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FAITH WITHOUT HOPE:
BLACK PROTESTANTS, CHICAGO, AND THE CRITIQUE OF PROGRESS, 1914-1968

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Painting Redemptive Black Labor: Art, Ethiopianism, The Great Migration, and the Political-Theological Problem of Analogy.....	29
Chapter Two: In the Whirlwind: Divine Violence, Foreign Missions, and Black Chicago Protestants' Exilic Internationalism.....	90
Chapter Three: Minstrelsy and Messianic Justice: The Transfigurations of the Dungill Family Orchestra.....	159
Chapter Four: "He's Been My Mother": The Mothering of Redemption in Black Chicago Gospel Music.....	210
Chapter Five: The Wretched and the Damned: Gospel Music between Civil Rights and Urban Crisis.....	270
Chapter Six: The Location of Charisma: The Chicago Freedom Movement, Urban Renewal, and Black Religious Space.....	334
Conclusion.....	400
Bibliography.....	402

ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes how black Protestants in mid-twentieth century Chicago developed notions of spiritual redemption that critiqued the tendency to portray the black freedom struggle as a movement from slavery to freedom analogous to the biblical Exodus. As African Americans entered Chicago from the Jim Crow South during the Great Migration, the persistence of antiblackness in Chicago sapped the hope that the city would be a Promised Land of equality and prosperity. However, black Chicago Protestants believed they could still thrive within oppressed urban neighborhoods if they kept faith in Jesus Christ's redemption. During the first decades of the Great Migration, painter William Edouard Scott epitomized how black Chicago Protestants developed a conception of redemptive black labor as oriented by rest rather than movement by identifying theologically with the labor of biblical and apocryphal Ethiopian disciples. This Ethiopianism inspired messianic and apocalyptic critiques of how the Exodus analogy framed the labor ideologies of Booker T. Washington's followers, the black Popular Front Left, and what historians often call the long civil rights movement. Black Chicago Protestants' visions of apocalyptic divine violence and conceptualizations of foreign missions during the Italo-Ethiopian War, World War II, decolonization, and the Cold War problematized attempts to align African American internationalism with U.S. foreign policy. In their gospel music, black Chicago Protestants' understanding of Jesus as a mother for the motherless evinced an alternative to prophetic religion's melding of biblical invocations of social justice as justice bestowed upon the fatherless and the widow with sociological theories of the social disorganization of the black family. As racial inequality deepened into an urban crisis, gospel music's mothering of redemption manifested a transgressive limning of the limits of civil rights religion's emphasis on overcoming, rapprochement with liberal public policy, and normative gender and sexual politics. By the 1960s, this faith motivated black Protestants in Chicago to resist the plan of the municipal

government to clear black church space for urban renewal, and to challenge the approach to housing desegregation undertaken by the Chicago Freedom Movement led by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The dissertation contributes to African American religious history by demonstrating that in the mid-twentieth century, black messianic, apocalyptic, and evangelical notions of redemption through Christ inspired radical critiques of prophetic religion and the social gospel, rather than only conservative or escapist alternatives to them. The dissertation draws conceptually from black theology, womanist theology, recent debates in black studies over questions of black being and black non-being, messianism and apocalypticism in Jewish thought, and the theological turn in continental philosophy. It uses methods from cultural history, social history, and urban history to interpret paintings, sermons, gospel music, church ephemera, newspapers, municipal archives, and the records of ordinary worshippers.

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INTRODUCTION

Critics generally argue that Afro-Protestantism's principal contribution to African American politics has been its nurturing a hope in progress toward liberation and racial equality. This hope has most often been expressed in the terms of the Exodus, the movement of the biblical Hebrews from slavery to freedom. As the Great Migration gathered steam during World War I, the *Chicago Defender*, Black Chicago's flagship newspaper, portrayed the migration as "The Exodus" in order to further encourage the tendency for African Americans to view the South Side of Chicago in religious terms as the "promised land" for black Southerners escaping the "Egyptland" of the Jim Crow South.¹

However, in 1939, a generation after its initial excitement, the *Defender* ran a series of articles attempting to answer the question, "Is the South Side Doomed?"² The paper explained that by doomed, "it is of course clear, we meant, will those black men and women who have sunk their roots in the soil of the South Side have those roots plowed under?"³ The paper recapitulated the articles' findings on the debilitating effects of racial discrimination in spheres such as housing, bank lending, employment, and health care that migrants encountered upon reaching Chicago. Still, it concluded that "No, the South Side is not doomed," in part because "To say that we are doomed is to admit that the community is beyond redemption."⁴ But readers were divided. In a roundtable of five letters on the question that the paper published, two

¹ James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 79-90; Wallace D. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 19, 23-24; Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 154-156.

²"Is the South Side Doomed?" *Chicago Defender* Oct 21, 1939:14; Ella Dawson, "What the People Say: Christian Home," *Chicago Defender*, Aug 12, 1939:14.

³ "Is the South Side Doomed?"

⁴ *Ibid.*

affirmed that it was doomed, two answered firmly in the negative, and one respondent offered that he “wouldn’t exactly say the South Side is doomed.”⁵ In a letter titled “South Side Near Doom” published in a different edition of the paper, a reader warned, “I will not say that it is doomed now, but it is fast approaching its doom.”⁶

Yet while the *Defender*’s own answer to the question equated “doomed” with “beyond redemption,” a letter by a Mrs. Fannie White that the paper published with the title “South Side Is Doomed” on December 30th, 1939, indicated that doom and redemption could co-exist.⁷ Thereby, it indicated that redemption in the South Side was not the same as the liberation of the South Side. White stated that “In regard to the condition of the South Side and all sides of Chicago, I must say that [all sides are] decidedly doomed so long as the powers that be will be bought over by the forces which degrade and debauch our people.”⁸ She observed that “The churches and the social agencies are at a loss to grapple with these conditions. If any force is to be used to remedy these things, it is to be found in religion and social service. Just now the forces of evil are so strong that they seem to overpower the forces of righteousness. But,” despite the inability of socially-active religion to save the South Side from doom, “God is still on the throne...and as sure as the sun rises and sets retribution will come some time.”⁹ Thus, it was important that “all valiant-hearted men and women” faithful in God “labor and pray for a better day and by their lives show others that the world can be made a better place to live in.”¹⁰

⁵ “Quizzing the Crowd: The Question,” *Chicago Defender*, Nov. 4, 1939: 15.

⁶ Eula Mae Taylor, “South Side Near Doom,” *Chicago Defender*, Oct. 28, 1939:14.

⁷ Fannie White, “South Side is Doomed,” *Chicago Defender*, Dec. 30, 1939: 12.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

In its frank dismissal of hope in social action and acceptance of the South Side being doomed, but its insistence that redemption could yet be lived within the South Side because God “still” reigned, Fannie White’s letter was part of a heterogeneous effusion of black Protestant faith, theology, and cultural production in Chicago best described as “messianism.” Black Chicago messianism stemmed from the faith that Jesus Christ’s redemption of the whole world gave every person the potential for eternal salvation. This faith anchored a pivot away from the Exodus framework of the Afro-Protestantism of the First Great Migration (roughly World War I through the 1920s), a framework in which Afro-Protestant theological concepts were harnessed to express the hope in a move toward earthly liberation. As the Great Depression, the rise of fascism, and most protractedly the mounting mid-twentieth century urban crisis made it seem to many Black Chicagoans that their city could not move toward liberation and racial equality, the goal of liberationist movement decoupled from the final goal of the eternal salvation of the soul—i.e., from the eschatological goal. Unlike the Exodus conception of liberation, salvation was not a goal in the distant future to be progressed toward. Rather, to those who believed that Jesus had redeemed the world, salvation could occur at any time and place, including in a “doomed” city.

In African American history, the hope in liberation has been a manifestation of what Calvin Warren calls “political hope,” defined as the investing of “spiritual currency” into a political project.¹¹ Canonical scholarship in the field of African American religious history has argued that the Exodus concept has been the spiritual currency most invested in the political project of moving toward black liberation. Towering scholar of African American religion Albert

¹¹ Calvin Warren, “Black Nihilism and the Politics of Hope,” 8.
<https://illwilleditions.noblogs.org/files/2015/09/Warren-Black-Nihilism-the-Politics-of-Hope-READ.pdf>.

Raboteau writes that for the antebellum slaves, “The Exodus, the Promised Land, and Canaan were inextricably linked in their minds with the idea of freedom. Canaan referred not only to the condition of freedom but also to the territory of freedom, the North or Canada.”¹² Classic cultural histories by Raboteau and Lawrence Levine convey the depth of this notion of Exodus in slave culture, particularly in the Negro spirituals.¹³ Eddie Glaude shows that at the same time, Northern free blacks used the story of Moses and the Hebrews to create an “Exodus politics” designed to free the slaves and achieve racial equality North and South by reforming the extant U.S. government and society.¹⁴ Linking such a politics to a general Afro-Christian hope in worldly progress, in their seminal textbook on African American churches C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya note that “Throughout black history the term ‘freedom’ has found a deep religious resonance in the lives and hopes of African Americans...During slavery it meant release from bondage; after emancipation it meant the right to be educated, to be employed, and to move about freely from place to place. In the twentieth century freedom means social, political, and economic justice.”¹⁵ For Curtis Evans, the idea that there is a peculiarly religious resonance to black freedom has long placed a “burden” on African American Christianity to act as a singular “Negro church” charged with bringing that freedom to fruition.¹⁶

¹² Albert J. Raboteau, “African Americans, Exodus, and the American Israel,” in *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African-American Religious History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 17-36:34.

¹³ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004 [1978]), 247, 251, 319-320; Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007 [1977]), 23, 33, 43, 50-51.

¹⁴ Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

¹⁵ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 4.

¹⁶ Curtis J. Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Albert Raboteau’s statement that seventeenth century Massachusetts Bay colony governor John “Winthrop’s version of Exodus and [Rev. Martin Luther] King’s were not far apart” highlights the normatively Americanist implications an emphasis on Exodus could convey—a normativity analyzed in particular by Glaude.¹⁷ Thus, to underscore the oppositionality of black visions of freedom, recent studies stress that Afro-Protestant deployments of hope and Exodus have worked against the Winthropian, Exodus-inspired notion of teleological progress so central to the United States’ sense of exceptional national destiny.¹⁸ However, scholarly attempts to radicalize hope by rooting hope in tragic narratives of loss and violence, or by distinguishing hope from the “mere optimism” that stems from confidence in the ability to achieve a goal, nevertheless still depend on the political potential of movement toward another time and/or space.¹⁹ By contrast, in a city seemingly incapable of moving toward liberation—a city in which moving toward liberation seemed to actually re-inscribe or rearrange unfreedom—Black Chicago Protestantism indicated that having faith in redemption without hope in the movement toward liberation was the best way for post-migration Afro-Protestants to live fulfilling lives—and afterlives. This dissertation elucidates this faith’s critique of the black

¹⁷ Raboteau, “African Americans, Exodus, and the American Israel,” 36. Raboteau’s claim, however, is questionable in the sense that King’s democratic socialism, which deepened toward the end of his life but was already germinal by the early 1950s, is difficult to reconcile with Winthrop’s embrace of divinely-ordained socioeconomic and political stratification: see John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity.”

¹⁸ Stephen H. Marshall, *The City on the Hill from Below: The Crisis of Black Prophetic Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012); David L. Chappelle, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

¹⁹ Joseph R. Winters, *Hope Draped in Black: Race, Melancholy, and the Agony of Progress* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016); A. Elaine Brown Crawford, *Hope in the Holler: A Womanist Theology* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002); Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 113-117; Jose Estaban Munoz, *Cruisin’ Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009). These works tend to elaborate the arguments of earlier classic theologies- or theologically-redolent studies of hope: see Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope: Volume One*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1986 [1959]); Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. Sister Caridad Ita and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988 [1973]), 123-125.

liberation struggle's politics of hope as the critique developed during the emergence of the urban crisis, from the Great Depression through the mid-1960s Chicago Freedom Movement.

Understanding Black Chicago as a site of redemption rather than liberation necessitates locating it at the nexus of the inextricable connection between the city, both as theoretical concept and historical development, and religious notions of power and redemption. From its outset, the history of cities was dominated by the connection and conflict between the strive for material progress and power, and the practice of devotion to the sacred. Drawing on Mircea Eliade's *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, Lewis Mumford's *The City in History*, Robert McCormick Adams' *The Evolution of Urban Society*, and Paul Wheatley's *The Pivot of Four Quarters*, history of religions scholar Charles Long has shown that canonical work in the history of religions and in urban studies posits that in human history, cities began as sacred ceremonial centers that accumulated power.²⁰ Long argues that the construction of temples and other structures proclaimed to the surrounding rural areas these centers' special connection to what Rudolf Otto, in his pioneering phenomenological study of religion, called the *mysterium tremendum*: "the oppressive sense evoked by the power and majesty of the divine."²¹ Thus, "the discernment of the sacred in the ceremonial center is a recognition of a surplus of power...and from this place power may be allocated."²² Consonant with Long's thinking, urban planning scholar Kevin Lynch argued that as particularly impressive ceremonial centers attract pilgrims and gifts, their leaders are able to build architectural structures and develop rituals to further increase their appeal.²³ Power develops from this process: elite classes rise to manage the

²⁰ Charles H. Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Aurora, CO: The Davis Group Publishers, 1999 [1986]), 78-79.

²¹ This definition is Long's: see *ibid*, 176; see also Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 13.

²² Long, *Significations*, 79.

²³ Kevin Lynch, *Good City Form* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), 8.

increasingly complex affairs of the center, while voluntary gift-giving from the awed rural population in the surrounds is marshaled into compulsory tribute.²⁴ The city becomes, Lynch states, “storehouse, fortress, workshop, market, and palace. First, however, it is a holy place.”²⁵

For Charles Long, this “imperialistic principle” of the power of the sacred center and the submission of the worshipful periphery “inherent in even the earliest citted traditions” gave rise to an interpretive binary: on the one hand, the civilized, rational, and historically dynamic West; and on the other hand, the primitive, irrational, and ahistorical “others.”²⁶ Deploying this imperialistic principle, white Americans attempted to use Christianity to instill obedience in the black slaves of the antebellum South.²⁷ However, Long notes, black slaves ultimately did not identify the true *mysterium tremendum* with “the sociological situation or the oppression of slavery itself,” i.e., with white supremacy; rather, the *mysterium tremendum* was the “manner in which these human beings recognize their creatureliness and their humanity, shall we say, before God.”²⁸ Linking W.E.B. Du Bois’ immersion in rural Southern black religion to his seminal formulation of double consciousness, Long concludes that the “eschatological dimensions of the religions of the oppressed”—their concern with humanity’s ultimate relation to the divine—“stem from” a double understanding of the *mysterium tremendum* as both the veil of white supremacy and the authentic experience of the divine obscured by that veil.²⁹ Thus, eschatologically speaking, “[t]he oppressive element in the religions of the oppressed is the negation of the image of the oppressor and the discovery of the first creation”—i.e., the

²⁴ Ibid, 8-9.

²⁵ Ibid, 9.

²⁶ Long, *Significations*, 81, 86.

²⁷ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*.

²⁸ Long, *Significations*, 178.

²⁹ Ibid, 184.

discovery of the *mysterium tremendum* underlying citted traditions of power.³⁰ Black Chicagoans were heirs to this tradition of finding the overwhelming majesty of God beneath the overwhelming might of citted white supremacy.

Long's narration of the historical relationship between religion and urban power parallels modern Protestant theology's analysis of the New Testament's discussion of "the powers." This modern discourse stems from Apostle Paul's biblical references to the "principalities and powers," such as in Ephesians 6:12: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Such language appears throughout the New Testament in various forms. Christian theology has often interpreted the principalities and powers rhetoric as concerning metaphysical entities such as spirits and demons, and therefore emblematic of an early Christian worldview that is irrelevant to modern Christians' engagement with worldly problems.³¹ Recent scholars of the powers have located the turn to this interpretation in the fourth century, when Christianity, having risen to the status of official religion of the Roman Empire, had to be reconciled with worldly power. Thus, theologian John Howard Yoder stated, "when in the fourth century Christians found themselves in positions of social responsibility, so the argument continues, they had to go for their ethical insight to other sources than Jesus" (and his early followers).³²

Most influential in this pivot away from the early Christian worldview was Bishop Augustine of Hippo. In *City of God*, Augustine indicated that believers could not seek "peace" in

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Gordon Rupp, *Principalities and Powers: Studies in the Christian Conflict in History* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952), 14-16.

