<u>16</u>	<u>228210</u>	<u>3890160</u>

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Carroll Van West and Claudette Stager  
organization MTSU and THC date August, 2000  
street & number Box 80/2941 Lebanon Road telephone 615/532-1558  
city or town Murfreesboro/Nashville state TN zip code 37132/37214

**Additional Documentation**

submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 Or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO) or FPO for any additional items

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name See continuation sheet  
street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Mid-South Coliseum  
Shelby County, Tennessee

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## DESCRIPTION

Built with the cooperation of both Memphis and Shelby County, the Mid-South Coliseum in Memphis was completed in 1964 at a cost of \$4.7 million. As the centerpiece of a 1960 master plan by Vandenburg-Linkletter Associates, the coliseum is the only new building erected as part of the plan. Government officials and architects visited numerous other coliseums in the U.S. before starting on the Mid-South building. (1) Everything from hockey, ice shows, basketball, meetings and banquets, concerts, trade shows and conventions could be held in the building.

The primary construction materials of the domed building are concrete and steel, brick on the exterior walls, glazed ceramic tiles on the interior walls, concrete roof decking, and terrazzo tiles on the interior floors. The building looks circular in form, but is actually composed of thirty-two wall segments. The arena space is roughly 112 feet x 228 feet with 64,500 square feet of exhibition space. The inside ceiling is eighty-six feet in height and the exterior height is 102 feet. Depending on the type of event held, the coliseum was planned to hold up to 10,000 people. (2) In reality, the building can hold between 12,000-13,000 people, utilizing both permanent seating from the American Seating Company and temporary upholstered seating supplied by the Clarin Corporation. (3)

According to the dedication brochure of December 19-20, 1964, the coliseum was "Constructed by the people of Memphis and Shelby County for the athletic, cultural and entertainment betterment of the entire Mid-south Area." (4) Floors are concrete with cork below. Brine pipes were located below the concrete floor to make ice and the usable area was erected with no columns or other obstructions. A movable stage was planned to be used at the east end of the arena. Spaces for the press were provided on both the upper level and on the arena floor. House lights and spot lights were placed for the most optimum use and were state-of-the-art in the 1960s.

In addition to the visible spaces, like the arena and lobby areas, the coliseum was designed with eight dressing rooms, accompanied by showers for headliners, and four team dressing rooms with baths. Seven meeting rooms were planned for the concourse level and the offices for the building were located near the south entrance. A catering kitchen, storage space, maintenance space, exhibit spaces, rest rooms and drinking fountains were located throughout the building. Public entrances, originally a total of 108 doors, were placed in three areas around the coliseum. These entrances are still in the coliseum, but many are not used now. Service entrances were situated at the back of the building, along with the mechanical room and a service yard.

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Mid-South Coliseum  
Shelby County, Tennessee

The chief architect for the building was Merrill G. Ehrman of the Memphis firm of Furbringer and Ehrman. Ehrman's fee for the project was reported to be six percent. (5) Robert Hall of Robert Lee Hall & Associates also worked on the design. According to *Architecture-Memphis*

The shape of the Coliseum necessitated an unusual approach by the collaborating architects Furbringer and Ehrman, and Robert Lee Hall & Associates. Since the structure was to be essentially round, they laid it out from radius lines from the center of the building rather than from dimension lines on the circumference. A man stood at the center point with a transit, shooting angles for accuracy in laying out each segment. (6)

Ehrman became a partner with the better-known Furbringer in 1935. In 1936 Furbringer and Ehrman designed the Art Deco influenced Memphis Humane Shelter on Auction Avenue and Front Street. Ehrman was the associate architect for the Overton Park Shell (Raoul Wallenburg Memorial) with Furbringer in 1936. The firm worked with Everett Woods in 1948 to complete the West Tennessee Tuberculosis Hospital in Memphis and they added an education building to the Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary (former Temple Israel), which the firm of Jones and Furbringer designed in 1915, in 1950-1951. One of the more notable residences that Furbringer and Ehrman designed was due to its occupant rather than the style. In 1939 they designed the Dr. Thomas D. Moore House, also know as Graceland (NR 11/7/91). Other Memphis buildings designed by Ehrman include an IBM Corporation building and the Treadwell and Harry buildings; he was one of several architects who worked on the Naval air station at Millington.

Robert Lee Hall designed the Patterson Building at the University of Memphis in 1966 and the Clark Tower on Poplar Ave. in 1971. He is quoted in a 1963 newspaper, where he discusses how the coliseum building will be designed for the comfort of patrons: "People demand that they be as comfortable as if they were at home watching television." (7)

As with most large projects, several other companies worked on the building. S.S. Kenworthy and Associates of Memphis were the structural engineers, while James F. Lefler was the consulting engineer. The firm of Sam Burns and Associates did mechanical and electrical engineering. The general contractor was Granite Construction from Houston, Texas. The company's contract called for them to complete construction by December 13, 1964. The building schedule was programmed into a data processing machine in order to track the progress of the project. Shelby County paid for forty percent of the cost of the coliseum, and Memphis paid for sixty percent. Groundbreaking ceremonies were held on March 16, 1963 with City Commissioner James W. Moore and County Commission Chair Jack Ramsey officiating. (8)

Promotional information described the coliseum as a

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# **National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet**

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Mid-South Coliseum  
Shelby County, Tennessee

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functional and attractive, clean, architectural design, it is also from the very nature of its concept, unusually clean structurally. The large amount of repetition and the shape of the building have much to do with keeping the cost down. (9)

Bell-bottom caissons as large as eleven feet in diameter are the structural underpinnings of the building. Beams, columns and concourses were constructed of fireproofed concrete. The roof decking was composed of pre-cast reinforced concrete slabs. Seven hundred-thirteen tons of steel was used in the 325 foot span dome roof. When it was constructed, the roof was thought to be the third largest structural steel dome in the United States. (10) Permanently lubricated plates at bearing points allow for the roof to move up to one and one-half inches.

Two separate air conditioning systems were placed in the building. One handled the public spaces, while the second system was for offices, meeting rooms and dressing rooms. The system was designed so the engineer, depending on the size of the audience, could manipulate the capacity of the air conditioning system. A central operating and information board was placed in the engineer's room. Today, the system has 75% operating capabilities. It is used daily to turn on and off the pumps for the HVAC system and the brine (used for ice). The system still controls the air handlers and ventilation fans and monitors building humidity. (11)

Together, the air conditioning systems have a capacity of nearly 1,400 tons of refrigeration. Centrifugal water chillers in the equipment room supply cooler water to the air handling units on the third level of the structure. The eight units have high velocity ducts located over the ceiling with the outlets in the ceiling itself. Built at a time when little or no thought was given to not smoking in public, the exhaust openings were placed "so as to remove the smoke most effectively and therefore maintain as clear an atmosphere for the spectators to look through as we think is practical for such a large assembly area." (12)

The ice rink was constructed with two brine coolers, each with a capacity of eighty tons. The temperature-controlled surface rests on a concrete pad and contains an ice-melting pit that is warmed by water from the main boiler.

The Mid-South Coliseum was designed with modern power and lighting systems, fire and smoke detection, sound systems, telephone, and radio and television systems. The main public space, the arena, was lit with incandescent and color-corrected mercury vapor lights. The lighting system is still in use today. A system of catwalks above the dome ceiling was erected in order to provide maintenance for the lighting system. So that lighting could be controlled, the coliseum contains no windows. Tracor, Inc., an acoustic and sound reinforcement consulting firm, helped build the ceiling for optimum sound effects. Suspended acoustic tiles line the dome ceiling and the glazed

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Mid-South Coliseum  
Shelby County, Tennessee

tile walls are perforated and filled with acoustical material. (13) The arena seat bottoms are perforated.

During nearly thirty-seven years of use, the Mid-South Coliseum has, remarkably, changed very little. The majority of the original operating systems are still in the building and most of them are still in use. The principal spaces have not generally been altered, except for cosmetic changes, such as paint and new material for seating. Historic entrances are extant, although city codes require that most of them be closed off when there are no events at the building. The saucer-like building is located in the Mid-South Fairgrounds on Early Maxwell Boulevard. Minimal landscaping, parking, sidewalks and other fair buildings surround it. As the most unusual shaped structure at the fairgrounds, the massive Mid-South Coliseum stands out among its surroundings.

The principal approach to the coliseum is from the street side. A one and one-half story covered walkway with MID SOUTH COLISEUM on it leads from the building, partially surrounds it and provides some cover for those entering the building. Solid slabs support the walkway canopy. Paired metal and glass doors with large expanses of glass above are visible on this part of the coliseum. Six bays composed of three sets of doors separated by concrete columns define the entrance on this part and the entrance from the "side" parking lot. A two story solid wall covers the areas of the coliseum that do not have entrances. From all views, the metal dome roof, concrete main structure and supporting slabs are visible. Slender, 1960s era street lamps are located around the building.

