



# Blues Empress in Black Chattanooga: Bessie Smith and the Emerging Urban South

*Michelle R. Scott*

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As one of the first African American vocalists to be recorded, Bessie Smith is a prominent figure in American popular culture and African American history. Michelle R. Scott uses Smith's life as a lens to investigate broad issues in history, including industrialization, Southern rural to urban migration, black community development in the post-emancipation era, and black working-class gender conventions. Focusing her analysis on Chattanooga, Tennessee, the large industrial and transportation center where Smith was born, Scott explores how the expansion of the Southern railroads and the development of iron foundries, steel mills, and sawmills created vast employment opportunities in the postbellum era, contributing to Chattanooga's African American community and an emergent blues culture.

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