³² John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994 [1972]), 135.

the unholy, temporal “earthly city” by imitating the perfect example of Jesus: earthly peace meant finding “a solace for our wretchedness rather than the joy of blessedness,” and righteousness meant the “forgiveness of sins rather than” the “perfection of virtues.”³³ Thus, in the Christian rapprochement with the world of Roman power, the best peace that could be hoped for in the earthly city was imperfect, even tragic, as opposed to the perfect peace awaiting in the eternal city of God in the heavens. Reinhold Niebuhr and other mid-twentieth century “Christian realist” religious thinkers looked to Augustine to ground a theologically justified militant response to the Cold War, which included legitimating U.S. inheritance of European imperialism as a necessary evil to stop the spread of communism.³⁴ The Christian leveraging of the power of the earthly city to maintain an imperfect peace thereby corresponds with the notion of sacred centers undergirding citted concentrations of imperial power.

Writing against Niebuhrian Christian realism, theologians of the “principalities and powers” language in the New Testament argue that rather than only referring to the metaphysical, and thereby being irrelevant to matters of worldly power, “the powers” are manifest in the various systems and social structures that order human life—some scholars have even suggested that the New Testament anticipates Foucault’s account of the discursive flows of

³³ Saint Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 19.14, 19.27. For a useful comparison of Augustine’s and Yoder’s echoes of the prophet Jeremiah’s decree to Jewish captives of Babylon to “seek the peace of the earthly city” (Jeremiah 29:7), see Gerald W. Schlabach, “The Christian Witness to the Earthly City: John Howard Yoder as Augustinian Interlocutor,” Paper presented at conference on “Assessing the Theological Legacy of John Howard Yoder,” University of Notre Dame, 7-9 March 2002. <http://geraldschlabach.net/documents/yoderandaugustine.pdf>, accessed 11.2.2014.

³⁴ For a critical account of the theology and politics of Niebuhr the Cold Warrior, see Jason W. Stevens, *God-Fearing and Free: A Spiritual History of America’s Cold War* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 3, 32, 62-63; see also Andrew S. Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich in an Age of Anxiety* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

power in this regard.³⁵ For theologians of the principalities and powers, the powers were originally part of, in Yoder's words, "the good creation of God"; they were essential to God's order for humankind.³⁶ However, "the powers are fallen"; they are in rebellion against God because they have "absolutized themselves and they demand from the individual and society an unconditioned loyalty."³⁷ Yet although even fallen powers perform some necessary ordering functions for society, one does not have to make a tragic, Augustinian rapprochement with them. Rather, "the powers can be redeemed," because in the redemptive, messianic event—Jesus' crucifixion at the hands of the fallen powers in Jerusalem, the Jewish holy city then functioning as the seat of Roman imperial power in the region—Jesus unmasked the moral and political bankruptcy of the fallen powers for all to see.³⁸ This aligns with Charles Long's notion of black slaves uncovering the authentic experience of the divine obscured and coopted by citted traditions of power.

Yet Chicago presents a distinctive challenge to modern Protestant theology's conception of redeemable powers. Soon after Chicago's incorporation as a city in 1837, modern capitalism turned the budding trading outpost into an industrial metropolis seemingly without the steady development from sacred centers that had characterized Old World cities, or even the cities in the

³⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2000), 36; David Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo: Theological Reflections on Nihilism, Tragedy, and Apocalypse* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998).

³⁶ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 143.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 145-146. For scholarship largely concurring with or developing Yoder's account of the principalities and powers summarized above, see Rupp, *Principalities and Powers*; Hendrik Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, trans. John Howard Yoder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1977); Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); *idem*, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); *idem*, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992); Ray Gingerich and Ted Grimsurd, eds., *Transforming the Powers: Peace, Justice, and the Domination System* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006); and Scott Thomas Prather, *Christ, Power, and Mammon: Karl Barth and John Howard Yoder in Dialogue* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2013).

eastern United States that religious dissenters nurtured and that had grown up with the Great Awakenings. Some early observers thought that God had perfectly positioned Chicago for economic prosperity as the commercial hub connecting the Eastern states, the Great Lakes and the Great West.³⁹ But, as portraits of the city such as William T. Stead's 1894 muckraking epic *If Christ Came to Chicago*, Theodore Dreiser's 1900 novel *Sister Carrie*, and Fred Fisher's 1922 song "Chicago (That Toddlin' Town)" conveyed, Chicago generally augured the ascendance of secularizing forces: large corporations, financial risk, byzantine bureaucracies, the "cheap amusements" of mass culture, and the thrills and perils of urban violence and vice.⁴⁰

By the time E. Franklin Frazier described Chicago as a quintessential "city of destruction" for black migrants in 1932, it appeared that black people in Chicago were in the most oppressed and depressed community of a city not so much fallen, as always already uniquely removed from the *mysterium tremendum*, from the sense of Christ's messianic redemption. In a 1940 report on the black plight in Chicago, the mystical theologian Howard Thurman, who would become a key influence on the theology that would animate the Southern civil rights movement, concluded, "[t]he Negro in the Northern city is not a citizen and his *position* is a perpetual threat and constant disgrace to democracy."⁴¹ [Italics mine] Thurman, a mentee and Howard University colleague of Frazier's, emphasized in a prophetic sense how

³⁹ William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), 12-13.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 17, 35; William T. Stead, *If Christ Came to Chicago* (New York: Living Books, Inc., 1964 [1894]), 8; Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, ed. Donald Pizer (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006 [1900]), 1, 12; Fred Fisher, "Chicago (That Toddlin' Town)," 1922. For these developments more generally, see Jonathan Levy, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Harvard University Press, 2012), 4-5; Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 53-54, 74; Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian Britain* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁴¹ Howard Thurman, "A 'Native Son' Speaks," *The Papers of Howard Thurman, Vol. 2*, ed. Walter Earl Fluker (Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press), 248.

Black Chicagoans' political, socioeconomic, and juridical degradation evinced their distance from citizenship—a “position” evident in maps and graphs charting rates of residential segregation, or dilapidated housing, or unemployment, or woman-headed households.

However, as Black Chicago became unmoored from the Exodus narrative that had first fired the Great Migration, Chicago Afro-Protestants' understanding of the relationship between citizenship and redemption departed from the way that national black leaders measured citizenship. For example, in 1934 or '35, Rev. A. Wayman Ward, pastor of Black Chicago's Bethel A.M.E. Church, delivered an address on the “struggling Negro” anticipating Thurman's account of the city.⁴² Nevertheless, he added, “A finer knowledge of the Negro would be to know him in his ideals. His greatest ambition is to be worthy of citizenship—world citizenship and citizenship in the coming Kingdom of God.” Foreshadowing Fannie White, Ward suggested that citizenship as an eschatological category—as a reflection of the Negro's ultimate relation to God—did not correlate with the Negro's lack of standing in a municipality or nation-state, but could correspond with how the Negro engaged the “world.” Conceptions of worldliness remained, but were diverging from notions of local black progress in the city.

Thus instead of emphasizing progress from urban degradation, Black Chicago Protestantism stressed that Christians were called to, in White's words, “labor and pray” in degradation. Decades before its flourishing in modern academic theology, the *Chicago Defender* disseminated the discourse on the principalities and powers in a manner that showed how Black Chicago became a node of a messianic turn in Afro-Protestant theology. The white American press tended to allude to biblical evocations of the principalities and powers in matter-of-fact,

⁴² A. Wayman Ward address excerpted in Reverdy C. Ransom, *The Negro: The Hope or the Despair of Christianity* (Boston, MA: Ruth Hill, 1935), 44.

secular, and/or politically conservative terms, particularly in relation to Chicago.⁴³ By contrast, after having never used the phrase before the 1930s, in 1931 the *Defender* remembered Frederick Douglass on his birthday (February 12) by stating that he “fought God’s battles against principalities and powers,” an assessment based on an 1895 *Evening Star* obituary that the *Defender* had republished the previous February, in the edition heralding Negro History Week.⁴⁴ The paper drew from the *Evening Star*’s remembrance of Douglass fighting the powers at the dawn of Jim Crow’s reign as a new, socioeconomic nadir deepened. Demonstrating the Pauline, apostolic valence of anticolonial world citizenship, in late 1935, the *Defender* indicted the “imperial dictates of plunderous principalities and powers” as it decried Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia while praising Black Chicago Congressman Oscar DePriest’s work on ending U.S. colonialism in the Philippines.⁴⁵ Earlier that summer, the paper ran a report on a black college student panel discussion of Christianity held in Wichita, Kansas. The report included the panel’s closing “challenge” that, quoting the aforementioned Ephesians 6:12, “the fight is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, therefore, the new world will not be a change of materials or geography”—not a movement from slavery to freedom, or even from dispossession to prosperity—“but a new approach, new slants, new ideas, new ideals, and new understanding.”⁴⁶

⁴³ “Asks Swarthmore to Defend ‘Brains’: G.E. Vincent Tells Phi Beta Kappa Distrust of Professors is as Old as the Frontier,” *New York Times*, Jun. 4, 1934, p.11; “Forget Politics, Seek Principles, President Told: Rockford Pastor Replies to Letter,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Sep. 29, 1935, p.9.

⁴⁴ “Douglass—A Consistent Man,” *Chicago Defender*, Feb. 14, 1931, p.2; “When Douglass Died: At Douglass’ Bier Thousands Throng to Gaze at the Dead Face [Reprinted from the Washington (D.C.) Evening Star of Feb. 25, 1895],” *Chicago Defender*, Feb. 8, 1930, p. 12.

⁴⁵ “Black America Rejoices with Filipinos: California Group Hears Member of the Race,” *Chicago Defender*, Nov. 23, 1935, p.3.

⁴⁶ “Students Discuss Prejudice,” *Chicago Defender*, Jun. 15, 1935, p.11.

The *Chicago Defender's* religious editor in the mid-1930s, Rev. R.C. Keller, was an assistant minister at Pilgrim Baptist Church, and the paper's promotion of the importance of theological-spiritual-intellectual disposition over material or geographic change concurred with Pilgrim's outlook. Under the leadership of Rev. Junius Caesar (J.C.) Austin, Pilgrim was one of the most influential black churches in Chicago and nationwide. It played a central role in many of the developments discussed in this dissertation, from the 1930s rise of gospel music and debate over how to respond to the Italo-Ethiopian War, to the 1960s fight to maintain black religious space slated for urban renewal. In 1939, arguing against the interpretation of Christianity as primarily a democratic ethics or a social gospel, Pilgrim's booklet celebrating the 13th year of Austin's pastorate declared that "Christianity is not merely a set of ethical principles or social objectives. It is the revelation through Christ of spiritual power available for man's highest deeds. Any lesser Christianity than this is inadequate for our age and will leave men and women still groping for what they wistfully hope for from the church. The Christian message for our generation is not simpy [sic] that there is a way of life which all should follow—it is that there is power to enable men to follow it."⁴⁷ Contra Augustine and modern prophetic figures aligned with Howard Thurman, Black Chicago's messianism was faith that through the power of Jesus, the joy of blessedness could be lived in wretchedness, and black people could live redemption within a city that was perhaps socio-politically irredeemable.

Drawing from a variety of scholarly discourses to be discussed below, most importantly Walter Benjamin's exploration of the messianic, I specifically consider this post-migration religion "messianism" because of how Chicago Afro-Protestant faith in Jesus as redeeming

⁴⁷ "Our Christian Message: How Big Is It?" in J.C. Austin, *Pilgrim Baptist Church Achievement Celebration*, 1939. Charles L. Blockson Afro-American History Collection, Temple University.

Messiah functioned as a political critique. To apply the words of Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," the faith that "every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter"—that the Messiah could come in any time or space—constituted an alternative to the "concept of historical progress" endorsed by liberationist thinkers and social movements.⁴⁸ This faith was in keeping with the argument of other scholars of Jewish messianism that messianism has often manifested as a challenge to the oppressed people's leaders' normative, Exodus-oriented approaches to advancement, a challenge that arises at a particularly desperate time and/or among a particularly desperate segment of the oppressed community.⁴⁹

In recent decades, the "theological turn" in continental philosophy has rekindled interest in Walter Benjamin's discussion of the messianic.⁵⁰ Alongside this discourse, scholars of African American and Afro-diasporic history such as Susan Gillman, Alexander Weheliye, and David Scott have harnessed Benjaminian messianism to explore alternative histories and temporalities that marginalized black people have developed in the past.⁵¹ This dissertation builds on their line

⁴⁸ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 253-264: 264, 261, 260. See also Benjamin's close friend Gershom Scholem's statement that "the apocalyptic writers know of no progress in history leading to the redemption...there can be no preparation for the Messiah. He comes suddenly, unannounced, and precisely when he is least expected or when hope has long been abandoned." Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism: And Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995 [1971]), 11.

⁴⁹ John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 25; Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 11, 27-33; Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 117-124.

⁵⁰ For the notion of a "theological turn," see for instance Dominique Janicaud, Jean Francois Courtine, Jean-Louis Chretien, Michel Henry, Jean-Luc Marion, and Paul Ricoeur, *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000). Two catalysts for the theological turn's explorations of Benjamin's conception of the messianic have been Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994); and Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

⁵¹ Susan Gillman, *Blood Talk: American Race Melodrama and the Culture of the Occult* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014); Weheliye, *Phonographies*;

of inquiry in two ways: it harnesses the messianic paradigm for a sustained engagement with black religious history; and it views the messianism of twentieth century Jewish intellectuals such as Benjamin, Martin Buber, and Jacob Taubes as not only theoretically useful for studying black history, but as being in alignment with contemporaneous developments in Afro-Protestantism.

Recently, the theological turn in continental philosophy has been paralleled by what could be called the ontological turn in black studies, or in other words, an increasing focus on the relationship between blackness and the Heideggerian notion of “being in the world.”⁵² While this scholarship has only sparingly engaged religion directly, it is redolent of theological concerns and apocalyptic motifs, such as questions about the meaning of suffering and the beginning and end of the “world,” and has increasingly referenced Benjamin’s ideas about messianism and divine violence.⁵³ The ontological turn has drawn from the work of Frantz Fanon and Hortense Spillers to question whether blackness is commensurate with worldliness. This enables a transformation of scholarly approaches to black religion. If blackness can be considered as being

David Scott, *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014).

⁵² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper, 2008); Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010); Jared Sexton, “The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism,” *InTensions* 5 (Fall/Winter 2011); M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Fortress Press, 2010); J. Kameron Carter, “Paratheological Blackness,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2013) 112 (4): 589-611; Nahum Dimitri Chandler, *X-The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought* (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 2014); Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016); C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); David Marriott, *Whither Fanon? Studies in the Blackness of Being* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018); Fred Moten, *Black and Blur (consent not to be a single being)* (Duke University Press, 2017); Fred Moten, *Stolen Life (consent not to be a single being)* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018); Fred Moten, *The Universal Machine (consent not to be a single being)* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018); Calvin L. Warren, *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018); Joao H. Costa Vargas, *The Denial of Antiracism: Multiracial Redemption and Black Suffering* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

⁵³ Frank B. Wilderson III, “Afropessimism and the End of Redemption”; Fred Moten, *Stolen Life*; David Marriott, *Whither Fanon?*

in an antagonistic relationship with the world, then it is imperative to reinterpret forms of black Christianity that scholars have traditionally denigrated or dismissed as “otherworldly,” such as forms that have praised Christ as the redeemer of (or against) the world rather than consulted Jesus’ example as a prophet or revolutionary in the world. This dissertation argues that often, these ostensibly “otherworldly” forms have in fact been radical, in that they have challenged the understandings of the relationship between black people and the world at the root of much black progressive thought. Uncovering this radicalism demands approaching black Protestantism as a heterogeneous theological and intellectual tradition that developed its own complex ways of interpreting the world, rather than as a cultural tradition to be interpreted according to secular notions of progress.

Rather than simply a resignation to an apparently implacable white supremacy on earth, the emphasis on faith in Jesus’ redemption presented a critical alternative to the theory and praxis of black liberationist social, intellectual, and cultural movements such as the black social gospel, the New Negro Renaissance, the Black Popular Front, and the Civil Rights Movement. Indeed, messianic faith was a critique of the very tendency to equate achieving a fulfilling black livelihood with liberationist movement: with progressive social mobilization; modernization; escape; marroonage; fugitivity; flight; migration; recognition; racial uplift; overcoming; cultural, economic, and legal progress; and above all, with a march from a space and time of slavery to a space and time of freedom. Living the faith in Jesus’ redemption did not mean moving in the hope for liberation, but rather staying and worshipping where one was, how one was.