At the back part of the Mid-South Coliseum are the service areas. This area departs from the generally circular design of the building. Here is a two story solid angular section that is used for deliveries, utilities and servicing the coliseum. Both pedestrian and garage-like doors are located on this part. Currently, a chain link fence separates this part of the building from the public.

The interior of the Mid-South Coliseum still has terrazzo floors, tile walls, metal stair balusters, re-upholstered original seating, original lighting system and acoustical panels. Some areas have been modernized with slightly dropped ceilings and recessed lighting. Overall, the building retains a high degree of integrity.

## Endnotes

- (1) Information from Beth Wade, Managing Director, Mid-South Coliseum, August 1, 2000
- (2) "Design for Versatility" in *Architecture-Memphis*, p.3, December 1964.
- (3) 1964 dedication, n.p.
- (4) Printout from Beth Wade. and n.d. "The Mid-South Coliseum." p. 2

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Mid-South Coliseum  
Shelby County, Tennessee

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- (5) Dedication cover
- (6) Mid-South Coliseum. Newspaper article dated March 2, 1961.
- (7) "Design for Versatility" in *Architecture-Memphis*, p.3, December 1964
- (8) Mid-South Coliseum. Newspaper article dated July 22, 1963.
- (9) *Commercial Appeal*, March 16, 1963.
- (10) The Mid-South Coliseum" p. 4
- (11) *ibid.*, p. 4
- (12) *op cit.*, p. 5
- (13) *op cit.*, p. 7

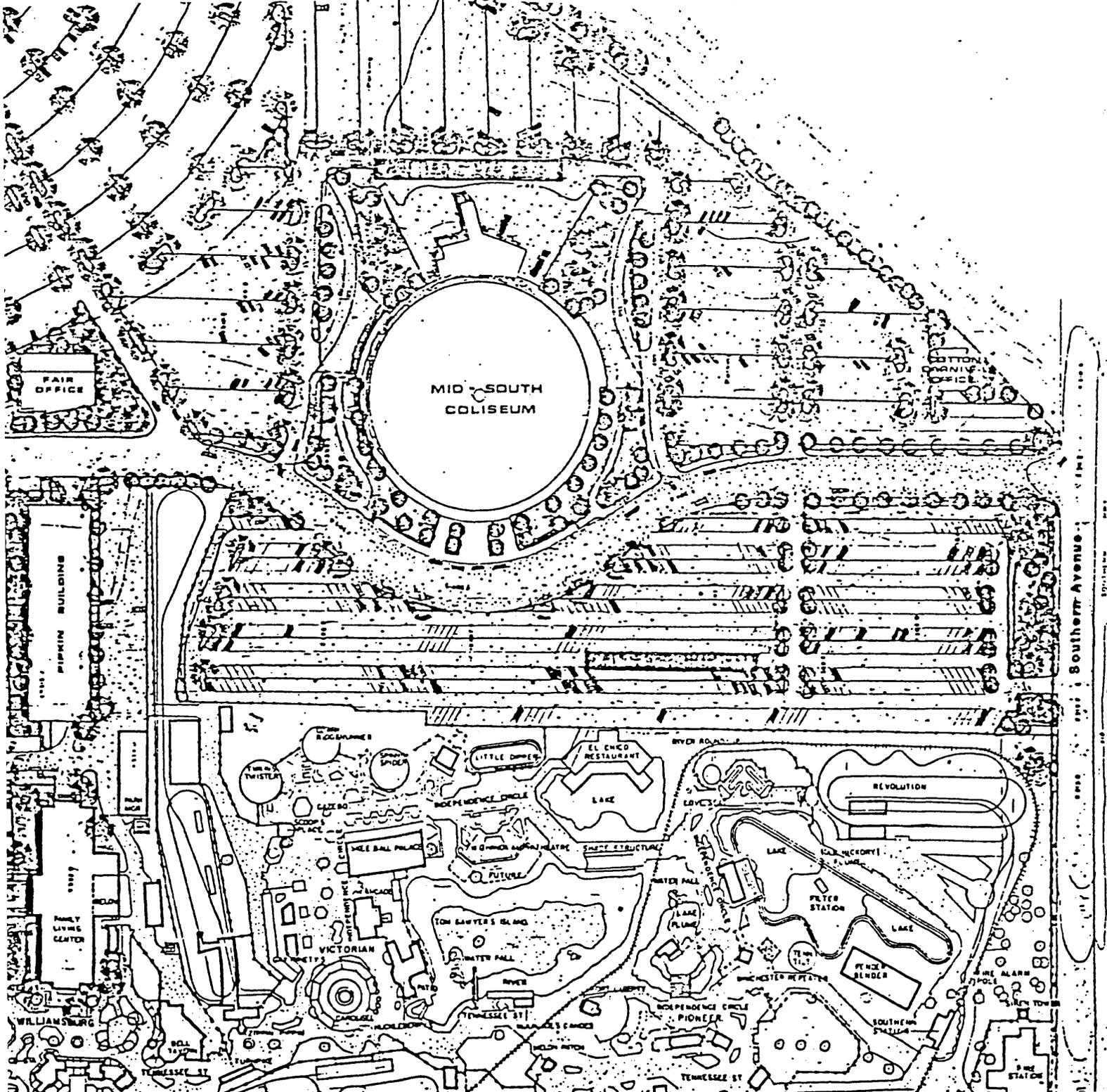
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Mid-South Coliseum  
Shelby County, Tennessee

Site Plan for Fairgrounds showing coliseum



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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Mid-South Coliseum  
Shelby County, Tennessee

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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Mid-South Coliseum is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its extraordinary local significance in the modern history of entertainment/recreation and the music history of Memphis. It is the only extant building in Memphis where such significant musical groups as The Beatles, The Stax-Volt Record Revue, Ike and Tina Turner, The Who, Led Zepellin, The Rolling Stones, James Brown, and Elvis Presley performed during their period of significance in American popular music and as such, the coliseum served as a center for cultural expression among Memphis youth, both white and black. The building created a cultural forum where Memphis youth, both black and white, participated in, and were influenced by, a rapid transformation in American popular music that replaced small venues of a several hundred patrons, who listened attentively to barely amplified performances, to thousands of kids reacting emotionally to the throbs of massive sounds of screaming instruments set in a theatrical backdrop where the audience was as much part of the performance as the performers themselves.

Developed and constructed between 1960 and 1964, the Mid-South Coliseum was the first public auditorium in Memphis to be planned as an integrated facility, rather than a so-called "separate but equal" segregated building, significant in an era of rapid change in race relations that by no means could be predicted as successful in 1960. The building is similar in design to the coliseums in Jacksonville, Florida, opened in 1960, and Mobile, Alabama, opened in 1965. However, the coliseum in Mobile was specifically designed, as were other Deep South public buildings of the era, as a segregated facility. Performances before integrated audiences occurred at the Mid-South Coliseum as soon as the building opened in 1964, and its period of significance extends to 1974, when Elvis Presley gave his first Memphis concerts in over a decade at the coliseum and recorded a live album there.

### Planning and Building the Mid-South Coliseum

The Mid-South Fair and Exposition Board, in consultation with city and county officials and with the endorsement of Mayor Henry Loeb, the Shelby County Commission Chairman David Harsh, and Tennessee Governor Buford Ellington (all three were strong segregationists), chose in the fall of 1959 to develop a new comprehensive plan for the Mid-South Fairgrounds, its various facilities, and its various buildings. The fair had been suffering from declining interest and attendance, attributed in part to its dated facilities and in part to the increasing urban and suburban population of Memphis and Shelby County, which had little interest in "county fairs." This planning initiative was a carryover from the Orgill years when officials sought to place the city on a modern, progressive path, but the Loeb administration actually saw the idea become public policy.

In December 1959 the chosen consulting firm, Vandeburg-Linkletter Associates, Inc., of New York City, with the design assistance of Ayres Houghtelling, began work. Six months later, on May 31,

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Mid-South Coliseum  
Shelby County, Tennessee

1960, it presented its master plan to city and county officials. The plan called for an overhaul of the fairgrounds and construction of several new facilities. The centerpiece of the plan would be a modern styled, multi-purpose indoor arena capable of hosting programs, concerts, and conventions that would interest both urban and rural residents of southwestern Tennessee. The planners called for:

A new, modern functional all-purpose enclosed coliseum with permanent seating for a minimum of 8,000 people with expansion to 12,000 by means of portable arena seating. This structure would be permanently heated and air conditioned and self-contained. It would have its own administrative offices, maintenance and canteen service, dressing rooms, ticket booths, turnstiles, ticker controls, radio-television origination studios and equipment, press box and press room, show lighting and staging equipment, rest rooms and public service facilities.

In order to attract business and industrial groups already contracted on behalf of the new Mid-South Fair, the new Coliseum should be modern in every detail and as architecturally exciting as funds and utility will permit.

The Coliseum should be considered as a 'blue chip' facility provided by the City of Memphis and of sufficient importance to set the architectural pattern and quality of all other new structures and facilities planned for the grounds. (1)

Nowhere in the description of the coliseum did the consultants discuss the need for segregated or separate facilities for blacks and whites. Rather the burning public question of segregation versus integration was treated in a tangential manner, with scattered references. The report, thus, is a classic text of "quiet desegregation" at work. For example, on page 44, it was argued that fairgrounds "must do something to educate, assist and reward all the youth of the State" while the authority's governing board "should be representative of a cross-section of the entire Memphis, Shelby County, and tri-state population."(2) The master plan was more specific on how the coliseum could serve Memphis as a modern community recreational point, as an exhibit facility and as a paid entertainment facility.

## The Coliseum as Cultural Common Ground

The first two events at the coliseum showed how, without fanfare, it was opened as a race neutral facility. The first program in late October 1964 was the Ringling Brothers Circus, which attracted a broad audience. The next program, and the first stage show, was the Goodwill Revue, sponsored by Memphis radio station WDIA, which holds a significant place in the history of popular music in

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Mid-South Coliseum  
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the 20<sup>th</sup> century South. WDIA was the first southern radio station to adopt an all African-American format, having done so in 1948. Cultural and music historians emphasize that the success of WDIA led to radio stations across the country adopting black news and entertainment formats.(3) Brook Benton headlined the November 28, 1964, show. Other notable artists were Dee Clark, Johnny Nash, The Marvelettes, and Rufus and Carla Thomas. Otis Redding also sang, but then he was almost an unknown talent to many of the audience. (For instance, a story about the revue in the Memphis *Tri-State Defender* gave Atlanta as Redding's home (he was from Macon) and blandly announced he would sing "Chained and Bound.") Supported as almost always by the musical talents of Booker T. and the MGs and the Mar-Keys, the Marvelettes, Redding, and the Thomases were fixtures at the local Stax Records. This record company was the center of the Memphis Soul Music scene; music historians in the years since have never wavered from their conviction that Stax produced some of the most important recordings in American popular music during those years. The WDIA concert was the first sellout, and its estimated attendance of between 12,600 and 13,500—with some newspapers noting that whites attended with the blacks--held a Memphis attendance record for a single concert event for many years. (4)

The Mid-South Coliseum also played a significant role in the introduction of modern professional sports in Memphis. On December 2, 1964, the first home game of the Memphis Wings, a member of the Central Hockey League, took place at the arena. An affiliate of the Detroit Red Wings of the National Hockey League, the Memphis Wings was the first professional ice hockey team to play in Memphis, and all professional ice hockey games in Memphis have been played at the Mid-South Coliseum. For a brief period in 1965-66, it also was a regular home court (for eight games a season) for the St. Louis (now Atlanta) Hawks of the National Basketball Association. When these games were played, they afforded local residents an exceedingly rare opportunity in those days in Memphis of viewing basketball teams with both white and black members on the same team. It is the only arena in the state of Tennessee to have hosted a schedule of regular season games of the National Basketball Association. From the fall of 1964 until the opening of the Memphis Pyramid in the early 1990s, the Mid-South Coliseum was also home court for the Memphis State University basketball teams. Once Memphis State integrated its teams in the late 1960s, the Mid-South Coliseum played host to some of the largest integrated crowds in the city for that time. When the mostly African-American lineup of Memphis State University made the NCAA Final Four in 1973, the sports audience of Memphis went basketball crazy.

The evolution of the coliseum as the most significant concert venue in Memphis during the height of the Rock-n-Roll and Soul Music movements (1964 to 1974) in American popular music began with the WDIA Goodwill Revue of November 1964 and slowly gained momentum over the next eighteen months until the arena's popularity was firmly established. The Dave Clark Five, the first of the British Invasion bands to play in Tennessee, performed at the Coliseum in December 1964. Local journalists timed the performance at 23 minutes in length, and these critics had no difficulty

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Mid-South Coliseum  
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understanding the teen audience's screaming and swooning—after all they had seen it before with Elvis Presley (one photo caption remarked, “The reaction is comparable to those given Elvis Presley”)—but they had difficulty with the sound and music that would slowly become part and parcel of arena rock concerts. “Imagine standing in front of the stage—the loud twang-twang of electric guitars assaulting your right ear while 8,000 screaming youngsters screeched uncontrollably on my left side for 30 minutes,” Bill Burk asked of his *Press-Scimitar* readers. “It was like stereophonic bedlam. . . . Now and then you might hear one of their voices sing part of one word, but you couldn't understand it.” (5) A mainstream African-American singer, Johnny Mathis, came next on March 1, 1965, followed by the delightfully mixed show of British rock, Southern Soul, and Urban Pop represented by “Dick Clark's Caravan of Stars” on April 27, 1965. Clark's shows were carryovers of his very popular television and radio programs, introducing to audiences quick glimpses from currently popular artists. Clark's television program, especially during its Philadelphia days in the late 1950s, often showed black and white teenagers dancing in the same room, and always showed a mix of white and black artists. Several southern television stations would not show the program, or only show it in an edited version. However, it seems that this type of controversy was over by the time Clark's revue hit Memphis in the spring of 1964. The coliseum show was the first time Clark had brought his traveling road show to Memphis. The British Invasion group, The Zombies, was the headliner, followed by Tommy Roe, The Shangri-Las, The Ikettes, Del Shannon, and nine others. The integrated pop music program was followed two weeks later by a concert from The Righteous Brothers, a white group popular with both whites and blacks. The San Francisco-based group The Beau Brummels also performed.

Memphis between 1962 and 1965 was the cultural birthplace of modern soul music that would take white American and European audiences by storm in 1967 and 1968. The Motown Sound of Detroit was a carefully controlled and choreographed music aimed for a white audience. Much of the music coming out of the Memphis was the opposite, and is often designated as such by being called Southern Soul music. Until the coliseum the concert scene in the Bluff City was segregated by custom, if not by law, in tiny venues downtown and in West Memphis, Arkansas, with the occasional large concert at the Auditorium. Radio, however, was the great mixer and beginning in 1960, the Stax Records studio and record store at 926 East McLemore Avenue (not extant) became the place where the new Memphis Soul sound would emerge to enchant the western world. As Brian Ward argues in his new history of the ties between Southern Soul music and the Civil Rights Movement, the sounds from Memphis and the mixed audiences they attracted created an important public arena that enhanced racial identity and civil rights consciousness. The one place in Memphis that attracted the best groups and the largest audiences was the Mid-South Coliseum. When such magnetic artists as Otis Redding chanted “A Change is Going Come” in 1966 and 1967, those in attendance knew he was singing to both present circumstances and the immediate past in the Bluff City. (6)

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In the spring and summer of 1965, the Mid-South Coliseum became the concert performance center for Memphis Soul music, as the city's various African-American radio stations and record companies put together different revues to showcase their artists and their most recent recordings. After the success of the November 1964 WDIA show, WDIA producer David James Mattis put together the first coliseum show, "The Swingin' Spectacular," on May 1, 1965. It featured The Impressions, Jerry Butler, The Drifters, Joe Tex (his first major Memphis show), Major Lance, and Gene Chandler. But the real precedent setting shows came that summer, when between June 1 and July 3 Memphis audiences witnessed two concerts that included Stevie Wonder, Percy Sledge, Joe Tex, Rufus Thomas, Muddy Waters, Staple Singers, Homer Banks, and The Marvelettes. Between the two concerts came the opening of the nearby Fairgrounds pool as the first public pool to be integrated in Memphis since the Supreme Court's decision in Watson v. City of Memphis (1963). The three events signaled the beginning of a new era for Memphis public recreational facilities—the color line had not only been crossed; it was erased, as far as the Mid-South Fairgrounds was concerned.(7)

That summer and fall the Mid-South Coliseum continued its evolution into a major Rock-n-Roll venue, which meant that it became a center for the increasing influential 1960s youth culture in Memphis. Dick Clark brought in British group Peter and Gordon in July while fellow Brits Herman's Hermits and Wayne Fontana and the Mind Benders, together with the Memphis act The Gentrys, performed in August. Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs played the arena at the end of August along with the Canadian group The Guess Who, the Portland, Oregon group The Kingsmen (who performed the immortal classic "Louie, Louie"), and the influential California band The Turtles. Sonny and Cher, along with Gene Pitney, played in September, followed the next night by Rhythm-n-Blues legend Jackie Wilson. Then the first major popular music icons played the Bluff City in November. Motown came to the home of Stax and Hi Records with a vengeance with a concert by The Supremes. Their pairing with the white pop group, The Lovin' Spoonful, while odd at first glance, is actually a good example of how Motown targeted a broad white teenage audience. Next came the Rolling Stones (paired as often with soul or blues music groups they admired, this time being Patti LaBelle) who played to 7,500 people later in the month. To close the year, the coliseum had two return acts from 1964, The Dave Clark Five and the WDIA Goodwill Revue. Headlined by Johnny Nash and Fontella Bass, the WDIA show set a new pop music attendance record. As Press-Scimitar columnist Bill E. Burk observed, "Time was when Memphis was lucky to get one big-name entertainer a year in town, but that seems far into the ancient past today. And thank goodness. Now the complaint seems to be, 'Why are they booking in so many all at once?'"(8)