This emphasis on staying distinguished messiahs— primarily Jesus Christ, but also earthly figures who seemed to embody his redemptive message such as Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie I and Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.—from the conventional notion of black messiahs as

symbolic leaders of movements. For the Black Chicago Protestants under study, earthly figures such as Selassie or King were not messiahs simply because they were powerful, glorious, or compelling. Earthly figures could be messiahs in so far as they seemed to epitomize the meaning of Jesus' redemption of the world: that salvation was not a result of historical progress and thus could occur in the most desperate time and place. In relation to Black Chicago Protestantism, one could question whether "leader" is a useful descriptor for such figures, in their capacity as messiahs. Rather than concentrating on ostensible leaders and leadership, the dissertation uses the faithful—the disciples and apostles—as the point of departure, rather than the messiah(s); hence, the focus on *messianism*.

Although the Black Protestants under study did not view messianic figures as primarily the heads of liberation movements, their faith still placed a premium on confronting the evil in the world. Thus, as Fannie White's enduring valuation of "religion and social service" demonstrated, this faith did not so much reject social action wholesale as disconnect it from grand conceptions of progress and re-contextualize it in a worldview in which such action practiced faith in Jesus, who alone could bring about salvation. As hinted by White's invocation of God's "retribution," Black Chicago messianism often envisioned a divinely sanctioned apocalyptic reckoning that could occur at any time, and would both destroy earthly white supremacy (but not necessarily *only* white supremacy) and herald the eternal salvation of the faithful.

Black Chicago Protestantism's messianic emphasis on living a redeemed life in a "doomed" city hinged on a pivot in biblical orientation from Psalm 68:31 ("Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hand unto God") to Psalm 68:5-6 ("A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation. God setteth the solitary in

families: he bringeth out those which are bound in chains”). Psalm 68:31 is often considered the central prophecy in Afro-diasporic Christianity. But Psalm 68:5-6 was a root of an ascendant concept in mid-twentieth century Afro-Protestantism: Jesus as a “mother for the motherless.” This concept was critical to how Black Chicago Protestantism’s understanding that faith in redemption enabled black people to live fulfilling lives within the urban crisis countered narratives about black urban life harnessed by liberationist conceptions of movement.

The significance of Afro-Protestantism’s modification of the biblical term “fatherless” into “motherless,” and black leaders’ subsequent interpretation of “motherless” as equivalent to “fatherless,” has largely evaded scholars.⁵⁴ But upon these adjustments hinge the reputation of Moses and the Hebrew prophets as proper models for post-emancipation black leadership, and at least until recently, for African American Studies in its manifestation as what W.E.B. Du Bois called “the Study of the Negro Problems.”⁵⁵ In the Bible, prophets such as Isaiah proclaim that their post-Exodus societies’ failure to “Seek justice” for the “fatherless” and the “widow” (Isaiah 1:17) shows that their societies have strayed from God in the years since reaching the Promised Land.⁵⁶ In the wake of Reconstruction, the New Negroes harnessed this prophetic critique to assume their leadership in the struggle for black progress within the U.S. nation-state. They aimed to lead the intra-racial attempt to cultivate strong, patriarchal nuclear families and build a civil society capable of uplifting the race’s less fortunate members. They also sought to shape the race’s articulation in the public sphere of the demand that the wider American society address racial inequality.

⁵⁴ For an exception regarding the first clause, see Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, “‘Mother to the Motherless, Father to the Fatherless’: Power, Gender, and Community in an Afrocentric biblical tradition,” *Semeia*, no. 47 (1989), 57-85.

⁵⁵ For this as Du Bois’ vision for African American studies, see Nahum Dimitri Chandler, *X: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 38.

⁵⁶ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper, 2001 [1962]), 262.

W.E.B. Du Bois's seminal 1903 publication *The Souls of Black Folk* made this argument, particularly in its discussion of the Negro spirituals. Du Bois and other early twentieth century black leaders within and without the church argued that their leadership was legitimate because their familiarity with black culture enabled them to deduce that the black masses cried out for and/or demonstrated the need for it.⁵⁷ Epitomizing this cry and need were nineteenth century spirituals, such as perhaps the most prominent example of the form, "Sometimes I Feel like a Motherless Child." Also crucial to the Hebrew prophets' credibility as models for a legitimate black leadership was that they were raised in relatively privileged circumstances compared to those for whom they advocated.⁵⁸ Moses, the ultimate prophet-as-leader, exemplified this exceptionalism. Having escaped Pharaoh's slaughter of Hebrew newborn sons, he was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and raised in Pharaoh's household, apart from the social disorganization of the Hebrew slaves, among whom, Exodus and Isaiah state, "there was no man" (Exodus 2:11-12, Isaiah 59:16).⁵⁹

The Bible seemed to suggest that slavery before emancipation, and backsliding toward un-freedom after emancipation, correlated with fatherlessness; and that the achievement, maintenance, and restoration of emancipation necessitated addressing fatherlessness. This was critical to the development of New Negro ideology because, at a time when black freedom seemed at best generations away, the emancipation of the 1860s served as evidence that black progress had occurred before, and thus was possible in the future. Emancipation served this purpose both for those who, like Booker T. Washington, rendered post-emancipation black

⁵⁷ Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2009).

⁵⁸ Heschel, *The Prophets*, 261; David L. Chappelle, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 47; Obery M. Hendricks, Jr., *The Politics of Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 30-31; Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*.

⁵⁹ Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 44-45, 66.

history as a story of progress “up from slavery” and downplayed the overthrow of Reconstruction, and those who, like Du Bois, viewed Reconstruction as a “brief moment in the sun” that became a “splendid failure.”⁶⁰ From Du Bois and E. Franklin Frazier to William Julius Wilson and, more implicitly, Cornel West, the attempt to solve the problem of the “fatherless” and the “widow” as a way of carrying on and/or redeeming the progress of emancipation has animated generations of seminal scholarship on race and urban inequality.⁶¹ Black Chicago has figured centrally in this scholarship since the heyday of the Great Migration, when social scientists flocked to the South Side to deduce whether blacks could thrive in the modern metropolis.⁶²

The most influential mid-twentieth century scholar of Black Chicago, black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, argued in two landmark books, *The Negro Family in Chicago* (1932) and its sequel *The Negro Family in the United States* (1939) that urban blacks must solve the problem of fatherlessness in order to achieve racial equality and eventually liberation in the metropolis. Frazier argued that the black family proceeded through history in cycles of “disorganization” and “reorganization.” He thought that because slavery had destroyed transplanted Africans’ familial and cultural heritage, African American families had reorganized themselves along “matriarchal” lines, as families headed by mothers. This was not necessarily a terrible thing in the context of the rural South: black women’s keeping multiple generations of relatives together and taking in

⁶⁰ Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co, 1907); W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 30, 708.

⁶¹ E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939); Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*; Wilson, *When Work Disappears*; Cornel West, “Nihilism in Black America,” in Gina Dent, ed., *Black Popular Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), 37-47; Cornel West, “The Black Underclass and Black Philosophers,” in *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times: Beyond Eurocentrism and Multiculturalism, Volume I* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1993), 143-157.

⁶² Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 1-17.

orphans had kept the black family intact, if in a form less socially stable and economically viable than the patriarchal form.⁶³ However, in the wake of the Great Migration, matriarchal family structure bred a new crisis of “social disorganization” in the Northern slum, as male joblessness exposed children to increased levels of crime, violence, male desertion, delinquency, loose sexual mores, and welfare dependency. If not corrected, social disorganization could perpetuate itself, becoming a kind of doom that later social science influenced by Frazier would identify as the culture of poverty, or, in Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s infamous phrase, the “tangle of pathology.” However, Frazier argued, more and better jobs would enable black men to assert normative patriarchal leadership over their families, and thereby lead blacks to social and economic parity with whites.

Working against Frazier’s notion of the “matriarchal” black family, cultural historians have recently argued that post-migration Black Chicago was not a den of social disorganization, but rather a vibrant node of “Afro-modernity”: a movement toward black progress and liberation that stressed intra-racial idiosyncrasy, entrepreneurial innovation, women’s leadership, and working-class vitality rooted in Southern folkways. In many respects, this culture was discordant with Frazier’s valorization of liberation through the assimilation of patriarchal norms. Scholarship on Afro-Protestantism has played a major role in this revisionist body of work. Barbara Savage shows that in the wake of the Great Migration, Frazier, Du Bois, and other black leaders worried that women-predominant church congregations sapped the male-headed home of its rightful role as the backbone of the community. Scholars of black Chicago argue that the nationwide popularity of Black Chicago women such as Pentecostal pastor Elder Lucy Smith and

⁶³ Clovis E. Semmes, “E. Franklin Frazier’s Theory of the Black Family: Vindication and Sociological Insight,” *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* Vol. 28, No. 2 (June 2001), 3-21: 16.

Baptist gospel singer Mahalia Jackson evinced Black Chicago's centrality to the cultivation of a commercial marketplace for phonographic recordings of sermons and music, which was integral to the rise of modern black culture industries.⁶⁴ The gutbucket preaching, emotive singing, and spirited dancing of this predominantly women's religious culture countered the patriarchal sensibilities and Western classical music aesthetics favored by New Negro scholars.⁶⁵

This scholarship has emphasized the social and cultural history of Chicago Afro-Protestantism. However, this work does not locate the ideological origins of the New Negro intellectuals' sociology of black liberation in theology and biblical criticism. Thus, the revisionist work has downplayed the importance of Chicago Afro-Protestantism's own theology, intellectual history, and most importantly, eschatology: i.e., its outlook on the ultimate destiny of human souls. An eschatological focus shows that rather than charting a different road to liberation, Chicago Afro-Protestantism's reorientation from solving the problem of fatherlessness to believing in Jesus as a "mother for the motherless" indicated that redemption, rather than liberation, was the best orientation for black lives in the midst of the urban crisis.

The work of Hortense Spillers and Saidiya Hartman provides tools to interpret this reorientation. In her classic essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar

⁶⁴ Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*; Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*; Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Farah Jasmine Griffin, *Who Set You Flowin'? The African American Migration Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 61; and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "Rethinking Black Vernacular Culture: Black Religion and Race Records in the 1920s and 1930s," in Wahneema Lubiano, ed. *The House That Race Built: Black Americans U.S. Terrain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), pp. 157-177.

⁶⁵ Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*; Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*. Referring often to Baldwin and Best, Clarence E. Hardy III analyzes this turn to the body in "'No Mystery God': Black Religions of the Flesh in Pre-war Urban America," *Church History*, Vol. 77, No. 1 (Mar., 2008), pp. 128-150. Michael Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues: The Music of Thomas Andrew Dorsey in the Urban Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*; Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*. See also Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007 [1977]), 180-181.

Book,” Hortense Spillers argues that the constitution of African Americans as “*father-lacking*” has been predicated not upon a sociological condition of fatherlessness, but upon the “elision” of the terms ““mother”” and ““enslavement.””⁶⁶ This elision was codified by the slavers’ decree that slavery passed through the condition of the mother, and was made viscerally legible through the (to use Thomas Holt’s term) “race-making” marks on the flesh left by the subjection of black women to forms of violence typically thought of as male-on-male, violence that thereby “ungendered” them (and thus all black slaves).⁶⁷ Or as literary historian Saidiya Hartman pithily puts it in her memoir *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, for the slave, “The mother’s mark, not the father’s name, determined your fate.”⁶⁸ Spillers’ and Hartman’s work indicates that the Negro spiritual lyric “Sometimes I feel like a motherless child / A long way from home” was not primarily a sociological statement but an ontological one; in other words, a lyric intimating that motherlessness defined the state of African American being regardless of particular familial circumstances.⁶⁹

New Negro intellectuals’ attempt to speak to racial inequality in terms of fatherlessness evinced their inability to conceive of, much less articulate, the above lyric’s sense that the black plight in America was rooted in the un-mothering of slavery. By contrast, consistent with Hartman’s understanding of the persistence of motherlessness after emancipation as the afterlife of slavery,⁷⁰ twentieth century Afro-Protestantism’s retention of the concept of motherless

⁶⁶ Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics*, Vol. 17, No.2, Culture and Counteremory: The “American” Connection (Summer, 1987), 64-81: 79-80.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 80, 67-68; for “marking” as “race-making,” see Thomas C. Holt, “Marking: Race, Race-Making, and the Writing of History,” *American Historical Review*, February 1995, 1-11.

⁶⁸ Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 80.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 103.

⁷⁰ Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Trans-Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Harper, Strauss and Giroux, 2007); Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

indicated that motherlessness did not end with the Mosaic⁷¹ event of emancipation, and could not be addressed by Exodus-oriented attempts to render the black liberation struggle as the struggle to solve the problem of fatherlessness. Thus, this dissertation identifies the phenomenon of what I call the “mothering of redemption,” which was grounded in the rehabilitation of the image of Christmas in interwar Afro-Protestantism and epitomized by the preponderance of the conception of Jesus as a “mother for the motherless” in post-World War II gospel music. The mothering of redemption—understanding Jesus as Mary’s baby, who is also a mother—anticipated one the closing arguments of Spillers’ essay: “the black American male embodies the *only* American community of males which has had the specific occasion to learn who the female is within himself, the infant child who bears the life against the could-be fateful gamble...It is the heritage of the mother that the African-American male must regain as an aspect of his own personhood – the power of ‘yes’ to the female within.”⁷²

The mothering of redemption countered Frazier’s vision of Black Chicagoans moving to a space and time of patriarchal socioeconomic empowerment to solve the problem of fatherlessness. Whereas Fannie White stated that “all sides” of Chicago were “decidedly doomed,” Frazier plotted a spatial trajectory for black Chicagoans’ overcoming matriarchal social disorganization and assimilating urban normalcy. Frazier argued that disorganization festered in the “zone of deterioration,” which was primarily on the Near South Side, where many Southern black families first settled as they entered the city. However, black families fared better in “workingmen’s zones” further to the south, where black men were more successfully entering the multiethnic industrial proletariat. These working-class families in turn pushed middle class

⁷¹ Of or relating to Moses.

⁷² Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 80.

and upper middle class black families, families often with longer histories of patriarchal leadership, outward into more stable, whiter residential areas. As social science historian Alice O'Connor explains, for Frazier each of these successive zones evinced “steadily falling rates of female-headed households, single parenthood, marital instability, female employment, and family size.”⁷³ In contrast to Frazier, Black Chicago messianism intimated that believers in Jesus as the redeeming Messiah could live redeemed lives in female-headed households in poor, hypersegregated Near South Side neighborhoods at least as righteously as in, say, male-headed two-parent households in the more integrated, middle-class Morgan Park neighborhood further to the south.

Yet messianism indicated that redemption was not merely a viable orientation for black lives in the city, but a *better* orientation than liberation. This implies a more fundamental critique of Frazier and the broader scholarly study of black urban life. Frazier’s notion of liberation as a product of black workingmen’s empowerment was a New Negro idea, in that it hinged on emancipation. For the New Negroes, emancipation remained transformative despite the overthrow of Reconstruction because it turned slaves (most importantly male slaves) into wage laborers, and enabled black people to build a vibrant civil society (led by men) behind the wall of segregation. Following in this vein, more recent Frazier-influenced scholarship on the decline of black urban life since the 1960s has called for measures designed to repair the damage that the interconnected collapses of the Fordist industrial economy and black civil society has done to inner city black men.⁷⁴ This scholarship implies that the vitality of the project of black liberation at mid-century rested upon the historically unique strength of black labor and civil society during

⁷³ Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth Century U.S. History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

that era: a notion perhaps ironically resonant with the cultural history scholarship written against Frazier.

However, Fannie White's 1939 statement that "all sides" were doomed despite the valiance of "religion and social service" suggested that black civil society—to which churches were central—and the New Deal industrial welfare state were not engines for a drive toward black liberation. White therefore challenged the fundamental point that emancipation's turning slaves into wage laborers and enabling a black civil society left an enduring pathway toward black liberation. Thus, according to White's formulation, contra Frazier, the fledgling black middle class of Morgan Park made possible by industrial labor was no more indicative of a movement toward black liberation than the poor on the Near South Side were. Yet faithful, ostensibly "disorganized" Near South Siders untethered to the quixotic burden to strive for progress could "labor and pray," thereby making the South Side a space of redemption and, at the return of the Messiah, salvation.