As white Memphis journalists experienced (or endured, as they may have said) the arrival of modern rock and soul, they left behind a group of writings that adequately document the cultural significance of the events that took place at the Mid-South Coliseum during the mid-1960s. (9)

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White journalists said little of the soul music concerts, probably because they knew that their audience was not terribly interested. Plus the soul music shows lacked the loudness, the discordant sounds, and the alternative look of the new rock groups. After performing in the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967, Steve Cropper of Booker T. and the MGs commented that even the sound of his famous band was tinny and low-tech compared to their counterparts in the emerging rock scene of 1967-1968. Journalists in the two largest newspapers wrote the most about the mainstream acts that the coliseum booked in 1965. These included the sultry torch singer Julie London, Chet Atkins, and television stars Lawrence Welk, Ted Mack, and Tennessee Ernie Ford, who brought their shows to the coliseum during the annual Mid-South Fair. But the reporters could not pass up the opportunity of comparing the increasing number of rock acts to the more traditional radio and television stars. *Press-Scimitar* reporter Clark Porteous asked the venerable Ted Mack if he believed that "Beatles type" music would last. Mack reportedly laughed, then said "I think it's a phase they are going through, just as we went through 'Jada, Jada, Jing, Jing, Jing' and the Charleston and Blackbottom." (10)

The first extensive comments about the cultural phenomenon of the new music came after that summer's concert by Herman's Hermits, an extremely popular British Invasion group of that time. *Commercial Appeal* writer Larry Williams wrote that the concert was "an H-bomb of destruction in the form of long hair, wiggly hips and shrill, screechy noise. . . . Its practitioners are invariably young, energetic, loud, brassy, and un-talented." Using a fictional "discussion" between two brothers, one a psychologist, Williams distinguished between 1950s rock and the new style rock associated with the British Invasion: "Elvis started horsing around years ago with something almost genuine. I mean, he did more than just shout and jump and gyrate like a kindergarten kid. And then the imitators came and took that germ and instead of building on the music, just started using one gimmick after another and the kids hypnotized themselves with the aid of the wicked pushers and pretty soon, it didn't make any difference that the sum of the parts was no good." (11)

Looking back at the summer and fall concerts *Commercial Appeal* columnist Connie Richards observed that the opening of coliseum has "added a new element to our entertainment fun" through the new rock concerts: "It's the half hour or so screaming, shouting and clawing that is the highlight of any good rock and roll show." Central to Richard's column was an interview with Jim Oshust, Mid-South Coliseum manager. Oshust, whose prior career was as a professional skater, called the music: "Be-bop barbiturate." He added: "By the time they [his example was the Rolling Stones] come on, the audience is hysterical. The kids spit, holler and curse. In the fury of trying to get backstage, they weep, throw things, stand on chairs and scream. They come in nice kids and they leave nice kids, but for that half-hour, it's something. Cortez must have used something like this during the height of the Mayan sun rallies. Little girls, who probably never express affection to their own parents, will scream 'I love you!' over and over at the top of their lungs." Ten years later, historian Godfrey Hodgson said much the same when he looked at what the youth

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culture of the mid-1960s wanted, and that was “excitement, purpose, a feeling of community, and some measure of individual worth. When Mick Jagger swayed in the spotlight and promised them, “We’re gonna get some satisfaction,’ dams burst. A frightening intensity of emotion flooded normally sulky faces. It was hardly the fault of the musicians if all they had to give was excitement without purpose, an illusion of community, when the individual’s yearnings were lost in the contrived explosions of mass hysteria.” (12)

Oshust next expressed the conviction that the new rock was just a fad, and one that would not last. He did not care much for groups like the Rolling Stones: “Some of these long-hairs don’t even belong in the world of entertainment. They’re ill-attired, they’re surly and have no manners.” Richards agreed with Oshust that “the fad is dying, if we can put trust in statistics.” While The Dave Clark Five drew 8,500 in 1964, its latest (1965) concert attracted only about 3,500. Herman’s Hermits had 11,000 in attendance during the summer but only 7,500 came to the Rolling Stones concert (compared to a mere 2,000 in Nashville). Oshust had a reason why modern rock was quickly dying: “Unless you’re in the first few rows, you can’t hear a thing. You can’t see them afterwards to get autographs or take pictures. They’re money-conscious and careless groups. Herman’s Hermits spent about 25 minutes on the stage—no autographs, no nothing. That’s very little to give when you are making between 10 and 20 thousand dollars a night. A big rock group won’t spend 40 minutes in the building.” Richards ended the column by pointing out that “the imitators may be dropping by the wayside, but the Beatles, who started it all, are still thriving. Maybe that’s because they still have the personality that established them in the first place, and also because they have brains under all those mops of hair.” (13) The stage could not have been better prepared for the summer 1966 arrival of The Beatles to Mid-South Coliseum.

Although other pretenders occasionally put forth their claims, music historians agree that The Beatles were the most influential group in the history of modern rock music. The Beatles only performed in the United States between 1964 and 1966. They played in four southern cities: Jacksonville, New Orleans, Atlanta, and, in their last U. S. tour, Memphis for two shows at the Mid-South Coliseum in August 1966. Memphis was the only southern city on the 1966 American tour. Members of the group, most notably John Lennon, were scared of performing in the South due to the persistent outbursts of violence against civil rights activists. Shortly before the tour began, Lennon found himself in the middle of the greatest controversy the band had ever faced, when a small American fan magazine published, out of context, comments Lennon had made comparing the popularity of the group to Jesus Christ. In a March 1966 interview with *London Evening Standard* reporter Maureen Cleave, Lennon predicted: “Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink. I needn’t argue with that; I’m right and I will be proved right. We’re more popular than Jesus now; I don’t know which will go first—rock ‘n’ roll or Christianity. Jesus was all right but his disciples were thick and ordinary. It’s them twisting it that ruins it for me.” Few in England noticed,

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or cared about, Lennon's comments, but once snippets of the interview were published in the American magazine *Datebook* on July 29, 1966, a virtual cultural war broke out in the South. (14)

Until the controversy, the coming of The Beatles was an event generally celebrated in Memphis' two largest newspapers as both the *Press-Scimitar* and the *Commercial Appeal* kept count with ticket sales, the number of tickets sold out-of-state, the elaborate security, and other pre-concert news. Then on August 3, the *Commercial Appeal* published an Associated Press wire story about Lennon's "Jesus controversy" comments. The story seemingly first broke in the South when a Birmingham disk jockey, Tommy Charles of WAQY, called for a "Ban the Beatles" campaign, promising to stage a Beatles record bonfire at the venue nearest Birmingham, which would have been Memphis. From that day until the concerts on August 19, the Memphis newspapers covered the controversy extensively. Memphis youngster Beth Hendrix told the *Commercial Appeal* on August 4: "I think it's terrible. Nobody's better than Jesus. I just wish that I could send them a telegram or something." Two days later, the newspaper attempted to quell the controversy through a column by Lydel Sims, who asked: "Look, do you realize what you're getting into when you start out of this sort of crusade? If the Beatles' music is to be rejected because of the beliefs of one of their members, then by golly we ought to blacklist all entertainers whose convictions are not our own." (15)

But, of course, the controversy continued because Lennon's innocent remarks opened a point of attack eagerly seized by people pursuing other political and cultural agendas. The end of the segregated South was well underway, especially after the congressional passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. When the transformation of race relations was added to the other significant changes—suburbanization, modernization, and rising materialism—shaping southern life, it provoked a heated, even violent response from those wedded to the old ways. The Lennon controversy became one way of expressing disgust with the new youth culture and its most public vehicle of expression, rock-n-roll music. Bonfires of Beatles records took place in Memphis on August 5. Over the next three days, Mayor William B. Ingram and city commissioners Pete Sisson, Claude A. Armour, and James W. Moore called for the cancellation of the concert. While the city government admitted that the concert might go on if the city would have to pay the \$50,000 concert guarantee, Commissioner Armour hoped that local residents "will have to make it so clear that the Beatles are unwelcome that they'll cancel the performances themselves." (16) That message was not unlike those given in past years to alleged "outside agitators" who came to the South to demand civil rights. And the message was heard loud and clear in the Beatles camp, where John Lennon later admitted that he tried to talk the group out of coming to an area where they shot people who refused to conform. Jimmy Stroud, superintendent of the Memphis Union Mission, called for a meeting of local ministers to discuss having a competing religious rally on the day of the concert. By August 11, entertainment columnist Robert Johnson remarked that the Beatles boycott was the hottest issue around, and his

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mail, both pro and con, was consumed with the topic. That same day, the *Commercial Appeal* announced that while the Beatles were performing the night show at the Coliseum, over 100 ministers would sponsor a Memphis Christian Youth Rally at the city auditorium. Union mission director Stroud emphasized that "we want it understood this is not an anti-Beatle rally. It is to give the youth of the Mid-South an opportunity to show Jesus Christ is more popular than the Beatles." The rally would feature Jay North, former star of the "Dennis the Menace" television show, Gregory Walcott, another television actor, and singer Cathie Taylor. (17)

Attempting to quiet the controversy, the Beatles' manager, Brian Epstein on August 13 telegraphed the mayor and city commission, pledging that the group would not "in any way, offend or ridicule the religious beliefs of anyone." Jerry Foley of promoter Early Maxwell Associates promised that the concert would go, no matter the controversy. But the fate of the Beatles in Memphis remained a heated debate. Rev. James E. Hamill, pastor of First Assembly of God Church, boasted in a *Commercial Appeal* interview that "Memphis is the only city in America doing something positive in a [Christian] rally while the Beatles are in the towns. . . They (the Beatles) have challenged the church of Jesus Christ. We are not going to lie down and roll over. It is a time to stand up and be counted, and we believe the youth of Memphis and the Mid-South are ready to meet this challenge by making this rally the biggest ever in the city." For the readers of the *Press-Scimitar*, Rev. Hamill asserted that the Beatles "have insulted the Christian community. They owe more than the apology that was made." (18)

The Beatles encountered some of their worst fears of the South when they arrived in Memphis on the morning of August 19. The journal of Barry Tashian, who was a member of The Remains, one of the acts traveling with the Beatles, records that the group drove into the town seeing roadside protestors who held signs demanding that the "Beatles Go Home." Grouped into a city bus, the various musicians were told to keep their heads out of the windows. Once they left for the coliseum, the Beatles were in an armored Wells Fargo truck and security at the coliseum was tripled. Being a member of a secondary act, Tashian did not know the full story, however. The Beatles had received a phone call threatening to kill one or more members of the group at the Memphis concerts. The Beatles, especially Lennon, were on edge the entire day in the Bluff City. The afternoon show at 4:30 was not a sellout, which some attributed to the Jesus controversy. A group of Ku Klux Klan members, in full regalia, protested outside the coliseum and encouraged people to burn whatever Beatle items they had. The group of six Klansmen also passed out anti-Beatle literature. As Thomas BeVier commented in the *Commercial Appeal*, "the sheets and hoods lent an incongruous touch to the stream of bell-bottomed trousers, paisley shirts and high heeled boots worn by the Beatles' faithful who filed by." But to the Beatles and their entourage, the presence of Klan members, in full regalia, was much more than an "incongruous touch"—it was a scary threat, with meaning, in lieu of the death threat. In 1966, few people with access to

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television had not seen the Klan's outrages over the prior years and could imagine well what the KKK was capable of. Despite the protests, the shows went on. (19)

Across town, the largest demonstration against what the Beatles "represented" was held at the auditorium. While the Beatles performed, the planned Christian Youth rally went as scheduled with an estimated 8,000—half of them adults—in attendance. Dale Enoch in the *Commercial Appeal* reported: "The crowd was devoid of string-haired girls or mop-topped boys and showed no signs of beatlemania, but they applauded lustily through the tight schedule of singing, testimonies by young people, and two 30-minute speeches," one by television actor Gregory Walcott and the other by Dave Wilkerson, director of Teen Challenge of New York City. Memphis mayor William B. Ingram was even on hand to offer Walcott and Wilkerson the keys to the city that he had earlier refused the Beatles. But the alternative teen event—planners still emphasized that it was not an anti-Beatles rally—was still too much of the new youth culture for some adults who accompanied their children. A group of about thirty walked out of the performance of Sing-Out Memphis, a group that performed religious songs with a pop beat. One parent told Enoch: "Many young people were decoyed into going down there for a Christian testimonial service. We might as well have gone to the Coliseum," and Enoch added that this angry conversation took place as Sing-Out Memphis "continued singing to a modified 'twist' and the accompanying combo maintained a throbbing beat." (20)

Inside the coliseum, the Beatles found adoring fans and an aggressive local media. During their break between the two concerts, the *Commercial Appeal* even invaded their privacy by disguising one of their reporters, William Norton, as a waiter. The next day, Norton breathlessly reported on the Beatles' meal, adding what he could about the dinner conversation. During a press conference between the shows, the group patiently answered questions about the "Bigger Than Jesus" controversy, and indicated their interest in recording in Memphis. Elvis was not lure; rather the Beatles admired the stars of Stax Records. They wanted an opportunity to work with Steve Cropper, guitarist extraordinaire and producer at Stax Records. "He's the best we've heard," the group said. (21)

The most significant event of the concerts happened at the evening show when Vicki Arnold and Richard H. Price, as reported in the Memphis newspapers, tossed a cherry bomb on stage. The kids denied intent and claimed they were forced to do it. Nothing happened at the moment, and the music continued. But the sound terrified John Lennon and the other Beatles. Lennon recalled that everyone looked at each other, certain one had been shot. What was passed off as a high school prank in the Memphis newspapers was an ominous sign to Lennon. Already the demands of touring had discouraged both him and George Harrison; after the various disasters of the 1966 tour, Paul McCartney reluctantly agreed to stop touring. The Beatles never toured again in the United States. (George Harrison brought his band to the coliseum in November 1974). (22)

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In the concert's aftermath, the editorial page of the *Commercial Appeal* opined: "if we may indulge in some amateur psychology, it was a useful performance in that it allowed the area's young people a chance to let off steam in a harmless way;" Memphis had survived the Beatles. Another news story emphasized the financial benefits of the new rock music. "A survey of several Memphis merchants," noted the reporter, "shows a close partnership today between merchandising and loud music. The louder the music the better because it's aimed at the buying power of the youngsters." Irving Rodenberg of Lowenstein's department store, remarked that his store "faced the facts of life. We are in show business in a big way and it's getting bigger all the time." By the time of the Beatles' concert, Lowenstein's had already had 36 rock and fashion shows that summer and was planning a weeklong "rock and roll gala" for its suburban Whitehaven Shopping Center store in September. (23)

Although the Beatles never again wanted to play in Memphis, they never lost their admiration for what they saw as the most important music of the Bluff City, and that was Southern Soul music. When the Stax-Volt Revue launched its now legendary tour of England and Europe the following spring, "the Beatles sent limos to the airport to pick up the entourage and tried in vain to arrange for a jam session, but they were in the midst of finishing up their long-awaited Sergeant Pepper album and were never able to do anything more than attend Carla Thomas's show. . . where, upon meeting Steve Cropper, 'the four Beatles stood in unison and bowed from the waist.'" (24) But concert goers in Memphis long ago knew the excitement, artistry, and passion of the Stax sound that mesmerized the audiences in England and Europe. The twice-yearly revues produced by WDIA at the coliseum had featured the Stax stars since the second coliseum event in November 1964. Even after the Beatles' concert, the November 1965 WDIA revue had still attracted the largest crowd for a coliseum concert. Before the Beatles' visit, the summer 1966 revue featured Otis Redding, Percy Sledge, Sam and Dave, and Carla Thomas. Here is where Memphis whites and blacks experienced the special talent that was Otis Redding. As June Dunn, the sister of Booker T. and the MGs member Donald "Duck" Dunn, recalled, "Everyone would come out, and they would all have on a sharper suit and be cooler or better than the group ahead of them. Otis was the last, and I thought, what is he going to do to impress them? Otis walked out, and he had on a plain black tuxedo—everybody else was in like chartreuse—but he wore that . . . halo. He just strutted out in that plain black tuxedo with that big smile, and everyone just went wow." (25)

After the wildly successful spring 1967 overseas tour, the Stax-Volt Revue returned to the Mid-South Coliseum on July 29, 1967 in a show featuring Otis Redding, Percy Sledge, and Arthur Conley. This concert came a month after the rousing reception given to Redding, Booker T. and the MGs, and the Mar-Keys at the Monterey Pop Festival, when the broader American rock scene encountered the Stax sound for the first time. Ironically, after a big WDIA revue on December 9, 1967—a concert featuring Sam and Dave, Bobby Bland, Muddy Waters, and Rufus and Carla

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Thomas—Otis Redding died the next day when his plane crashed outside of Madison, Wisconsin. The accident took the lives of Redding and most of the members of the Bar-Kays. (26)

Redding's accidental death was the first in a series of events to change the cultural context of Memphis' music scene over the next few months. On February 14, 1968, African Americans who worked for the city sanitation department went on strike to protest the unsafe working conditions, deplorable wages, and segregated operations.

Thus began a six-week period of increasing racial conflict and turmoil, topped by a late March demonstration on city streets led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. A week later, on April 4, 1968, a gunman assassinated Dr. King at the Lorraine Motel, protest riots erupted, and the city imposed a tight curfew and called in the national guard. As race relations reached a new low, the show continued at the Mid-South Coliseum, but ironically those months did not witness the mix of white and black events so common in 1965-1966. Performing at the coliseum from February 1 to May 1 were the Harlem Globetrotters (on the night of King's "Been to the Mountaintop" speech at Mason Temple [NR 4/10/92]; the Beach Boys and Buffalo Springfield; Holiday On Ice; two country music shows; Tony Bennett; and Gary Puckett and the Union Gap.