The dissertation is comprised of six chapters. These chapters proceed in rough chronological order as they attempt to detail the development of black Chicago's messianic faith from the rise of the Great Migration through the 1960s Chicago Freedom Movement. Chapter 1, "Painting Redemptive Black Labor: Art, Ethiopianism, the Great Migration, and the Political-Theological Problem of Analogy," analyzes focuses primarily on how as black Chicago solidified between the 1910s and the 1930s, the black Chicago painter William Edouard Scott painted the connection between work, redemption, and African American identification with Ethiopia as the seat of Afro-Christianity in a way that elucidated how black Chicago Afro-Protestantism between the world wars critiqued how notions of African Americans marching from slavery to freedom were often rooted in analogies to the biblical Exodus narrative. Chapter

2, “In the Whirlwind: Divine Violence, Foreign Missions, and Black Chicago Protestants’ Exilic Internationalism,” harnesses Benjamin’s notion of divine violence to examine how black Chicagoans thought and prayed about how Jesus’ redemption might interact with fascism, totalitarianism, anticolonialism, and the global scale of war engulfing the mid-twentieth century. Chapter 3, “Minstrelsy and Messianic Justice: The Transfigurations of the Dungill Family Orchestra,” follows a Chicago family band, the Dungill Family Orchestra, as it underwent a series of repertory and identity transformations that evinced how black Chicago faith was increasingly at odds with and incomprehensible within the terms of a rising black civic culture’s engagement with New Deal liberalism and Cold War liberalism. Chapter 4, “‘He’s Been My Mother’: The Mothering of Redemption in Black Chicago Gospel Music,” discusses how Chicago gospel critiqued the notion of prophetic social justice by transforming the notion of fatherlessness anchoring prophetic and academic sociology to the notion of Jesus as first and foremost a mother for the motherless in Afro-Christianity in the 1930s and 1940s. Chapter 5, “The Wretched and the Damned: Gospel Music Between Civil Rights and Urban Crisis,” shows how post-World War II Chicago gospel’s engagement with the growing urban crisis evinced a critical alternative to the religion animating the civil rights movement. Chapter 6, “The Location of Charisma: the Chicago Freedom Movement, Urban Renewal, and Black Religious Space,” discusses how black Chicago Protestantism’s understanding of black religious space influenced its clash with the King-led Chicago Freedom Movement’s emphasis on housing desegregation.

Chapter One

Painting Redemptive Black Labor: Art, Ethiopianism, the Great Migration, and the Political-Theological Problem of Analogy

*“If the proletariat was thought capable of blowing the foundations sky high,
what of the shipped, what of the containerized? What could such flesh do?”¹*
- Stefano Harney & Fred Moten

*“Must Jesus bear the cross alone
And all the world go free?
No! There’s a cross for everyone
And there’s a cross for me.”*
-Traditional

I. Introduction

“*Jesus ... is black because he was a Jew,*” declared the eminent black liberation theologian James Cone in his 1975 classic *God of the Oppressed*.² Cone’s was the most seminal statement of a core conviction of militant sectors of black religion since at least the nineteenth century: that for Afro-Christianity to be oppositional to and not accommodative of white supremacy, it must conceive of Jesus Christ as identifying with and as the oppressed, and not the oppressors. Thus, instead of following Western convention and portraying Jesus as white, black Christians should instead render Jesus black to identify him with the cause of black liberation. According to this logic, black Chicago artist William Edouard Scott’s 1934 painting of a phenotypically black Simon of Cyrene, a biblical figure African American Protestants understood to be Ethiopian, helping a phenotypically white Jesus bear the cross would seem to epitomize accommodation. The only way to interpret such a painting as anything other than a Christian apologetics for white supremacy would appear to be in the mode of W.E.B. Du Bois’ 1913 comparison of Jesus’ and African Americans’ toils and tribulations: “Jesus Christ was a laborer and black men are

¹ Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Minor Compositions, 2013), 93.

² James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1975), 123.

laborers...He was persecuted and crucified, and we are mobbed and lynched. If Jesus Christ came to America He would associate with Negroes and Italians and working people.”³ However, Scott’s painting in fact challenged the idea that Jesus’ experience as an oppressed Jew made his suffering analogous to black suffering, and that this similarity meant Jesus could help facilitate black liberation if blacks envisioned him as a node of solidarity with other “working people.” Scott’s painting instead explored how different black labor was from non-black labor in its suffering, its gendering, its being in the world, and its ultimate goal.

In their portrayal of the contrast between black labor and non-black labor, Scott’s religious paintings were characteristic of how “Ethiopianism”—defined here as African American Protestants’ identification with Ethiopia⁴—functioned in black Chicago between the World Wars, during the first decades of the African American Great Migration from the Jim Crow South to Northern cities. This chapter argues that Scott’s paintings of laboring Ethiopian disciples exemplified how interwar Ethiopianism critiqued the tendency to analogize the black freedom struggle to the biblical Exodus from slavery to freedom and to the Roman Empire’s oppression of Jesus. In making this critique, Scott’s paintings depicted how faith in Christ revealed redeemed ways of living that could sustain black migrants to Chicago reeling from the persistence of anti-black racism in the North. His art and thought suggested how Afro-Christian faith could reorient African American engagement with the broader world.

³ Du Bois quoted in James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 103, 187 n. 22.

⁴ For introductions to African American Ethiopianism, see Theophus H. Smith, “Exodus,” in Cornel West and Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., eds., *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 309-337; and Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. 26.

One of the most celebrated African American painters of the first half of the twentieth century, but largely forgotten since the 1950s, William Edouard Scott (1884-1964) was a prominent proponent of the Ethiopianism flourishing in black Chicago and nationwide in the interwar years. Interwar Afro-Protestant Ethiopianism centered upon the idea that the most important early devotees of Jesus were Ethiopians, and figures celebrated in Ethiopian Christian traditions, whose labor helped Jesus fulfill his mission to redeem the world. These laboring devotees included the midwife Salome, who in ancient Ethiopian apocryphal gospels (gospels not canonized in the Bible) accompanies the Holy Family (Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus) on the Flight into Egypt after Jesus' birth; and Simon of Cyrene, who in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) helps, under compulsion of the Romans, carry Jesus' cross to Calvary, the site of the Crucifixion.

For William Edouard Scott, labor was the measure of life, and black people—whether African Americans, Haitians (whose fishing and marketplace work inspired Scott's most acclaimed paintings), or biblical Ethiopians—were the laborers par excellence. Scott's art indicated that both ancient Roman and modern Western white supremacists noticed this black propensity for work and singled out black people for degraded forms of hard labor, such as chattel slavery. And yet, as Salome and Simon demonstrated, the excellence of black labor facilitated the revelation of Jesus as the Christ (Messiah) and Son of God who redeemed the world. Thus, Scott's and other black Chicago Protestants' identification with biblical Ethiopians stemmed from a sense of the continuity of black labor struggle. Black Chicago Protestants portrayed Ethiopian labor as existing in the same matrix of anti-black racism and Christian devotion as their own. Ethiopianist depictions conveyed that anti-blackness structured the Ethiopian disciples' existence in the world in a way that made the struggle of biblical black labor

fundamentally different from that of non-blacks. Therefore, if under the conditions of anti-black racism, biblical faithful black labor played an essential role in Jesus' redemption of the world, faithful black laborers in Chicago could play the same role under the persistence of anti-blackness in the urban North, working in a redeemed state in anticipation of Jesus' apocalyptic return.

William Edouard Scott's conception of black labor enables an intervention into the scholarly discourse on black labor. Much African Americanist scholarship, operating in the wake of W.E.B. Du Bois' interpretation of the black slave as "the black worker" fighting to establish "abolition democracy" in his 1935 book *Black Reconstruction in America*, has argued that the emancipation of the black worker during the Civil War constituted a fundamental break with slavery.⁵ According to this scholarship, emancipation transformed black labor from slave labor into non-slave labor comparable to that of other oppressed-but-not-enslaved groups, and/or revealed the already extant truth of a categorical affinity between black and non-black labor.⁶ In particular, left- and labor-oriented schools of U.S. historiography have affirmed black humanity by showing blacks' affinities with the struggles of other groups and contributions to broader fights for the democratization of the modern world.⁷

⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1998 [1935]).

⁶ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994); David R. Roediger, *Seizing Freedom: Slave Emancipation and Liberty for All* (New York and London: Verso Books, 2014).

⁷ Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago's Packinghouses, 1904-1954* (University of Illinois Press, 1997); Nancy MacLean, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2006); Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York and London: Verso, 1997); Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2006); Jarod Roll, *Spirit of Rebellion: Labor and Religion in the New Cotton South* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004); Robert Rodgers Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth Century South*

However, for black Chicago Protestants, the black struggle against anti-black racism was incomparable to other groups' struggles precisely *because*, they believed, black people were the ultimate workers: ultimate both in that they were the workers par excellence, and that their work concerned not the incremental, fit-and-start process of democratization, but the divine fulfillment of history in the revelation of Jesus as the redeeming Christ. Thus black labor was important because it *differed* from non-black labor in its quality, positionality, and most importantly its mission. Scott's artistic project focused on depicting how black labor continued to differ from non-black labor after emancipation and Reconstruction. In his paintings, black labor not only still attracted anti-black racism toward it in the way that Simon of Cyrene attracted the Romans to force him to bear the cross, but also continued to be ultimately redemptive, as Simon's labor was.

Scott's work therefore shows how Ethiopianism critiqued what Frank Wilderson has termed "the ruse of analogy."⁸ For Wilderson, the analogizing of the black freedom struggle to other struggles effaces the particularity of the black struggle in a manner that reinforces anti-blackness, despite its oppositional intent.⁹ This chapter conceives of the ruse of analogy as a political-theological problem, rooted in the tendency to render the black freedom struggle as an analogous successor to the narrative of the biblical Hebrews, and especially to the Exodus, the Hebrew journey from slavery to freedom.¹⁰ Historians and theologians in particular have

(Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* Vol. 91, No. 4 (Mar. 2005), pp. 1233-1263.

⁸ Wilderson, *Red, White, and Black*, 38; Frank Wilderson, "Afro-Pessimism and the End of Redemption," <https://humanitiesfutures.org/papers/afro-pessimism-end-redemption/> Accessed 8.10.2017.

⁹ Ibid; see also Hyo Kim, "'The Ruse of Analogy': Blackness in Asian American and Disability Studies," *Penumbra*

¹⁰ For the role of "themes of Judeo-Christian deliverance" in the use of analogy to give narrative structure to the black freedom struggle, see Jared Sexton, "People-of-Color-Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery," *Social Text* 103, Vol. 48, No.2, Summer 2010, 31-56: 42.

depicted the African American-biblical Hebrew analogy positively, based on the argument that the Exodus and the Hebrew prophets formed the basis of the “prophetic” religion that inspired black oppositional consciousness and activism in the mid-nineteenth century and during the Civil Rights Movement.¹¹

However, despite its political pedigree, the analogy helped facilitate African American politics’ entanglement with supersessionism, the idea that Christianity fulfilled, replaced, and/or overcame Judaism to become the true religion of God. Early Christianity could appear to align Judaism with slavery and Christianity with freedom.¹² Similarly, by narrating the movement of black people from slavery to freedom, the Exodus analogy led to the conceptual supersession of the category “slave” by the category “free.” It indicated that Emancipation had transformed a race of slaves into a race of modern “subjects”: persons whom the state and civil society recognized as thinking, self-determining individuals invested with universal rights to life, liberty, and property. The post-Emancipation black freedom struggle became legible not as the struggle of a race marked by what Saidiya Hartman has called “the afterlife of slavery,” but as a struggle of free subjects to actualize their *de jure* freedom.¹³

Under this logic, the Great Migration became one of the events most depicted in Exodus terms. As hundreds of thousands of African Americans from the South migrated to Chicago and

¹¹ Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *Exodus! Religion, Race and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000); Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 43-53; Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 60-61, 90-92; Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Verso Books, 1976), 252; David L. Chappelle, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

¹² For the debate over anti-Judaism in the Epistle to the Galatians, see David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The History of a Way of Thinking* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), 56-63; and J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians* (New York: Doubleday, 1997).

¹³ Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Trans-Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2007); Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*.

other Northern cities in the 1910s, blacks portrayed the movement as a Second Exodus, with Chicago the most prominent beacon of the Northern Promised Land.¹⁴ The application of the Exodus analogy to the Great Migration relied on the idea that emancipation had transformed slaves into free workers. Workers' freedom to sell their labor indicated that they had a right to self-determination that the U.S. state and civil society were bound to respect, and thus that they could actualize their *de jure* freedom by moving and changing their labor situations. African Americans could conceive of such liberation in accordance with a variety of ideologies. For some, such as Robert S. Abbott, founding publisher of the black newspaper and migration clarion the *Chicago Defender*, the Exodus framework had racial nationalist implications that tended to align black workers with capitalists and against organized labor, which Abbott often castigated as either racist or too economically radical.¹⁵ The use of the analogy with the biblical Hebrews—or even of the notion that black people were the authentic Hebrews—to argue that African Americans could collectively actualize their right to self-determination within the confines of an anti-black, white supremacist world dominated by capitalism became a hallmark of variations of nationalist and quasi-nationalist black religious thought.

Aligning with the Exodus optimism but from a different ideological standpoint, left-leaning black social scientists argued that since emancipation brought black people into the liberal capitalist Enlightenment framework as free subjects, the Great Migration enabled new worker solidarities in Northern cities.¹⁶ In his 1932 book *The Negro Family in Chicago*,

¹⁴ James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Wallace D. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005); Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997).

¹⁵ Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 83, 222-223.

¹⁶ Abram L. Harris, "Reconstruction and the Negro," in Abram L. Harris, *Race, Radicalism and Reform: Selected Papers*, ed. William L. Darity, Jr. (New Brunswick and Oxford: Transaction Publishers, 1988), 209-212.

sociologist E. Franklin Frazier depicted the industrial proletarianization of black migrants as a prerequisite to an integrated, cross-racial class struggle, because it would enable working-class black male migrants to lead their families to socioeconomic parity, and even neighborhood integration, with white working-class families.¹⁷ In their classic 1945 Chicago study, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, anthropologist St. Clair Drake and sociologist Horace Cayton were also optimistic (if less so) that labor unions could facilitate interracial working-class solidarity.¹⁸ Frazier and Cayton collaborated to depict this trajectory in a sequence of dioramas for Chicago's 1940 American Negro Exhibition. Reprising a formulation from Frazier's book, the dioramas echoed St. Augustine's juxtaposition of the Earthly City and the City of God by contrasting the "City of Destruction" with the "City of Rebirth."¹⁹ The description for the diorama "In the City of Destruction" stated, "To man the mills and factories of northern industry, a million black folk fled from feudal American to modern civilization. In the city many simple folkways of the South were lost."²⁰ Yet, the "In the City of Rebirth" description continued, "For black men and women the travail of civilization is not ended. Color caste is dissolving. Black workers are helping to build a new America."²¹ The contingency of the emancipated black worker—the black worker's ability to move, change labor conditions, and join with non-black workers—made industrial work the labor of liberation. Such thinking was a

¹⁷ Frazier, *The Negro Family in Chicago* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1932).

¹⁸ St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993 [1945]).

¹⁹ American Negro Exposition Official Program Guidebook (National Auditions Annual, 1940), 27, 28. William Edouard Scott Papers [hereafter WESP], Box 1, Folder 19. Vivian G. Harsh Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Woodson Regional Library, Chicago, IL [hereafter VHC].

²⁰ *Ibid*, 27.

²¹ *Ibid*, 28.

hallmark of the artists and writers, a generation younger than Scott, most identified with black Chicago's participation in the leftist Popular Front of the 1930s and 1940s.²²

The conceptual supersession of “slave” by “free” prefigured how non-blacks would conceive of the black freedom struggle in a framework of sociopolitical supersession. The black freedom struggle's orienting itself via universal categories of freedom could indicate that the struggle was valuable not so much because it facilitated black freedom, but because it superseded the ostensible in-group orientation of its Judaic inspiration. In the second half of his career, black Chicago's iconic novelist Richard Wright recalled how he left “hopeless” black Chicago for “racially free” Paris.²³ Redefining himself in his post-World War II travels in Europe, Africa and Asia as a cosmopolitan “Western man of color,” Wright portrayed his own life story as an existential transition from the afterlife of slavery to the alienated worldliness of being free.²⁴ One of the Parisian philosophers he conversed with, Jean-Paul Sartre, rendered Wright's ability to strike out artistically and build an audience of both blacks and white allies as a transcendence of Judaic particularism. For Sartre, Wright reached Popular Front-oriented “white Americans of goodwill (intellectuals, democrats of the left, radicals, C.I.O workers)” because he did not engage in parochial “prophetic lamentations. Jeremiah spoke only to the Jews. But Wright, a writer for a split public, has been able both to maintain and go beyond this split. He has made it a pretext for a work of art”—meaning, a pretext for the universal.²⁵

²² Bill V. Mullen, *Popular Fronts: Chicago and African-American Cultural Politics, 1935-46* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Erik S. Gellman, “Chicago's Native Son: Charles White and the Laboring of the Black Renaissance,” in Darlene Clark Hine and John McCluskey Jr., eds., *The Black Chicago Renaissance*.

²³ Richard Wright, “The Shame of Chicago,” *Ebony*, Dec. 1951: 24.