As the events that spring proved, Memphis was slow to end the vestiges of Jim Crow. In 1968, four years after the coliseum's opening, there were no African Americans on the board of the Chamber of Commerce, the Future Memphis, Inc., local bank boards, the school board, and Rotary clubs. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in the city that spring and the National Guard occupied black neighborhoods. But black and white teenagers swayed together to the sounds of Stax, James Brown, and many others at the Mid-South Coliseum. In this southern city, that truth made this building an extraordinary place of its time.

From 1968 to 1974, the Mid-South Coliseum became a must stop on every tour by the most influential performers: repeated visits by James Brown, Led Zeppelin (April 4, 1970), Ike and Tina Turner (April 24, 1971), The Who (November 28, 1971), Elton John (November 11, 1972), Stevie Wonder (July 5, 1973), and Bob Dylan and the Band (January 23, 1974). These concerts, with their high stages, huge P.A. systems, and intricate lighting were a far cry from the early rock shows, where a small stage and a few guitar amps separated the performers from their adoring fans. It was an era of Big Rock, with loud, ear-splitting sound, long music sets (Led Zeppelin normally played for two hours; compare that to the roughly 30 minute concerts from Herman's Hermits, the Beatles, and the Dave Clark Five), and increasingly theatrical performances, what historian Martha Bayless calls the "visual effect" of modern rock. (27)

Finally on March 16-17, 1974 came the first Memphis arena concerts for Elvis Presley. By this time in his musical career, Presley was far from the innovative performer of the 1950s, but he

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remained an immensely popular performer as the acknowledged King of Rock-n-Roll. Presley performed an afternoon matinee and an evening show both days, drawing sellouts of 12,300 to all four concerts. There he introduced his hometown to the elaborate arrangements that had characterized his music since his Las Vegas and Lake Tahoe stage concerts of the late 1960s. On March 20, Elvis returned for a single concert, which RCA engineers recorded for release. The album was titled "Elvis As Recorded Live On Stage in Memphis" and contained the logo of the Mid-South Coliseum in the upper right corner of the jacket. The jacket photograph was of Graceland, Presley's Memphis home.

The Mid-South Coliseum is the only place in Memphis where one may step inside the arena seating and see where these internationally significant performers of American soul music once danced and sang upon the stage to thousands of fans. Admirers of Elvis still have the Sun Studios and Graceland, but the McLemore Avenue studio and headquarters of Stax is gone. Music historian Rob Bowman emphasizes: "Stax has been marginalized in a way that is totally inappropriate given its ultimate influence on musical history. It's never been accorded its place in history." (28) At the end of his history of Stax Records, Bowman notes "Tragically, in 1988 the Stax building was torn down. What should have been a national historic site remains in the late 1990s an empty field containing rubbish and junkie needles. It's a disgrace, and speaks volumes regarding Memphis's treatment of its African-American heritage."(29) However, at the start of a new century, the new rock and soul museum in Memphis, and the local support and interest in the Mid-South Coliseum being listed in the National Register of Historic Places shows a new determination to identify, and celebrate, the Bluff City's contribution to modern American culture. During some of the worst years of violence in the Civil Rights Movement, from 1964 to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in Memphis in 1968, the Mid-South Coliseum evolved into a cultural common ground for the various strands in American popular music that came to define a distinctive, significant era in American culture. It is a Memphis monument to an era of extraordinary creativity, hope, and achievement.

## Race and Rock-n-Roll in Memphis, 1960-1974

No public institution in Memphis in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century can be fully assessed without an understanding of their place in the ongoing debate over race relations during those years. One of the most remarkable facts about the Mid-South Coliseum is that it developed and was established as a major popular culture institution for both races during a time of racial turmoil. Planning for a new, modern auditorium for the Mid-South Fairgrounds in Memphis began in late 1959. Brown v. Board of Education (1954) had been the law of the land for five years, but Memphis, like most other major Southern cities, had moved only slightly toward anything but token compliance with the end of the legal justification for Jim Crow segregation. In 1956, black and white residents had created the Greater Memphis Race Relations Committee (GMRRC). It was modeled on the earlier

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Memphis Inter-Racial League (MIL), which had developed in the 1920s as an institution to foster communications between white and black community leaders after racial strife in 1919-1920. But like the earlier MIL, the GMRRC still embraced segregation as it maintained separate committees for white members and for black members. The civic, economic, religious, and educational leaders behind the GMRRC's creation took a courageous step because most whites were not ready to discuss integration on any terms. In fact, due to overt economic pressure on some of its members, the GMRRC dissolved the same year it was created. Memphis remained a very segregated southern city. And change did not appear to be even remotely possible in the near future. (30)

From 1956 to 1958, racial tensions in Memphis became increasingly tense, in part because of the regional and national debate over public school integration and in greater part due to the first stirrings of residential integration in Memphis at the Glenview neighborhood (Glenview Historic District NR 10/7/99). Politicians seeking the office of mayor in 1958 paid close attention to the issue of integration. In a public forum featuring the candidates, one white Memphis woman demanded that the candidates state their position on "the negro block-busting situation." She added: "When Mr. Crump was around he did something. I remember one negro who moved to Chicago after Mr. Crump posted policemen in front of his drugstore for only one day. That is all it took. We want to know what you candidates plan to do if elected." In response, each candidate promised to be a staunch segregationist, no more so than Commissioner Henry Loeb, who was elected mayor in that year's elections. (31)

Loeb's election ended a brief period of reform under the administration of Edmund Orgill, who had been among the civic reformers who fought the Crump machine in the early 1950s. Together with Memphis *Press-Scimitar* editor Edward J. Meeman and attorney Lucius Burch, Jr., Orgill in 1949 had formed the Civic Research Committee to investigate municipal problems and propose solutions. The group promoted modern city planning, and came to power in 1955 when Orgill—who reluctantly agreed to make the race once the first CRC candidate had suffered a heart attack—won the mayor's race over old Crump crony Walter Overton. From 1955 to 1959, the Orgill administration pushed for a new comprehensive plan for Memphis, drafted by Harland Bartholomew, and new urban renewal programs. However, Orgill received stiff opposition from old Crump loyalists as well as younger politicians, who asserted that Orgill was too much of a racial moderate. In the campaign of 1958, Orgill withdrew due to health problems and the reformers were swept from power. (32)

The election of Henry Loeb and a commission of vocal segregationists marked a public hardening of racial attitudes toward integration in Memphis by 1959. But, at the same time, local reformers, led by Lucius Burch, established the Memphis Committee on Community Relations. This group planned to work behind the scenes, and urge quiet, voluntary desegregation. Thus, while white

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political leaders were hard-line segregationists in words, a group of business and civic leaders believed that the "time had come" and that integration was occurring, and would continue to occur, in Memphis. As they saw it, the challenge was to manage this change so it would not rock the city, (33) It was into this political and racial context that the pivotal decisions to build a new city auditorium took place in 1959 and 1960.

Since avowed segregationists had just been elected to power, and public opinion appeared to be strongly against integration, why did the concept of separate but equal never appear in the developing plan for the new Mid-South Fairgrounds and its coliseum? First, there was the precedent of Ellis Auditorium (not extant), a 1920s downtown hall that had in the past hosted both white and black concerts and programs; these were segregated events but both races did use the building. The continuation of that tradition is obviously what the planners wanted for the renovated and expanded fairground facilities. The fairground area had long served both white and black residents, although in a segregated fashion. Thus, the idea that the fairgrounds were shared space could neither be viewed as a "sellout" to integrationists nor as a new "precedent" opening up the segregated city. On the other hand, planners were acknowledging recent legal developments in regards to public segregation in the Bluff City and the influence of those events should be considered. The release of the master plan followed a spring of increased racial strife in Memphis. While white business leaders wanted to go forward with slow, deliberate speed, young African Americans, inspired by their colleagues in Knoxville and Nashville conducted sit-down strikes at several Memphis institutions in March 1960. Jim Crow traditions had allowed blacks to use the public library and visit the zoo on Thursdays only. Forty-one college students staged the first sit-in at the downtown public library. Assorted boycotts and picketing at segregated lunch counters, business, and public facilities soon followed. (34)

While there were strident cries across the South for defending segregation, no matter the cost, the wording of the new fairgrounds and coliseum plan was race neutral. There were no statements delineating segregated areas. This does not seem to have caused any great debate or controversy within city and county government, at least that made it into the public record. Part of the credit goes to the New York City firm of Vandeburg-Linkletter for not pandering to "southern custom" by including the concept of segregation in the master plan. Part of the credit also has to go to city and county officials for not using the fairgrounds as a new battleground for the alleged virtues of a segregated South. But most importantly, credit lies with African-American groups who pushed legal efforts through federal courts to open up the city's recreational facilities, creating a legal environment where ignoring the mounting precedents in favor of recreational integration would have been foolhardy. As the new coliseum was being planned, constructed, and opened for its first events, African Americans in Memphis took to the courts to eventually smash the notion that somehow public segregation could take place in a slow, gradual fashion. Those events from 1960 to 1964 form a crucial context for understanding the historical significance of the coliseum.