²⁴ Richard Wright, *White Man, Listen!*, in Richard Wright, *Black Power: Three Books from Exile: Black Power; The Color Curtain; and White Man, Listen!* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), 701.

²⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, “*What Is Literature?*” and *Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 79-80; Jonathan Judaken, *Jean-Paul Sartre and the Jewish Question: Anti-antisemitism and the Politics of the French Intellectual* (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 158.

Sensing such broader implications, many sociopolitical and cultural movements have taken the black freedom struggle as paradigmatic in a way that repeated and/or paralleled African Americans' taking the biblical Hebrew struggle as paradigmatic.²⁶ Like E. Franklin Frazier, Horace Cayton, and Sartre, these movements have often underscored black people's opening up opportunities for new labor movements and solidarities.²⁷ This has led progressive social movements or causes to evaluate black movements according to whether or not they fulfill this universalism and coalitional potential—and to attempt to supersede black movements deemed too solipsistic.²⁸ Such evaluations are especially problematic because, perhaps especially while the Great Migration overlapped with the New Deal, movement solidarities were ephemeral, often ended in a retrenched anti-black racism, and resulted in the reproduction of racial inequality due as much to their achievements as their defeats.²⁹

Announcing a different vocation for black labor, Ethiopianism suggested that black labor differed from non-black labor because it was not ephemeral or incremental, but rather eschatological, i.e., oriented by the divine fulfillment of history, by the end. Thus, William Edouard Scott indicated, in the wake of the Great Migration, the contributions of “the modern Negro” to “bearing the burdens of the world” must follow Salome the midwife and Simon of

²⁶ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 27-32; MacLean, *Freedom is Not Enough*; Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*; Michael Szalay, *Hip Figures: A Literary History of the Democratic Party* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Alicia Garza, “A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement.” <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2014/10/blacklivesmatter-2/> Accessed 8.11.2017; Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiracism and the Critique of Multiracialism* (Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 49.

²⁷ MacLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough*; Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*; Eric Lott, *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

²⁸ Garza, “A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement”; Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes*, 49.

²⁹ Here I am primarily thinking of the New Deal and its related coalitional formations in labor and public policy: see Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*; Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism*; D. Bradford Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster: The Unraveling of Chicago Public Housing* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005); Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013).

Cyrene by privileging the eschatology of redemption over the secular temporalities of democratization.³⁰ To this end, Scott's painting redemptive black labor evinced how black Chicago Ethiopianism problematized the African American-biblical Hebrew analogy.

This chapter shows how Scott's conception of faithful black labor developed in tension with the ideologies of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, both of whom supported and worked with Scott. In the 1910s, Scott emerged as a prominent black artist within the Bookerite educational and media infrastructure, but his Ethiopianism flourished in nearly dialectical relationship with the theology underpinning Du Bois' evolving interwar theorizations of the relationship between the emancipated black worker and urbanity. Scott's 1918 painting of Salome as a black domestic working for a black Holy Family fleeing into Egypt portrayed the eschatology of black migration in a way at odds with black intellectuals' celebration of a black progress facilitated by industrial labor. His 1934 painting of Simon of Cyrene helping a white Jesus bear the cross showed how Ethiopianism conveyed that although both black and non-black biblical Jews suffered under the Roman Empire, they suffered differently. The Romans' oppression of the Jews followed the logic of colonialism. However, the Romans' singling out Simon to carry Jesus' cross signified that the oppression of black labor was dissimilar to the categories of colonialism and even enslavement. Because of this, there could be no redemption of black people or their oppressors via worldly conceptions and logics of redress—say, by the restoration of sovereign independence, or the recognition of rights, or the bestowal of largesse.³¹

Painting redemptive black labor showed that Afro-Protestant faith did not stem from an analogizing of blacks' situation to Jesus' persecution, and did not foster a desire to share in or to

³⁰ Scott quoted or paraphrased in "The Cross of Calvary," *Chicago Defender*, March 1934.

³¹ Wilderson, "Afro-pessimism and the End of Redemption."

democratize Western notions of progress, selfhood, subjectivity, sovereignty, and emancipation. Rather, Scott's painting indicated that redemptive faith in Jesus was apocalyptic: it was faith that revealed ways of living otherwise than by the notions of being and subjectivity that the world (the state and civil society) recognized.³² For Scott and other Ethiopianists, black Chicago was a space for living otherwise in Jesus' redemption, redemption undetermined by whether Chicago was a Promised Land or a City of Destruction. Undoing the analogy of African Americans and the biblical Hebrew narrative thus allowed for the reformulation of the Judaic valence of Afro-Protestantism, from an emphasis on Moses, the Exodus, and the Hebrew prophets (as usually understood in African Americanist scholarship) to an emphasis on the messianic and apocalyptic. It thereby laid the groundwork for future tension between black Chicago Protestantism and the Protestantism of the mainstream black freedom struggle.

II. Labor, Rest, and the Art of Bookerism

For William Edouard Scott, black labor was exceptional because of the connection it drew between work and rest. In the post-Emancipation era, the interconnection between black labor organization and leisure activities baffled and threatened white employer-observers.³³ It led whites to both disparage black workers as indolent and to feel threatened by the clandestine labor militancy that black leisure and spirituality seemed to evince.³⁴ This militancy challenged the notion among antislavery capitalists that the purpose of emancipated black labor was to maximize profit in order to contribute to the inexorable progression and expansion of liberal

³² For "being otherwise" see Fred Moten, "Black Op," *PMLA*, Vol. 123, No. 5, Special Topic: Comparative Racialization (Oct., 2008), 1743-1747: 1747; and Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

³³ Julie Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Laborer in South Carolina, 1860-1870* (Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 86-87; Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 210-211.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

capitalist civilization.³⁵ Julie Saville observes that when the freedpeople resisted whites' dismantling of their inchoate attempts at breaking up large commercial crop plantations into autonomous family farms growing crops for their own sustenance, their "popular agitation for land spoke in an indirect protopolitical idiom of song, dance, religious enthusiasm, and the interpretation of omens."³⁶

Even after the restoration of planter dominance, rural Southern labor patterns facilitated the enduring connection between the excellence of black labor, spirituality, and rest. Many whites considered black people essential to the New South economy because no other people were forced to work in such harsh conditions; and yet the seasonal plantation calendar and temporal idiosyncrasies of crop cultivation allowed blacks to intersperse this harshness with leisure activities and days off at certain times of the year.³⁷ As James Grossman points out, the degree of flexibility could lead blacks to conceive of rural work as running according to what black farmer Ned Cobb deemed "His time"—God's time—rather than an employer's: "You can't start His time, you can't stop it."³⁸

Post-Emancipation Afro-Protestant theology codified the connection between labor and the spiritual state of "rest" as it gravitated away from the often Exodus-oriented Negro spirituals of the mid-nineteenth century and coalesced around a set of around 10 Anglican hymn texts.³⁹ These iambic texts, often set in common meter (8-6-8-6), comprised the "Dr. Watts"

³⁵ Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction*.

³⁶ Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction*, 86.

³⁷ Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 194.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ William T. Dargan, *Lining Out the Word: Dr. Watts Hymn Singing in the Music of Black Americans* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2006), 27.

congregational hymns that African American Protestantism adapted from Anglicanism.⁴⁰ The lyrics on labor and rest formed the basis of much early twentieth century black gospel music repertory into the 1960s: “Must Jesus bear the cross alone, and all the world go free / No, there’s a cross for everyone, and there’s a cross for me”; “Amazing grace how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me / I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see”; “I heard the voice of Jesus say, come unto me and rest / lay down thy weary one, lay down, thy head upon my breast”; and “I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad / I found in him a resting place, and he has made me glad.”⁴¹ Underscoring this tradition was the tendency of gospel music to draw from the aesthetics of the work songs of the rural South, the context in which much black sacred music evolved through the early twentieth century.⁴²

This sacred repertory conveyed that even the most “wretched,” weary, oppressed black believers could rest in Jesus as they worked. Resting in Jesus enabled black workers to labor as they were, and not as others wanted them to become. They could labor otherwise than according to secular goals such as increasing the productivity of, democratizing, or overthrowing capitalism. From his depiction of Salome resting while serving as midwife for the Holy Family, to his paintings of Simon bearing the cross, to murals such as his 1946 piece *Come Unto Me, All Ye That Labor*, with its title drawn from the scriptural inspiration for “come unto me and rest”, Matthew 11:28 (“Come unto me all ye that labour are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”),

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ See for example the Soul Stirrers, “Must Jesus Bear This Cross Alone?” *Sam Cooke with the Soul Stirrers* (Specialty, 1992); Morning Star Gospel Singers, “Come On Let’s Go” (Music Makers 110); Cross-Road Singers, “Sing Til the Power of the Lord Comes Down,” Various Artists, *I Heard the Angels Singing: Electrifying Black Gospel on the Nashboro Label, 1951-1983* (Tompkins Square, 2013); Fireside Gospel Singers, “Get Your Soul Right,” *I Heard the Angels Singing*; the Five Blind Boys of Mississippi, “Move in the Room with the Lord,” 1947-1954 (Acrobat, 2011); Prophet Powers, “The Tree of Life is Waiting for Me,” Various Artists, *Get Right with God: Hot Gospel* (Heritage Music, 2000); Southern Revivalists of N.O., “Get Right with God,” *Get Right with God*.

⁴² See for example, the Five Blind Boys of Mississippi, “He’s My Rock,” 1947-1954; the Supreme Angels, “Rest from My Labor,” Nashboro 721, 1962; the Bells of Joy, “I’ll Work Lord,” *The Collection 1951-1954* (Acrobat, 2011).

Scott stressed the connection between labor and rest drawn in the above lines throughout his career.

Scott's particular conception of the spirituality of restive black labor developed out of the uniqueness of his route to becoming a Chicago South Sider, as compared to the archetypal migration narrative exemplified by Richard Wright's journey from the South to the South Side (and ultimately to Paris). Scott's paternal grandparents had migrated from North Carolina to Indianapolis in an oxcart in 1847—a story Scott memorialized in painting—and he was born William Edward Scott in Indianapolis on March 11, 1884. He began painting as a student at Indianapolis Manual Training High School. Between 1903 and 1914, Scott won several art scholarships and made enough money selling paintings to fund several stints to continue his art education in France, spending a particularly significant amount of time there starting in 1909. In France he honed his skills in prestigious art academies, as well as under the tutelage of the African American expatriate master painter Henry Ossawa Tanner. Scott stayed at Tanner's home in the artist colony in Étapes. Described as being of "Indian and Negro extraction" by an early newspaper profile, Scott looked racially ambiguous enough to have once considered briefly passing for white aboard a Jim Crow railcar in Alabama when traveling to teach summer art courses at the black Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College.⁴³ He in the end decided against passing "so as to not cause trouble for" the black railcar porter, who had permitted him to go into either the white or the black coach. The anecdote demonstrated his racial ambiguity and ambivalence, yet also the commitment to other black people that a 1970 posthumous show of his

⁴³ W.E. Scott to Esther Scott, July 4, 1949, WESP Box 2, Folder 61.

work deemed was “as great as any contemporary Black nationalist,” not an uncommon blend among early twentieth century “Race Men” and “Race Women.”⁴⁴

A similar sense of racial liminality led many African American artists, such as Tanner and Wright, to view France as a place to at least attempt to escape the burden of representing the race, as well as the more common burden of American racism. Scott was indeed taken enough with French language and culture to modify his middle name from his father’s first name, Edward, to its French equivalent Edouard, signifying his cosmopolitanism in a manner seemingly resonant with Wright’s notion of being a Western man of color. However, rather than idealizing France as a refuge of enlightened modernity, Scott’s impressions of France led him to a comprehensive critique of modernity, including the aesthetics of modernism. He did not follow the abstractionist European avant-garde of Picasso, Matisse, and Braque that would so influence the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s. Instead, in the pre-World War I pieces that established his professional reputation, Scott blended academic realism with a “semi-impressionistic” technique influenced by Tanner and his home state tradition of Hoosier Impressionism to depict the despair of the destitute he observed while living in Etaples. In 1912’s *La Pauvre Voisine* (“The Poor Neighbor”), an elderly woman enters a family’s doorway apparently to beg for food as the family has dinner. In 1913’s *La Misere* (“Misery”), a young, well-built man dejectedly sits on the ground in a street corner crevice as two figures pass by on the other side of the street. The man appears to possess the physical capacity for work, and yet modernity has left him, body and spirit, by the wayside.

⁴⁴ “William Edouard Scott: An Artist of the Negro Renaissance,” Beloit College, WI, January 13-February 1, 1970. WESP Box 1, Folder 40.

Whereas Scott painted the subject of *La Pauvre Voisine* in a more post-impressionist, nearly abstract style to represent her spiritual alienation from the world of labor, to convey the vibrancy of hard work he used a more figurative, detailed approach that illuminated the workers' face. In 1915 an Indianapolis newspaper described his piece *Honest Work* as "an interesting study of light and shade inside the smith's big shop, where sunlight streams through door and windows, while the red glow from the forge lights up the smith's face and figure."⁴⁵ Scott thought modernist abstraction incapable of capturing the vitality of such a scene. A later profile of Scott quoted his criticism of Harlem Renaissance painter and illustrator Aaron Douglas, whose abstract, angular, opaque black figures, inspired by the Cubism and Africanist primitivism of the European avant-garde, visually epitomized New Negro modernism: "'When you attempt to paint man and distort him with this futuristic stuff,' he says, 'he can't live.'"⁴⁶ For Scott, Douglas' Afro-modernism reflected a broader Western modernity that stifled life.

Dismayed by the despondency of the poor in Étapes, Scott began exploring the religion of the French countryside. In 1914, the *Indianapolis Star* remarked upon how Scott's "largest canvas, 'The Shepherd at Prayer,' is altogether different from anything ever attempted by him before. It is, as the name would suggest, a religious painting...The simple peasant with bowed head, surrounded by his flock, the dark, wooden crucifix rising high above him...the sun lighting up the fog and mist of the early morning."⁴⁷ The shepherd's praying while working in the countryside seemed a world away from the spiritual and labor deprivation of the *miserables* of

⁴⁵ Lucille E. Morehouse, "Works of William E. Scott, Colored Artist, Show Unusual Development," *Indianapolis Star*, May 3, 1914. WESP Box 3, Folder 14.

⁴⁶ Edgar T. Rouzeau, "Compete with White Artists, Advises Wm. Edouard Scott, Who Has Done So," [n.p., n.d.], WESP Box 3, Folder 38.

⁴⁷ Morehouse, "Works of William E. Scott, Colored Artist, Show Unusual Development."

Étapes. The juxtaposition indicated that in France, the religion of the countryside, however vibrant, did not sustain the disadvantaged in the city.

After Scott returned to the U.S. long term in 1914 weeks before the start of the Great War, he immersed himself in the connection between religion, labor, and rest he observed in the praying shepherd across the Atlantic. Scott's method of making art anticipated the theorizations of the manual labor orientation of black painting put forth by Howard University professors Alain Locke and James Porter circa the 1930s. Locke, perhaps the major philosopher and convener of the Harlem Renaissance, argued that unlike African American "song, movement, and speech," painting was a flowering of black peoples' "great ancestral gift of manual dexterity" in the "decorative and craft arts."⁴⁸ Thus the materiality of painting, the craftwork necessary to create fine art, demonstrated black people's capacity for doing as well as dreaming, for not just envisioning or advocating for the future, but making a physical space in the present.⁴⁹

When in 1915 Scott was one of 14 Indianan artists selected to paint murals concurrently for the Indianapolis City Hospital, he showed how the work of religious painting made space for the connection between black labor and rest. Scott painted over 20 murals in the hospital detailing the life of Christ.⁵⁰ Like many of his mentor Tanner's religious paintings, these murals evoked the Near East by featuring darker-complexioned figures than the "pale, Nordic" physiognomy typically employed in Western Christian visual culture.⁵¹ The "Negro custodians" and other black working-class hospital employees were "fascinated by Scott's work, exulting

⁴⁸ Alain Locke, "The American Negro as Artist," *The American Magazine of Art*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (September, 1931), pp. 210-220:211.

⁴⁹ Ibid; see also James A. Porter, "Four Problems in the History of Negro Art," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Jan. 1942), pp. 9-36: 13, 11.

⁵⁰ Gaither, "The Mural Tradition," 129; "Decorates Burdsal City Hospital Wing," *Indianapolis Star*, Oct 31, 1915.

⁵¹ Gaither, "The Mural Tradition," 129.

that a member of their own race had been assigned part of the project.”⁵² The black employees were particularly proud that Scott was the only artist to paint his murals directly onto the canvas after it was placed on the hospital walls. A doctor involved with the project recalled that “As none of the artists was familiar with the technique of doing pure mural work on the plastered wall,” every painter except Scott painted on canvas that was later glued to the wall; often they did this work in their home studios.⁵³ But since “Scott... painted directly on canvas-covered walls,” “For hours, their scrub buckets laid aside, [the black employees] watched [Scott] at work from his scaffold.”⁵⁴ For the black workers, the exceptional excellence of Scott’s work stemmed from its location: “Two of them leaned on their brooms under the scaffold one afternoon and talked this situation over. ‘That Scott,’ said one, ‘that Scott has got it all over them other painters. He just...slaps the pictures right on the wall without no monkey business. An’ you know what those other painters hav’ta do? They gotta send on to New York and buy a pattern.”⁵⁵ Scott had the capacity to choose to work on site, even though the practice of the white painters indicated that, for them, it was not the ideal worksite. His capacity enabled the black employees to rest from their labor while they worked.

The ability to work in what to others seemed adverse spaces was crucial to Scott’s career as a painter of public religious murals. In contrast to E. Franklin Frazier’s theory of black male workers leading disorganized families to progressively more organized neighborhoods beyond the inner city, Scott’s religious murals prioritized the labor needed to thrive while staying put. Writing to Rev. William Gray about painting murals for the Sunday school of Bronzeville’s

⁵² Lloyd H. Wilkins, “Little Known Murals in City Hospital Among Finest in State,” *Indianapolis Sun*, January 7, 1940.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Church of the Good Shepherd, Scott stated that the paintings “would last for 50 years,” and added that he “would be glad to keep them clean for 10 years.”⁵⁶ For Scott, enduring as a painter in a poor, ghettoized community meant offering to do long-term maintenance work on his murals. This work would help churches anchor embattled neighborhoods for generations, whether or not those generations generated progress toward liberation.

Scott’s relatively conservative technique and ability to depict, and even embody, the dignity of and promise of black manual labor helped bring the rising artist into Booker T. Washington’s ideological orbit. Indeed, he had perhaps been influenced by this orbit since his training at Indianapolis Manual Technical High School. Scott's early work suggested a road less traveled in African American cultural history, on which Washington, rather than W.E.B. Du Bois, was the primary ideological forbear of the New Negro Renaissance. Two 1913 Scott mural dedication programs for black Indianapolis schools featured young singer Noble Sissle, a fellow Indianapolis native whose future musical partnership with Eubie Blake would yield the 1918 musical *Shuffle Along*, one of the first major works of the Harlem Renaissance.⁵⁷ At the February 8th, 1913 dedication ceremony, Sissle performed Paul Laurence Dunbar’s poem “The Colored Soldiers,” likely to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the organizing of the black 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment.⁵⁸ While describing the program, the *Indianapolis Star* noted that the school “is one in which much attention is given to manual training and where it is hoped to develop this department of education still more extensively.”⁵⁹ Thus the program joined

⁵⁶ W.E. Scott to William Gray, [n.d.]. WESP Box 2, Folder 18.

⁵⁷ “Mural Painting Dedicated,” *Indianapolis Star*, February 8, 1913; “School Mural is Dedicated: Artist's Decoration Unveiled in 'Baby Room' He Attended,” *Indianapolis Star*, March 8, 1913.

⁵⁸ “Mural Painting Dedicated.”

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

together three artists who set the stage for the Harlem Renaissance, Dunbar, Scott, and Sissle, in support of the Bookerite agenda of manual training in black schools.

By 1915, Booker T. Washington himself became a supporter of Scott. Years earlier, Washington had urged Henry Ossawa Tanner to explore common black life in his art, but following his seminal masterpieces *The Banjo Lesson* (1892) and *The Thankful Poor* (1894), Tanner turned almost exclusively to religious paintings featuring non-black characters.⁶⁰ Washington likely perceived Tanner's protégé Scott as the artist to realize Tanner's potential to develop a new art by and for the race. When Scott spent the first several months of 1915 in Tuskegee studying, according to a newspaper, "southern life among the colored people" in order to further hone his ability to "interpret colored life," he stayed at Washington's Tuskegee, Alabama home.⁶¹ Prominent Bookerite institutions also lent him their support. A glowing 1924 profile of Scott in *The Southern Workman*, the publication of the Bookerite black college (and Washington's alma mater) the Hampton Institute, focused on how Scott's success as a student and teacher at Manual Training High School, followed by his toiling in menial jobs to help put himself through art school in France, enabled his triumph in the most prestigious Western art circles.⁶² Focusing on Scott's own education and work history resolved the ideological tension between Scott's embrace of French language and high culture, and Washington's reproachfully picturing a black youth "studying a French grammar" in a filthy "one-room cabin" surrounded by unkempt weeds.⁶³ Other interwar profiles defined Scott's art against the Harlem Renaissance's embrace of abstraction, dismissing abstraction as a "fad" and commending his "utilizing the

⁶⁰ Gaither, "The Mural Tradition," 124.

⁶¹ "Colored Artist to Study Negro," *Indianapolis News*, January 16, 1915, p.2.

⁶² Francis C. Holbrook, "William Edouard Scott, Painter," *The Southern Workman*, February 2, 1924, 72-76.

⁶³ Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery*.

effects of modernism in the sobriety of his touch but lacking all the artificial cliches which were in such vogue after the war and clattered up some of the art salons."⁶⁴

Scott indeed portrayed black life in ways, and in spaces, that for many observers identified him with the Wizard of Tuskegee's emphasis on manual labor, trade schooling, and notions of black people's good nature and humility.⁶⁵ However, closer reflection upon his Southern paintings from the 1910s and 1920s suggests a view of rural black life at odds with the Bookerite reconciliation of black labor and the designs of New South capital.⁶⁶ In Scott's *The Lord Will Provide*, a black boy in tattered clothing standing in the midst of a vast commercial crop farm smiles as he holds a hunted rabbit, with two small dogs in tow. He appears to be part of a sharecropping family that worked a large plantation with little supervision by the landowner. Black sharecroppers working rich "plantation belt" soil were often much less economically productive than rural whites who farmed inferior soil.⁶⁷ Yet unlike black families on more regimented, surveilled plantations, less-supervised sharecropping black families had greater independence to raise their own foodstuffs, own hunting dogs, and hunt animals such as rabbit and opossum for themselves.⁶⁸ Thus, the painting indicated that, as the freedpeople had intimated during emancipation, what the Lord provided was not the strength to produce according to the grandest economic ambitions of white capital, but rather a still small space for the manna of living otherwise than the drive for progress. The space of black faith in the Lord enabled the sharecropper boy to smile while the impoverished of France could not.

⁶⁴ Rouzeau, "Compete With White Artists"; "W.E. Scott...Of His Haiti..." (1932)

⁶⁵ "Mural Painting Dedicated," *Indianapolis Star*, 2/8/1913. WESP Box 3, Folder 7.

⁶⁶ See William Edouard Scott, *It's Going to Come* (1916) and William Edouard Scott, *The Maker of Goblins (High-powered Salesman, Hallowe'en)* (1920s), reproduced in Warkel, "Image and Identity," 24-25.

⁶⁷ Charles L. Flynn, Jr., *White Land, Black Labor: Caste and Class in Late Nineteenth-Century Georgia* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 80.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 80-81.

The rise of the African American Great Migration from the South to the North during World War I raised the political stakes of Scott's perceived identification with Bookerism. After having shuttled primarily between Indianapolis and France for much of the early part of the century, Scott relocated to the South Side of Chicago in 1915 as the first major wave of the Southerners' migration reached its peak. Between 1916 and 1919, approximately a half million black Southerners moved to Northern cities, 50,000-70,000 of them to Chicago, and many thousands more through Chicago to other destinations.⁶⁹ Like other more moderate white supremacist Southern institutions, the *Atlanta Constitution* tried to retain black labor by speaking out against the violent racism and poor work conditions driving blacks away, yet also by arguing that black people were at essence rural and Southern.⁷⁰ While commending Scott for his work, an editor of the paper told him in January 1918 that "it is to the rural product of [the] negro that we owe our race development."⁷¹ Implicitly countering Du Bois' focus on the liberal arts, the editor added that "Unless we have good material to work on, our schools and colleges can do very little. And it is people of the rural districts, when they have the chance, [who] prove their racial value."⁷² Despite such praise, as Scott encountered his fellow black recent arrivals to a South Side "Black Belt" rapidly being ghettoized by the rest of the city,⁷³ his art increasingly pondered: could migrating black labor retain the smile of the sharecropper boy amid the modernity that caused such despair in France? How would the Lord provide in the emerging black metropolis? To answer these questions, Scott, like many other African Americans, turned to Ethiopianism.

⁶⁹Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 4.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 43, 50; James R. Grossman, "Black Labor Is the Best Labor: Southern White Reactions to the Great Migration," in Alferdteen Harrison, ed., *Black Exodus: The Great Migration from the American South* (Jackson and London: The University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 51-71: 61.

⁷¹ *The Atlanta Constitution* Editorial Staff to W.E. Scott, Jan. 5, 1918. WESP Box 2, Folder 1.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967).

III. The Flight into Egypt: William Edouard Scott, W.E.B. Du Bois, and the Great Migration

In the year following the *Atlanta Constitution*'s positioning Scott against the Great Migration, Scott worked with W.E.B. Du Bois to depict the migration as a movement of biblical significance in the pages of the NAACP's monthly journal *The Crisis*, which Du Bois edited. With Booker T. Washington's death late in 1915 after a steady decline in health and influence, and the New Negro Renaissance stirring, *The Crisis* was in the middle of its most successful 2-year period, selling 74,000 copies in 1918 and 94,000 in 1919, a year of race riots and grand black postcolonial hopes, before falling off sharply in the 1920s.⁷⁴ During 1918, Du Bois, who would later call Scott's art "one of the finest things the Negro has produced in America," collaborated with Scott on three cover-editorial pairings for the journal.⁷⁵ For the December 1918 Christmas issue, Scott produced a painting titled *The Flight into Egypt*, and Du Bois wrote an eponymous editorial, both portraying the migration as the Holy Family's escape from King Herod's attempt to murder the newborn Jesus. When juxtaposed with the previous month's cover-editorial pairing spotlighting black soldiers fighting in the Great War, the Christmas pairing suggested that the migration would shape postwar black life. Du Bois concluded his editorial's introductory section titled "Peace" by heralding, "Hail then, Holy Christmas time, Nineteen Hundred and Eighteen Years after the Birth, and five since the last Crucifixion. *On Earth, Peace, Good Will Toward Men.*"⁷⁶ It was as if the guns of August 1914 had stopped

⁷⁴ National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Twelfth Annual Report of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People: For the Year 1921* (New York: NAACP, 1922), 81; Abby Arthur Johnson and Ronald Maberry Johnson, *Propaganda and Aesthetics: The Literary Politics of African-American Magazines in the Twentieth Century* (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1979), 35.

⁷⁵ Amy Helene Kirschke, *Art in Crisis: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for African American Identity and Memory* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 129; 245 n.70.

⁷⁶ W.E.B. Du Bois, "Peace," *The Crisis*, Vol. 17, No.2 (Dec. 1918), 59.

liturgical time, and the Armistice of November 1918 enabled that year's Christmas to restart the Christian calendar.

Yet despite their ostensibly complementary deployment in *The Crisis*, Du Bois' and Scott's pieces departed over how to reconcile postwar secular and devout temporality and spatiality. Du Bois' editorial's Ethiopianism separated labor from rest in order to present the move from South to North as a progression. By contrast, Scott's painting's incorporation of the apocryphal midwife Salome sitting and holding the baby Jesus demonstrated the fusion of faithful labor and faithful rest in a manner that worked against Du Bois' celebration of progress through space and time. The difference signaled a transformation in how African American Protestantism understood its relation to Ethiopia, and in how black Chicago Protestantism conceived of the Great Migration.

Du Bois' piece was an extension of the predominant strain of Ethiopianism before the war. In the nineteenth century, African Americans had used Psalm 68:31, "Princes shall come out of Egypt: Ethiopia stretches out her hands unto God," to keep faith in Providence when the freedom struggle seemed in its direst straits, such as in the 1850s and after Reconstruction.⁷⁷ Diasporic in scope, Ethiopianism had informed the dream of the "Redemption of Africa," a teleology in which African Americans would participate in the work of Providence by bestowing the Three C's—Christianity, Civilization, and Commerce—upon the rest of the diaspora.⁷⁸ More secularist iterations of Ethiopianism, such as Du Bois' 1913 *Star of Ethiopia* pageant, depicted Afro-diasporic contributions to civilization throughout history.⁷⁹ Matthew's account of the Flight

⁷⁷ Albert J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African American Religious History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 40.

⁷⁸ Moses, *Afrotopia*, 26.

⁷⁹ Alessandra Lorini, "The Spell of Africa is Upon Me': W.E.B. Du Bois's Notion of Art as Propaganda," in Fabre and Feith, eds., *Temples for Tomorrow: Looking Back at the Harlem Renaissance*, 159-176: 165.

into Egypt was particularly amenable to Ethiopianist adaptation because it cites Hosea 11:1, a verse similar to Psalms 68:31; Matthew states that the Flight “was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet who said, ‘Out of Egypt have I called my son’” (Matthew 2:15).

Du Bois’ depiction of Mary and Joseph as black laborers migrating to the North was in keeping with this progress-oriented strain of Ethiopianism. He described them as “poor, humble, ignorant people—albeit with the blood of kings burned in their veins. They were ragged unkempt and black. Long years they had plodded faithfully to earn their daily bread in sweat and pain.”⁸⁰ Du Bois may have hinted that the biblical Joseph and Mary were black, but he also alluded to the idea that African Americans descended from African royalty. While Matthew (and Luke) only depict Joseph, and not Mary, as being a descendant of biblical Israel’s King David (the Gospels do not specify Mary’s lineage), Du Bois states that they both have royal heritage.⁸¹ In Du Bois’ rendering, when one of the “Three Strangers” (the magi in the Gospels) looking to praise the newborn Messiah gives Mary and Joseph “a piece of Gold,” “Joseph and Mary looked at the gold-piece in amazement,” and “they dreamed. Egypt! the Land of Freedom; Egypt! the Haven of the Oppressed; Egypt! where there was Learning and Wages and Honor.”⁸² Du Bois shifted the aim of the story from Matthew’s concern with Jesus’ escaping King Herod and recapitulating various Hebrew sojourns in Egypt, to showing how the Great Migration could facilitate the cultivation of Southern field laborers and domestics into enlightened, honorable workers making good wages.⁸³

⁸⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Flight into Egypt,” *The Crisis*, Vol. No. 2 (Dec. 1918), 59.

⁸¹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 89.

⁸² Du Bois, “The Flight into Egypt.”

⁸³ Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 216.

In contrast to Du Bois' piece, Scott's *The Flight into Egypt* painting demonstrated how interwar religious Ethiopianism troubled historicist and progressive conceptions of black redemption. Ethiopia's defeat of Italy's invasion in 1896, the height of the age of imperialism and the year of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, electrified much of the African diaspora and helped lay the groundwork for this upsetting. Ancient Ethiopia had been the first Christian nation; many Afro-diasporic Christians associated it with the birth of Afro-Christianity, recorded in the very pages of the Bible. Thus, Afro-Christianity not only predated Christianity's iteration as the "white man's religion"; more importantly, it was biblical while Western Christendom was merely historical. Therefore, as Ethiopia's 1896 emergence on the world stage interrupted the imperial march of Western Christendom, the weight of Providence seemed to fall upon secular history. This reoriented Ethiopianism from a concern with past and future to a focus on the relationship between the present and the *eschaton*, or the divine resolution of history.

The transformation aligned with J. Kameron Carter's reading of how the towering historian of African American religion, Albert Raboteau, turned from thinking of black religious history in terms of culture to thinking it theologically. In Raboteau's latter day interpretation, Carter gleans, "faith becomes history's...realization...of the *eschaton*": faith evinced the *eschaton*—the divine resolution of history—as presently occurring within the unfolding narrative of secular history.⁸⁴ Black faith therefore conceptualized history according to divine salvation rather than secular aspirations or temporalities. Raboteau himself states that for African Americans historically, the Bible verse at the core of Afro-diasporic Christianity, "Princes shall come out of Egypt and Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God (Ps. 68:31) was not

⁸⁴ Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 155.

so much a prophecy as it was a prayer.”⁸⁵ In other words, it was not so much a foretelling of a distant future, as a way of living eschatologically in the present. Such an orientation predominated in interwar Afro-Protestant Ethiopianism in black Chicago.