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In May 1960 eleven African Americans - I. A. Watson, Jr., T. W. Northcross, W. O. Speight, Jr., A. E. Horne, Melvin Malunda, Johnny Gholson, Harold Gholson, Alfred Haynes, Jr., John Rogers, Thomas Pugh, and Curtis King - filed suit before the district court of the Western District of Tennessee to desegregate all public recreational facilities in Memphis. The case became known as Watson v. City of Memphis. That June federal district judge Marion S. Boyd ruled against the immediate desegregation of all municipal recreational facilities and parks in Memphis. Boyd's ruling was grounded on the good faith promise of city officials to implement gradual desegregation, but to ensure that the city kept its promise Boyd ordered that by December the city produce a desegregation plan for its municipal facilities. The African Americans, led by such local attorneys A. W. Willis, Jr., and Benjamin L. Hooks and joined by NAACP counsel Constance Baker Motley and Thurgood Marshall, immediately appealed Boyd's decision to the U. S. Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit, in Cincinnati.

Before the Sixth Circuit Court issued its decision, however, the U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments in late February 1962 in the case of Turner v. City of Memphis (369 U.S. 350; 82 S.Ct. 805, 1962). On March 26, 1962, the justices ruled that a café at the Memphis Municipal Airport had to serve African-American customers because it was operating in a city-leased space within a public building. Three months later, the Appeals Court issued its ruling in Watson v. City of Memphis (303 F.2d 863, 1962), which upheld the city's gradual desegregation plan for public recreational facilities. During arguments, the judges heard Harry Pierotti, chair of the Memphis Park Commission, testify that "I want no instance here like they had had in other parts of the South. And I believe that we can live better as a people if you permit us to desegregate these things on a gradual basis. . . The plan which we are evolving, and which we are asking the court to approve is not one which was gotten up overnight." Memphis police chief James C. MacDonald added that the timing of integration was crucial—ideally "it would be on a gradual basis where the hot heads wouldn't have a chance to act." In his testimony, Pierotti emphasized that the fairgrounds amusement park had been desegregated, at a financial loss to both concessionaires and the park commission, and therefore he believed that gradual desegregation was the only solution to keep a large number of facilities from being closed down due to a loss of income. Then, tellingly, Pierotti argued that since one-third of Memphis was African-American and that the surrounding area of north Mississippi and east Arkansas was largely African-American, having immediate desegregation at the fairgrounds and other major city recreational facilities would promote violence among blacks and whites.

Attorneys for the African-American appellants scoffed at the city's case, but the judges ruled against the appeal. The court pointed out that several areas of Memphis's recreational system had achieved limited desegregation. In the fall of 1961, the library, Brooks Museum, and zoo had been opened to all races and by the next summer, the fairgrounds' amusement park and three of

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seven golf courses had been desegregated. (Interestingly, while the Brooks Art Museum and adjacent zoo in Overton Park [NR 10/25/79] were open to African Americans, the Overton golf course was not.) But this limited progress was enough for the judges, who accepted the city's claim that "immediate desegregation of all city parks, playgrounds and recreational facilities would result in great damage to an organized system of play for many children." By ruling that the Memphis ten-year plan met the "all deliberate speed" test for public schools of the second Brown v. Board of Education decision (1955), it gave indirect approval to the city's desegregation policies. (35) As stated before the Court of Appeals in 1962, officials planned to have desegregation at the fairgrounds amusement park, the zoo, the library, the downtown plaza parks, and six golf courses by the end of 1963.

Already by this time of the Appeals court verdict, June 1962, the architects for the coliseum had been at work for more than a year. In March 1961, city and county officials announced Merrill G. Ehrman, a partner in the established and respected firm of Furbringer and Ehrman, as the lead architect of the project. Ehrman, in turn, worked in association with Robert Lee Hall & Associates, a firm with prior experience in coliseum design. After putting together the team, architects from both firms conducted a national survey of recently constructed city coliseums before beginning their design work. Here is another important influence. Most of the visited coliseums were not in the segregated South, consequently the planners and architects saw buildings with no vestiges of segregation. The design team planned the project by what was then "a unique scheduling system," where "the 'critical path' method was utilized, in which the building schedule was programmed on a data processing machine. When the system was ready for operation, each step in construction was printed on a separate line along with a schedule of dates. Included were the earliest feasible and latest possible dates for beginning and ending each operation in order to keep the entire construction program on schedule." The intricate planning and design work meant that it was two years before city and county officials conducted a groundbreaking ceremony at the fairgrounds. When the planning was over and construction of the facility began on April 15, 1963, the prevalent court ruling was that Memphis would have ten years—until 1971—to desegregate all of its public facilities. The architects of the coliseum planned not to wait for ten years; all public facilities in the building, restrooms, snack counters, seating, and the three entrances showed no vestiges of the old separate but equal doctrine. In fact, a quick walk around the building shows that the architects carefully had each of the three public entrances with their own attractive qualities: the covered sidewalk and lettering of the main entrance, the ticket booths at the south entrance, and the attractive plantings and trees of the north entrance. There would be no "back door Negro entrance" at the coliseum. (36)

Two days after the groundbreaking for the coliseum, April 17, 1963, the U. S. Supreme Court heard arguments in the appeal of Watson v. City of Memphis (373 U.S. 526; 83 S.Ct. 1314, 1963) A mere six weeks later, a unanimous U. S. Supreme Court, with Justice Arthur Goldberg reading

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the opinion, reversed the Court of Appeals' decision and vigorously struck down Memphis' gradual desegregation plan. The justices held that Memphis promoted

an unmistakable and pervasive pattern of local segregation, which, in fact the city makes no attempt to deny, but merely attempts to justify as necessary for the time being.

The court rejected that further delay was needed, considering it had been eight years since earlier court rulings on the desegregation of public recreational facilities. Moreover, the justices asserted

neither the asserted fears of violence and tumult nor the asserted inability to preserve the peace was demonstrated at trial to be anything more than personal speculations or vague disquietudes of city officials.

They concluded "goodwill between the races in Memphis" would "best be preserved and extended by the observance and protection, not the denial, of the basic constitutional rights."

Memphis officials reacted swiftly to the Supreme Court's ruling. They announced on the day after the decision that the summer recreation program would continue as a segregated program until they received formal federal court orders compelling the facilities to be desegregated. When those orders arrived three days later, park officials ordered all Memphis recreational facilities to be desegregated, except for 17 parks on the grounds, or adjacent to, still segregated white schools and the city-owned swimming pools. The pools were immediately closed to the public. African-American leaders blasted the pool closings. "Much has been said and done lately to portray Memphis as an ideal city in its handling of racial problems," remarked Jesse Turner, president of the Memphis NAACP chapter. "The closing of our swimming pools to preclude integration or to bypass the decision of the United States Supreme Court does not present the image of a progressive city in this age when men everywhere are demanding freedom."(37)

City officials replied that the pools needed to be closed because they were losing money, but of course the real reason was that the image of blacks and whites being together in an enclosed space was repellant to whites throughout Memphis. Pools and schools would become the new battlegrounds for racial segregationists in Memphis, and those battles would continue for years. Not until 1966, for example, would officials consider an even limited integration of high school sports, where white teams would play black teams - mixed race teams were still in the future. But the Supreme Court decision in Watson v. City of Memphis eliminated the possibility that recreational programs and entertainment events at the new coliseum would somehow be divided into segregated audiences. For the last year of construction and planning for the Mid-South Coliseum, the coliseum board knew that the facility, the modern centerpiece of the fairgrounds, would be an integrated space—a cultural common ground—within a still largely segregated city.

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Once it opened, it became more than a municipal arena; it became a public arena where the popular music of the era merged together audiences of white and black Memphians as they had rarely been mixed before.

## Endnotes

1. Vandeburg-Linkletter Associates, "Master Development Plan: Mid-South Fair & Exposition, Memphis, Tennessee, 1960-1970," (New York: Vandeburg-Linkletter, 1960), 28.
2. Ibid., 43-44, 48.
3. Bill Barlow, "WDIA," William Ferris and Charles R. Wilson, eds., *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 977; Anne-Leslie Owens, "WDIA," Carroll Van West and Connie L. Lester, eds., *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998), 1041-1042.
4. Various articles, photographs, and reviews in Memphis *Commercial Appeal* and Memphis *Press-Scimitar*, November 30, 1964; "12,000 Expected At Coliseum for 'Revue,'" Memphis *Tri-State Defender*, November 23, 1964. The *Tri-State Defender* did not cover the concert scene as did the two major white Memphis newspapers. It occasionally ran press release-like stories on the WDIA revues, and accepted advertisements for the concerts. But it does not provide critical reviews of the concerts.
5. Bill E. Burk, "Elvis-Type Reaction Greets Singers," Memphis *Press-Scimitar*, December 14, 1964.
6. Peter Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music: Rhythm and Blues and the Southern Dream of Freedom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 110-131; Rob Bowman, *Soulsville U.S.A.: The Story of Stax Records* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997); Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness and Race Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
7. "Dee Clark Joins WDIA Program," Memphis *Press-Scimitar*, July 2, 1965.