Ethiopianism facilitated eschatological salvation history’s eclipse of civilization history in Black Chicago Protestantism. The weight of Providence collapsed conceptions of black redemption into Afro-Christianity’s biblical-apocryphal origins. This collapsing indicated that, contrary to Du Bois’ statement in *The Souls of Black Folk* that “After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son,” blacks should not think that their redemption could occur in the future, after the greatness of other civilizations.⁸⁶ Bible scholar Raymond Brown explained that Matthew’s infancy narrative does not list Jesus as begotten by Joseph (i.e., that Joseph was Jesus’ father) because “Jesus is the final and once-and-for-all manifestation of God’s presence with us,” not just one more name in a generational succession.⁸⁷ Jesus’ name Emmanuel (“God with us”) was an eschatological finality: blacks had to experience redemption through and with Jesus to know it at all, for there was no “after” Jesus. The Flight into Egypt underscored this. Utilizing more “formula citations” of the Hebrew Bible than any other similar-sized New Testament Gospel passage, Matthew’s telling both recapitulates the history of Israel and foreshadows Jesus’ earthly career, thereby encapsulating Jesus’ eschatological mission more than any other story.⁸⁸

The program for the aforementioned 1940 American Negro Exposition in Chicago demonstrated the capacity of Ethiopianism’s eschatological temporality to upset secular visions

⁸⁵ Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones*, 56.

⁸⁶ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*.

⁸⁷ Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 153.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 219.

of redemptive labor progress. Two of the three dioramas following E. Franklin Frazier's dioramas depicting black migrant workers' familial trajectory in the city were of biblical scenes: "Baptism of the Ethiopians" and "Philip and the Ethiopians."⁸⁹ These were the only two dioramas listed without accompanying text. It was as if this anachronistic, esoteric, East African biblical material baffled into silence the descriptions' collective narration of a progression of black history and culture culminating in the rise of a multiracial industrial working class.

Scott's *The Flight into Egypt* also evinced the rise of eschatological time and space over secular conceptions. Indeed, the main similarity between Du Bois' and Scott's portrayals was that they both depicted the Holy Family as black. Yet rather than attempting to show the Holy Family on the move, Scott's piece in fact belonged to the subgenre of Flight into Egypt paintings usually titled *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, which depicted the Holy Family resting. Scott's piece aligned with the *Rest* genre's tendency to portray the Holy Family in a pyramidal formation, with Joseph standing.⁹⁰ However, departing from Western art's tendency to depict angels in the scene, Scott instead painted the Holy Family's midwife Salome. Du Bois, following only Matthew's Canonical account, did not mention Salome, but she appears prominently in apocryphal Coptic gospels, suggesting that African Americans' exposure to Ethiopic religious texts and traditions influenced the eschatological turn in Ethiopianism.

As the theology, phenomenology, and visual art theory of Jean-Luc Marion helps to reveal, Scott's piece reflected the eschatological paradigm's emphasis on the connection between faith undetermined by hope, and a corresponding surprise at the sudden, unanticipated

⁸⁹ American Negro Exposition Program and Guidebook, 29, 31.

⁹⁰ Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, description of Bernard van Orley, *The Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, ca. 1515, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436101>, accessed 11.3.2017.

manifestation of divinity.⁹¹ Whereas Du Bois' editorial invoked Mary and Joseph's hopes for—and thus visions of—secular gain (“Freedom,” “Learning and Wages and Honor”), Scott emphasized Joseph's faith in God. Throughout Matthew's account, Joseph follows the commands delivered by an angel of the Lord in his dreams exactly, an extension of his ethic of total obedience to Judaic law.⁹² Since Joseph's faith is rooted in the steadfastness of the law, it does not depend upon a hope for something he already envisions. Therefore, Scott rendered Joseph's surprise at receiving God's unanticipated commands. With his upward gaze to the top right corner and arms raised diagonally to his sides, Joseph appears transfixed by something beyond the corner, likely an angel who is or has just finished relaying a command from God. Thus, Joseph's gaze renders the invisible—God's command—visible to the viewer.⁹³

Scott's use of the *Rest* concept conveyed that the Great Migration could only be redemptive if it manifested the paradigmatic preeminence of divinely sanctioned stillness over human movement. Most Great Migration paintings have attempted to portray migrants on the move despite the fact that the painted figures, being in fact inert, require an invisible factor beyond the painting—the imagination of a viewer—to envision them in motion.⁹⁴ (Jacob Lawrence's celebrated *Migration of the Negro Series* sought to overcome this with an epic sequence of paintings.) Conjuring three levels of human agency, the painters of Great Migration pieces mobilize the viewer's imagination to render the static figures as agents. However, in Scott's piece, God's invisible command appears to the viewer via Joseph's still pose and gaze, and thus without movement on the part of Joseph, the viewer, or even the artist, who does not

⁹¹ This formulation, and the following interpretation, is influenced by Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berrand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 61.

⁹² Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 206, 214.

⁹³ This formulation is influenced by Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, trans. James K.A. Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 3-10.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

paint a separate visible entity representing the command, such as an angel, or even an exceptional light.⁹⁵ In Scott's painting, migration was redemptive only insofar as the Lord would provide in the still and the unseen.

The Gospel of Mark mentions a Salome, and early Christian traditions interpreted her as a disciple or sister of Jesus, but the Coptic tradition seems to have been the only to identify her as both a disciple and a midwife.⁹⁶ In Scott's painting, Salome is the woman wearing domestic garb and tending to the baby Jesus, whom she holds on her lap as she sits. The woman corresponds with Salome's vocation in the Ethiopic apocrypha. The apocrypha tradition mentioned that Salome washed Jesus, while Mary always gave him milk.⁹⁷ Furthermore, in a prominent apocryphal gospel used by early Copts that circulated in the U.S. in English translation in the early twentieth century—in an anthology featuring illustrations of black Bible characters—God tells Salome to “carry” the baby Jesus “and thou shalt be restored” (*Protevangelium of James* 14:25).⁹⁸ The Copts rendered Joseph as an elderly man and Mary as a girl on the cusp of her teens, probably to support the case that Joseph and Mary's relationship was not sexual, and thus that Jesus was immaculately conceived.⁹⁹ Correspondingly, in Scott's piece, Mary is the younger woman sitting on the ground staring at her feet, which are youthfully pointed up, while Joseph is more elder guardian than aspiring patriarch or doting husband and father. Thus, Salome is not the overshadowed, unheralded “help” for Du Bois' editorial's dynamic nuclear Holy Family raring

⁹⁵ This analysis is influenced by Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 9-10, and Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kolsky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 282-287.

⁹⁶ Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 232.

⁹⁷ Otto F.A. Meinardus, *Christian Egypt: Ancient and Modern* (Cairo, Egypt: Cahiers d'Histoire Egyptienne, 1965), 455.

⁹⁸ *The Lost Books of the Bible and The Forgotten Books of Eden* (Buffalo, New York: Eworld Inc), 34.

⁹⁹ Bauckham, *Gospel Women*.

to join the urban working-class; her faithful, restive labor for Jesus, and her individual relationship to Jesus, is central to the composition.

For Scott, Salome was a migrant iteration of the Southern domestics he painted around this time, such as the woman standing in front of her broken down house defiantly with her hands on her hips and held tilted upward in 1916's *It's Going to Come*. Still, attention to the spatiality of Bookerite theology underscores how Scott's portrayal of Salome's restive labor, while divergent from Du Bois' progressive movement, was also distinct from Booker T. Washington's call for blacks to "cast down your bucket where you are."¹⁰⁰ "Cast down..." was based on the idea that the black Promised Land was the rural South. In his 1912 Tuskegee commencement address, Washington's eventual successor Robert Russa Moton explained that just as "God gave the children of Israel the 'Land of Canaan'...God has given to the Negro here in this Southern country two of the most fundamental necessities in his development—*land* and *labor*."¹⁰¹ Working this land would enable blacks and whites to "develop side by side, in peace, in harmony...living together as 'brothers in Christ' without being brothers-in-law."¹⁰² Moton Christianized Washington's seminal statement accommodating segregation, "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."¹⁰³ He used a darkly humorous dismissal of interracial marriage to compare the mutuality of blacks and whites under Jim Crow to that of two groups of early Christians discussed by the Apostle Paul: those who followed Jewish law and those who did not. It also demonstrated the susceptibility of the African American-biblical Hebrew analogy to

¹⁰⁰ Booker T. Washington, Atlanta Exposition Address.

¹⁰¹ Robert Russa Moton, "Race Development," *Racial Good Will: Addresses* (Hampton, VA: Hampton Institute Press, 1916), 3-16: 10.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 15.

¹⁰³ Washington, Atlanta Exposition Address.

supercessionist interpretation. Portraying Afro-Christians as new recipients of Canaan allowed Moton to rework the idea that freedom in Christ superseded Jewish law into the notion that the economic development of the Southern Promised Land would supersede the relevance of Jim Crow law. Moton's Christian deployment of Exodus was thus completely at odds with how Joseph's fealty to the Law of Moses undergirds the Flight into Egypt.

For Scott, however, black workers could make space for redemption wherever Jesus was. A prominent early Coptic text stated that Salome "was the first to recognize the Christ," and "Whithersoever the Christ went to preach," she "followed Him," until the Resurrection.¹⁰⁴ In painting Salome, Scott rendered black migrant women's abandoning attachments to black landowning in the South¹⁰⁵ as an abandonment of a normative notion of a fixed Promised Land identifiable by something other than Jesus' presence. Salome is the only laboring figure in the painting, but even she is sitting while she works. Scott's depiction of Salome diverged from two groups of proponents of the Great Migration: Northern advocates of racial uplift who thought that black women working outside of their homes undermined the patriarchal domicile, and left-leaning black social scientists, such as economists Sadie T. Alexander and Abram Harris, who thought that industrial proletarianization could turn black women into political and economic agents.¹⁰⁶ Whereas such depictions of women's labor progress often identified politicized, liberationist labor as either paradigmatically manly or labor in which men were at the vanguard,

¹⁰⁴ *Discourse by Demetrius of Antioch on the Birth of Our Lord*, quoted in Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, 231.

¹⁰⁵ Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 233.

¹⁰⁶ Nina Banks, "Uplifting the Race through Domesticity: Capitalism, African American Migration and the Household Economy in the Great Migration," 620; Sadie T.M. Alexander, "Negro Women in Our Economic Life," *Opportunity* (July, 1930), 201-203; Harris and Spero, *The Black Worker*.

Scott's painting suggested that a black woman domestic could set the paradigm for redemptive black labor.¹⁰⁷

As African American midwifery faced increasing condemnation as backward and superstitious from a professionalizing (and whitening) pre- and postnatal health care industry, *The Flight into Egypt* linked the “divine intervention” and “spiritual call” many midwives felt necessary for doing their work to a Near Eastern biblical antecedent, presenting two temporal and geographic ends of Afro-diasporic women's esoteric spirituality making their way Northward as one.¹⁰⁸ And yet, the relative obscurity of Salome's expression reflected Scott's tendency to not render Southern black laboring women's faces as legibly to the viewer as he did that of the illumined smith of *Honest Work*, or sharecropping boys such as the smiling subject of *The Lord Will Provide*. This resonated with the observation of a post-civil rights era ethnography of black midwives that “older midwives... would not or could not define (‘mother wit’) but ‘could tell who did or did not have it.’”¹⁰⁹ In contrast to interwar social science's attempt to know Negro womanhood, Scott's brushstrokes evoked the ineffability of “mother wit” and the interiority of faith, an interiority otherwise than privacy.

IV. From Analogy to Apocalypse: Simon of Cyrene, Cross-Bearing, and the Antinomy of Blackness-as-Nothingness

While, as shown above, William Edouard Scott's method of representing the invisible in a painting of the infancy of Jesus had an affinity with Jean-Luc Marion's thought, they differed

¹⁰⁷ Ibid; Roll, *Spirit of Rebellion*; Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 62.

¹⁰⁸ Gertrude Jacinta Fraser, *African American Midwifery in the South: Dialogues of Birth, Race, and Memory* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 26.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 26.

when it came to limning the implications of Jesus' suffering and death. This difference evinced a fundamental divergence between Afro-Protestantism and Western philosophy and theology. Elucidating this divergence reveals how Afro-Protestant conceptions of redemptive black labor undid analogical thinking via apocalyptic faith. This understanding of labor centered on cross-bearing, and prominently featured Simon of Cyrene, the Synoptic Gospel figure whom the Romans force to help bear Jesus' cross to Calvary, the site of the Crucifixion: "And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross" (Matthew 27:12); "And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross" (Mark 15:21); "And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus" (Luke 23:26). Since Cyrene was a city in North Africa (in modern day Libya), black Christians have long identified with and celebrated Simon as black and "Ethiopian." The salience of the hymn "Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone" in black sacred music has testified to his conceptual resonance in black consciousness. He has appeared in much black expressive culture, particularly in the interwar period, and many Afrodiasporic churches have borne his name.

In 1934, Scott painted a mural of Simon of Cyrene helping Jesus bear the cross to Calvary on the wall of the Thomas E. Nolan Funeral Home, in the heart of Bronzeville, for its eighth anniversary.¹¹⁰ In the (now lost) painting, Simon is phenotypically black and Jesus phenotypically white. Simon carries the cross from behind Jesus, in accordance with Luke 23:26. Jesus occupies the center of the mural, while Simon stoops lower, is off to the right side, and has three men standing tall behind him. The tallest and most upright figure in the painting is a

¹¹⁰ Pinder, "Painting the Gospel Blues," 91.

Roman soldier standing guard to Jesus' left. The mural was one of at least four Simon of Cyrene murals Scott painted during his career, at least two of which were for funeral homes. Titled *His Part or Ascent of the Cross*, the painting, according to the *Chicago Defender*, was Scott's "conception of the part played by Simeon,¹¹¹ the black man, as he helped the Savior bear the cross," and was "meant by the artist to portray strength and sympathy and the willingness to do his bit towards bearing the burdens of the world. Simeon, Scott thinks, is symbolic of the modern Negro."¹¹² The mural and the description suggest a relationship between the care for the deceased, their fate in the afterlife, what Jacques Derrida called "the work of mourning," and the broader labors of black people living on in the world.¹¹³

Juxtaposing *His Part* with another funereal Scott painting helps illuminate this connection. *Come Unto Me, All Ye That Labor*, a 1946 piece for the black-owned Stuart Mortuary—for which Scott also painted a Simon mural—in his native Indianapolis, featured the mortuary owners' younger brother Bodie Stuart, who had been killed in a car accident, standing behind a white Jesus.¹¹⁴ The older Stuarts started the mortuary because they had been dissatisfied with their brother's mortuary care.¹¹⁵ In this piece, Bodie Stuart is a young man, without apparent injury from the car crash, watching Jesus preach. While the analysis of *The Flight into Egypt* above demonstrated the affinity between Scott and Marion on making the invisible appear to the viewer, the mortuary painting evinced a departure between them over the relation between Being and nothingness. For Marion, givenness relates to death only in terms of what death gives

¹¹¹ Simeon and Simon are equivalents; this could also have been a spelling error.

¹¹² "The Cross of Calvary," *Chicago Defender*, May 12, 1934: 3.

¹¹³ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

¹¹⁴ Pinder, "Painting the Gospel Blues."

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

to someone who experiences (as in, observes) another's death, or what it gives to a person who is being-toward-death before that person finally succumbs to it.¹¹⁶ By naming the possibility of impossibility, death makes life appear as possibility.¹¹⁷ By naming the possibility of afterlife or a transcendence of worldliness, death is the gift to beings of the possibility of post-being.¹¹⁸ Marion argues that because one's relations with other people protract across an "endless flux of significations" over the duration of a relation, "the truth of a life"—the truth of one's being in the world—"is only revealed at its last instant...that is why to love would mean to help the other person to the point of the final instant of his or her death."¹¹⁹ However, the Stuart mortuary and the painting of Bodie suggested that perhaps for Scott and the Stuarts, loving another person meant continuing to love and labor for them after their being has expired, after the possibility of being with them in life or even preparing their lifeless flesh had faded away. Drawing out from the painting's title to the full Gospel verse so prominent in Afro-Protestantism, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," (Matthew 11:28) indicates the painting's portrayal of Bodie resting from his labor in the afterlife. It also indicated that for the living, the connection between labor and rest signified that the end of life in death, or the end of time in the *eschaton*, did not just give Being to beings from beyond what Marion calls the "horizon of being"¹²⁰; even more, death and the eschatological erupted into the world of being. Whether on the quotidian level of a family mortuary business or the epic scale of what Du Bois in 1935 called a "general strike" hailing "the Apocalypse," the eruption of nothingness into the

¹¹⁶ Marion, *Being Given*, 56-59.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹¹⁹ Marion, *In Excess*, 157.