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8. "Sam to Head 'Fall Preview,'" Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, August 7, 1965; Bill E. Burk, "Kingsmen's Antics 'Rock' Teen-agers," Memphis *Press-Scimitar*, September 1, 1965; Bill E. Burk, "Seven Gold Records—It's the Supremes," *ibid.*, November 4, 1965; James Kingsley, "Rolling Stones Draw Response From Big Crowd," Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, November 18, 1965; "Biggest Crowd for the Coliseum," Memphis *Press-Scimitar*, November 29, 1965; Larry Williams, "Everything Is Five By Five As Dave Clark Rocks 'Press,'" Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, December 10, 1965.
9. For a mere sampling of the literature from music and cultural historians, see Robert G. Pielke, *You Say You Want A Revolution: Rock Music in American Culture* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1987); Robert Pattison, *The Triumph of Vulgarity: Rock Music in the Mirror of Romanticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Martha Bayless, *Hole in Our Soul: The Loss of Beauty and Meaning in American Popular Music* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*. Again, the *Tri-State Defender* did not publish concert reviews or commentary, thus there is no comparable evidence from African-American journalists.
10. Clark Porteous, "Amateurs' Spoof Mack," Memphis *Press-Scimitar*, September 30, 1965; Elinor Kelley, "Ernie's Music, Humor Fill Coliseum," Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, October 1, 1965 (But only 2,000 attended the reviewed concert, despite the title of the article).
11. Larry Williams, "Can 11,500 Teenagers Be Wrong?" Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, August 4, 1965.
12. Connie Richards, "The Decibels Ring If They're Good," Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, December 15, 1965; Godfrey Hodgson, *America In Our Time: From World War II to Nixon, What Happened and Why* (New York: Random House, 1976), 352.
13. Richards, "The Decibels Ring."
14. The controversy is summarized, with audio clips on the Memphis events by John Lennon, in "The Dark Side of Beatlemania" at The Long and Winding Road website: <http://www.fortunecity.com/tinpan/ash/618/apology>. Also see Ray Coleman, *Lennon: The Definitive Biography* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), 312-314; Albert Goldman, *The Lives of John Lennon* (New York: William Morrow, 1988), 205-206; Mark Lewisohn, *The Complete Beatles Chronicles* (New York: Harmony, 1992), 212-213.
15. "Beatle's Blast At Christianity Starts Backfire," Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, August 3, 1966; "Mid-South Temper Rises From Burn-Beatle Craze," Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, August 4, 1966; Lydel Sims, "Rock of America's Sages Lets Personal Beliefs Roll," *ibid.*, August 6, 1966.

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16. Don Tate, "Squash Beatles? Not Here—Show Will Go On," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, August 6, 1966; Jonathan Wax, "Foot in Moptop's Mouth Is Hot One," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, August 6, 1966; "Sisson Favors Beatle Ban, But Lane Has Legal Doubts," *ibid.*, August 9, 1966.
  17. James Kingsley, "Beatles to Get Christian Opposition," *ibid.*, August 11, 1966.
  18. "Mayor Expects The Beatles To Keep 'No Offense' Pledge," *ibid.*, August 14, 1966; "Plans Progress on Youth Rally; Beatles Invited," *ibid.*, August 17, 1966; "Teen-Agers Break Through Beatles' Police Cordon," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, August 19, 1966.
  19. Thomas BeVier, "Show By The Beatles Is A Scream," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, August 20, 1966. The Beatles had earlier, on August 15, encountered three protesting KKK members from Prince George County, Virginia, at a Washington D.C. concert. "Beatles Sneak In For Half-Hour Show," *Washington Post*, August 16, 1966. Barry Tashian, *Ticket To Ride: the Extraordinary Diary of The Beatles' Last Tour* (Nashville: Dowling Press, 1997), 65.
  20. Dale Enoch, "Rally Provides 8,000 Answers To Beatle Cries," *ibid.*
  21. William Norton, "Beatles Ask 'High Priest' For A Few Words of Grace," *ibid.*
  22. "Bang Joins Shrieks In Beatle Show" and "Girl Tells Police She Tossed Cherry Bomb," *ibid.* Edwin Howard, "Din of Iniquity Some Thrills More Than 20,000," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, August 20, 1966.
  23. "Beatle Steam Valve" and "Rock And Roll Downbeat Causing Cash Register Upbeat," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, August 21, 1966;
  24. Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music*, 310; Bowman, *Soulsville, U.S.A.*, 117-121.
  25. Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music*, 315; Bowman, *Soulsville, U.S.A.*, 123-124.
  26. Bowman, *Soulsville U.S.A.*, 132-135; Various clippings in Mid-South Coliseum Scrapbook, 1968-1974.
  27. Bayless, *Hole in our Soul*, 247.

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28. Errol Nazareth, "Rob Bowman talks about Stax Records," *Toronto Sun*, February 16, 1998. [www.acmi.canoe.ca/Jam ColumnNazareth/feb 16\\_stax](http://www.acmi.canoe.ca/Jam ColumnNazareth/feb 16_stax)
29. Bowman, *Soulsville U.S.A.*, 386.
30. Anne Trotter, "The Memphis Business Community and Integration," Elizabeth Jacoway and David R. Colburn, eds., *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 198\_), 286. Lester C. Lamon, *Black Tennesseans, 1900-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 256-257; Marie G. Wingfield, "The Memphis Interracial Commission," *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 21(1967), 93-100.
31. "Surprise Speakers at Glenview Rally," *ibid.*, July 7, 1958.
32. Roger Biles, "Epitaph for Downtown: the Failure of City Planning in Post-World War Two Memphis," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 44(Fall 1995): 267-283; David M. Tucker, *Memphis Since Crump: Bossism, Blacks, and Civic Reformers, 1948-1968* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980).
33. Tucker, *Memphis Since Crump*; Trotter, "Memphis Business Community and Integration," 286.
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35. "Negroes Lose Appeal for Speed-Up" and "Delighted, Says Park Supt.," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, June 12, 1962; "Court Approval of Parks Plan To Be Appealed," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, June 13, 1962.
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37. "Negroes Attack Pool Decision," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, May 31, 1966; also see various articles on the Supreme Court decision in *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, May 28 through 31, 1963.

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### **VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION AND JUSTIFICATION**

The boundary for the Mid-South Coliseum is delineated on the accompanying plat map (scale 1' = 200'). It includes the building, sidewalks, lighting and surrounding parking areas that were designed for the coliseum. This is the acreage determined by the city of Memphis and Shelby County to be the Mid-South Coliseum grounds. Other fair buildings, Southern Avenue and the railroad property surround the nominated property.

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### PHOTOGRAPHS

Photos by: C. Van West (1-5) and Claudette Stager (6-15 & 27-33) and Steve Rogers (16-26)  
Date: February 2000 and August 2000  
Neg: Tennessee Historical Commission

West façade, facing east  
#1 of 33

East elevation, facing west  
#2 of 33

Southeast elevation, facing north  
#3 of 33

Northeast elevation, facing south  
#4 of 33

South elevation, facing north  
#5 of 33

Detail of west façade entrance  
#6 of 33

Detail of south elevation entrance  
#7 of 33

Detail of north elevation entrance  
#8 of 33

Detail of east elevation  
#9 of 33

Detail of streetlight and entrance  
#10 of 33

South lobby, facing  
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South lobby, facing west  
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South lobby, facing north  
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South lobby, facing west  
#14 of 33

South lobby, facing west  
#15 of 33

Entrance to arena, facing east  
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Entrance to arena, facing east  
#17 of 33

Arena, facing east  
#18 of 33

Arena, facing east  
#19 of 33

Arena, facing northeast  
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Arena, facing northeast  
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Arena, facing northerly  
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Arena, facing north  
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Arena seating detail  
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Arena seating detail  
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Arena seating detail  
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Baffles in seating area  
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Air handling system vents  
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Typical main floor meeting room  
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Typical dressing room  
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Electrical room in lower level  
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Mechanical and air handling system space  
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Structure at lower level  
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Mid-South Coliseum  
Shelby County, Tennessee

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Shelby County (40%) and the city of Memphis (60%) own the Mid-South Coliseum.

W.W. Herenton  
Mayor, City of Memphis  
125 Main Street  
Memphis, TN 38103

Jim Rout  
County Mayor, Shelby County  
160 Mid-America Mall  
Room 850  
Memphis, TN 38103

MID-SOUTH COLISEUM  
SHELBY COUNTY, TN  
1" = 200'

886-245

1240  
COUNTY OF SHELBY  
1302

852.38

949.74

SOUTH

PARKWAY

3132.98

CITY OF MEMPHIS

565-162

FAIRGROUNDS &  
FAIR BUILDINGS

1500

1360.2

EAST

Boundary

175.  
CITY OF MEMPHI  
E4-880

299

347

PARKING

MID-SOUTH  
COLISEUM

ILLINOIS  
CENTRAL  
RAIL

1090.80

SOUTHERN AVENUE

SOUTHERN

RAILWAY