¹²⁰ Marion, *God without Being*.

realm of being was the specific task of redemptive black labor, the cross for blacks to bear in and for, and therefore against, the world.¹²¹

By the mid-1930s, the hope that had inspired Du Bois to write his 1918 “The Flight into Egypt” editorial had diminished due to the persistence of racial violence, ever more sophisticated residential segregation tactics, and a new crisis, the Great Depression. The Depression ravaged black Chicago’s economy, leading to unemployment rates that more than doubled the national average.¹²² Families increasingly relied on government programs just to survive.¹²³ In this context, the *Chicago Defender*, black Chicago’s and arguably black America’s leading newspaper, increasingly published articles that conceived of labor in religious rather than economic terms. With Pilgrim Baptist Church assistant minister R.C. Keller serving as its religious editor in the mid-1930s, the paper became a dynamic proselytizer, a church newsletter calling a diaspora to congregation, and a laboratory of black theology. Its vision elaborated upon what Scott had been working on for over twenty years. In the 1930s Pilgrim commissioned Scott to paint a series of murals for its nave, suggestive of the affinity of vision between the two; he often worked on these murals during the church’s Sunday services, practicing the spiritual interrelation of labor and rest, as he had at Indianapolis City Hospital in 1915.¹²⁴ The *Defender* piece on his Simon of Cyrene mural was one of its many articles from the mid-1930s that disseminated and helped formulate Bronzeville’s, and black America’s, conception of a specifically black redemptive labor.

¹²¹ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, 124.

¹²² Christopher Robert Reed, *The Depression Comes to the South Side: Protest and Politics in the Black Metropolis, 1930-1933* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

¹²³ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*.

¹²⁴ Pinder, “Painting the Gospel Blues.”

During this time, the *Chicago Defender* published articles on Simon of Cyrene and cross-bearing in March and April, around Easter season. Portraying specifically black labor, evocations of biblical cross-bearing tended to apply the black-white paradigm of the modern U.S. to the Gospels in ways that distinguished the black experience from the larger Hebrew narrative stretching across the Old and New Testaments. Edward J. McCoo's 1924 pageant *Ethiopia at the Bar of Justice*, which in the early 1930s was promoted in the black newspapers such as the *Defender* and performed throughout black America, demonstrated the specific blackness of Simon's labor.¹²⁵ The pageant recounted the exploits of various Biblical figures deemed black (Ethiopian), then traced black history from the Bible to American slavery, then followed the history of African Americans up to the 1920s. The pageant featured Simon of Cyrene bearing the cross during the hymn "Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone":

When Jesus was on his way to Calvary all others turned their hearts against Him. ["*Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone.*"] Reviled by Jew, mocked by Roman, scorned by both, the only spark of sympathy shown him was by Ethiopia. When struggling up the hill, bleeding, weary, worn and faint, Jesus sank beneath the heavy cross, on which was laid the sins of all the world—Ethiopia picked up the cross and bore it for him.¹²⁶

Distinguishing the black from the Hebrew narrative did not mean simply defining blacks and Jews as separate peoples, or attempting to disconnect Afro-Protestantism from the Hebrew Bible, but rather refining and reworking which aspects of biblical Judaism Afro-Protestantism would emphasize, and even locate itself inside. In some cases, this meant using Simon stories to

¹²⁵ "Brooklyn Elks Give Play at Their Crystal Ballroom," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 16, 1930, p. 10; "Milwaukee Church Presents Pageant; 75 Actors in Cast," *Chicago Defender*, June 27, 1931, p. 11; "Nevada; Reno, Nev.," *Chicago Defender*, February 25, 1933, p. 24; "Louisiana: New Orleans," *Baltimore Afro-American*, November 15, 1930, p. 18. Chicago black classical musician Theodore Charles Stone has a copy of the pageant script in his papers, suggesting that it was performed in Chicago in the early- or mid-1930s (he moved to Chicago in 1931): see Theodore Charles Stone Papers [Box 2, Folder 50], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

¹²⁶ Edward J. McCoo, *Ethiopia at the Bar of Justice*, in *Plays and Pageants from the Life of the Negro*, ed. Willis Richardson (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1990 [1930]), 356.

delineate the differences between the Romans' oppression of black Jews and nonblack Jews. W.P. Nowlin's short story "Simon of Cyrene: A Thought for Easter Sunday," which appeared in the *Defender* in March 1934 a few weeks after the article on Scott's Simon mural, depicted Simon navigating a predominantly non-black Jewish community in Jerusalem as a black African Jew. In the story, Simon's mother is a "Jewess of Cyrene," and his father is a general for Candace, the Ethiopian queen whose treasurer Philip the eunuch converted to Christianity, an episode later depicted in a diorama at the 1940 American Negro Exposition.¹²⁷ Eventually, the Romans lead Simon, the only black person mentioned in Jerusalem, to help Jesus bear the cross. The story conveyed that while Roman colonialism victimizes both Simon and the non-black Jews, the Romans force Simon to bear the cross because of the particular abjection of his blackness. Therefore, following the story's logic, the colonialism that rules Jerusalem's Jews and crucified a non-black Jesus is not analogous to the antiblackness that leads the Romans to select Simon.¹²⁸

In March 1936, the *Defender* published an essay by Dean H. M. Smith that further elaborated the specificity of black cross-bearing. A University of Chicago graduate who had had a fellowship to the university the previous year, Smith was the dean of the School of Religion at Bishop College, a black college in Marshall, Texas, a role in which he reportedly "had responsibility for the education of over 2,000 Negro preachers."¹²⁹ Later in the decade he became the first president of the Bronzeville's Chicago Baptist Institute, where he worked with the pastor of Pilgrim Baptist Church, J.C. Austin, the Institute's secretary.¹³⁰ Thus the essay was part of a

¹²⁷ W.P. Nowlin, "Simon of Cyrene: A Thought for Easter Sunday," *Chicago Defender*, 1934.

¹²⁸ For the distinction between antiblack racism and the broader category of colonialism, see Jared Sexton, "People-of-Color-Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery," *Social Text* 103, Vol. 48, No. 2, Summer 2010: 31-56.

¹²⁹ "Baptists Bring Dean H.M. Smith to Windy City," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 26, 1938: 19.

¹³⁰ <http://www.chicagobaptistinstituteintl.org/History.html>. Accessed 9.9.2018.

broader collaboration between Smith and Pilgrim, which was directing the *Defender's* religious coverage.

Smith began the essay with an anecdote about how a 25-year-old “semiskilled” black “workman,” whom racism had denied entry into the “local brickmason’s union” and confined to short-term unskilled odd jobs, told him that blacks’ Christian faith ““has hindered us more than helped us. We have been praying to Christ for years and on the whole we are in as bad a fix as ever.””¹³¹ Therefore, the man “came to [Smith] not for spiritual help...but help to find another job in the weary disheartening experience of the past few months.” Smith wrote that despite the past efforts of white abolitionists—“Thaddeus Stevens of Reconstruction days and John Brown who has made Harper’s Ferry a holy place”—the persistence of racism several decades after emancipation had caused the man to “lose faith not only in his white brother, but in his God as well.”

Smith’s essay suggested that the man’s problem evinced the problem of analogy undergirding black liberationist thought more generally. For Smith, the dream of black workers achieving freedom through organizing with white labor, as the “workman” had hoped, was based on the path of the longer Exodus narrative: from slavery to the Promised Land, and then, after the decline and fall of the Jewish kingdoms of Israel and Judah, to the messianic longing for the reestablishment of a sovereign kingdom in the Promised Land. E. Franklin Frazier called such a black workers’ Promised Land in Chicago the “City of Rebirth.” Yet Smith argued that when “[t]he Negro faces Christ and Christ faces the Negro,” Christ calls the black faithful to a different conception of labor: labor as non-sovereign cross-bearing. Smith quoted Matthew 16:24-25, in

¹³¹ Dean H. M. Smith, “‘Losses May Be Gains’ for ‘Race Facing Christ,’ Smith,” *Chicago Defender*, March 14, 1936: 15.

which Jesus says, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” For Smith, this emphasis on denying the self meant that what Jesus gives to those who take up the cross “are not the things for which the heart and soul of Israel have longed and dreamed down the dusty weary years of Messianic hope deferred.” The gifts are “not thrones in some fabulous Kingdom of exotic ease and unreal splendor but offering instead self-denial, a common cross, and a place in a procession which leads toward every man who joins it to Calvary.” Smith’s idea of Jewish messianism approximated the nationalist Zionism of a Theodor Herzl, yet as will be shown later, his formulation pointed toward how black Protestantism resonated, but not analogically, with more idiosyncratic streams of Jewish messianic thought. His main argument was against how various groups—he specifically discusses the Puritans but implies the black nationalisms that drew inspiration from Zionism such as Garveyism—had understood their own hopes in Jewish nationalist messianism’s image in ways that led them to embrace a worldly order of things based on sovereignty.

In his essay’s key passage, Smith tailored his critique of analogy to address black liberationist theologies:

After all are God the Father and Jesus the Christ to be thought of simply as means to an end? Are Father and Son simply weights on the scale of race struggle...? Convenient allies to have on your side. Is the only test and worth of God...racial prosperity—important as that is? If we answer yes to this question we face this devastating fact—the prejudice of the white world has robbed us of a Father—God, of an Elder Brother—Christ and given us in their place an earthly kingdom not unlike the Jewish dream of a Messianic glory that would rival Rome. Would we like Esau, hungry and cold, sell the glory of our birthright as sons and daughters of the living God for a mess of pottage? And mind you pottage has its place in life, but then so have birthrights.

Here Smith argued that white supremacy compelled many black Christians to view themselves as analogous to the Jews, and therefore as waging a normative fight for liberation in the world. This view led many blacks to want to conceive of Jesus as on their side in the fight for liberation, a

tendency epitomized by the notion of the black Jesus as prophet and teacher in the world, rather than as redeemer from the world. Smith even used a Hebrew Bible metaphor to unmake the analogy by referring to the Genesis story of Jacob (Israel) getting his older brother Esau to sell him his birthright as patriarch of God's covenantal people for a mess of pottage, suggestive of how undoing the analogy reconfigured, rather than rejected, the Afro-Protestant relationship to Judaism. Smith indicated that black people should not conceive of their taking up the cross as redemptive suffering in the sense of suffering that makes the way for liberation in the future. This notion of redemption depends on the idea that black people have a claim for the world to retribute.¹³² However, the birthright of Afro-Christians, for Smith, was precisely that they had no birthright to a Promised Land, and thus no sovereign claim to make. Their only claim was to be children of God through Christ. There was no economy of debt, obligation, and restitution through which they could make the state and civil society acknowledge their peoplehood. The birthright of those adopted into God's family was not one "the white world" was bound to respect, and could not be conflated with thwarted attempts to secure civil rights. Black people's taking up the "common cross" with Jesus in a spirit of unsovereign "self-denial" conveyed that redemptive black labor would not integrate blacks into the ways of the world, but would instead work against the world's reigning notions of selfhood and sovereignty.

A deeper investigation into Jean-Luc Marion's philosophy and theology reveals how the depiction of a black Simon bearing a white Jesus' cross at once represented the importance of blackness to the construction of the modern world, and the role of black people in the redemption from the world. Marion works in the philosophical discourse of phenomenology to craft an eschatological reinterpretation and extension of Western philosophy. In other words, he

¹³² Wilderson, "Afro-pessimism and the End of Redemption."

formulates what he calls “last philosophy,” the philosophy that finally fulfills philosophy’s claim to universality.¹³³ This eschatological “last philosophy” is the universality of “givenness”: the theory that all experience and consciousness proceeds from their being given to the human subject, rather than from the subject’s thinking or intention or the self’s being in the world. Put more succinctly, being is given. Marion describes this overwhelming, “saturated” universality—particularly as manifested in Christ’s Resurrection—as “white.”¹³⁴

In the Western tradition, blackness has generally figured as the ultimate nothingness, negativity/negation, opacity, and/or abjectness that paradoxically grounds whiteness as the glorious fulfillment of subjectivity, being, enlightenment, and spirit. Blackness therefore makes the whiteness of philosophy possible. Fred Moten shows that for Immanuel Kant, blackness was the supersensible that called the aesthetic judgment of the subject into being.¹³⁵ In a formulation resonant with Kant, Marion notes that the evocation of “pure depth from a black negativity” in Luc Piere’s abstract painting *Rubicon* shows how “the invisible, in the end, can produce the visible in order to inscribe there paradoxically what the painting cannot give to be seen: movement.”¹³⁶ For Marion, as for Western philosophy more generally, blackness names the invisibility, negativity, or nothingness that gives what otherwise cannot be given, that gives the aesthetic and contemplative orientations that ostensibly define the Western project, and that the Western project defines.

From here, turning to Marion’s discussion of Christ shows how Simon of Cyrene could be inserted into the subservient or accommodative role that recent critics have alleged. Whereas

¹³³ Marion, *In Excess*, 25-27, 20-21.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 68.

¹³⁵ Fred Moten, *Stolen Life*, 13.

¹³⁶ Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 9.

Rene Descartes argued that humans constitute themselves via their own thinking (*cogito ergo sum*: “I think, therefore I am”), for Marion, humans receive subjectivity and being as gifts; human being is given. Marion reinterprets the human subject as a “receiver” affected by a gift—“a subjectivity...entirely received from what it receives”—and thus revises Descartes’ formulation into “I am affected,” therefore I am.¹³⁷ For Marion, Christ is the ultimate gift to humans’ being and subjectivity, and the Revelation of the gift of Christ is best described as “whiteness.”¹³⁸ Without Christ’s death and resurrection revealing him to be the Word of God made flesh, the revelation of Jesus as the Christ would be “unbearable.”¹³⁹ Marion roots his interpretation in the New Testament, citing, for example, Jesus’ saying in John 16:12: “I still have many things to say to you, but you do not have the power to bear them.”¹⁴⁰ For Marion, whiteness best describes the unbearable quality of the revelation of Christ: “But what is to be borne? The visible and its excess, like the whiteness that absorbs the entire prism of colors and is excepted from the world of objects: ‘He was transformed before them, and his clothes became resplendent, excessively white [*leuka lian*], the likes of which no fuller on earth could bleach’ (Mark 9:3).”¹⁴¹ Christ’s whiteness is excessive because it overflows, or in Marion’s terminology, saturates the world, inviting “all flesh (to) see the salvation of God” (Luke 3:6).¹⁴² Thus, whiteness conveys the universality of Christ’s redemption. This whiteness of revelation has a particular liturgical and biblical temporal location. Believers receive the gift of the revelation in the Eucharist, the reception of the bread and wine that is Christ’s transubstantiated body and

¹³⁷ Marion, *Being Given*, 250-251.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 238.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 238-239.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 238.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 239-240.

blood.¹⁴³ In the Bible, “the Eucharist celebration” of the Last Supper before the Crucifixion is “where recognition takes place; for immediately after the breaking of the bread, not only did the disciples ‘recognize him’ and ‘at last their eyes were opened,’ (Luke 24:31),” but they also became able to correctly interpret Scripture.¹⁴⁴ Thus, theology’s whiteness—its recognition of and ability to interpret the universal truth of Christ—stems from the gift of the transubstantiated body and blood.¹⁴⁵

In contrast—but also congruence—to this, Chicago Afro-Protestantism posited that unlike the (implicitly non-black) Twelve Disciples at the Last Supper, the black faithful could bear the revelation of Christ *before* the Last Supper, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection. Thus, black believers bore the recognition of Christ despite not being present at the Last Supper. As Scott demonstrated in *The Flight into Egypt*, the Coptic Salome, whose witness to Jesus’ Lordship begins circa Jesus’ birth, inaugurates this paradigm. Similarly, in perhaps the most direct example of mid-twentieth century black Chicago gospel music’s allusions to the Twelve’s lapses of understanding and devotion, in his 1942 gospel repertory standard “If Jesus Had to Pray What About Me,” Chicago gospel singer Robert Anderson sang, “In the garden all alone, I can hear my savior moan / But his followers, they were weak, and they all went fast asleep.” The lyric, interpolating the Gospels, indicates that after the Last Supper, the Twelve left Jesus to despair by himself in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before the Crucifixion, and shortly before Judas’ betrayal and Peter’s denial epitomized their weakness. By contrast, a black believer could hear, and thus bear, the moaning of Christ, despite not being one of the Twelve. In

¹⁴³ To be clear, here the chapter’s analysis focuses on Marion’s emphasis on the Last Supper and the transubstantiated bread and wine, and is neither making an argument about nor concerned with doctrinal differences between Catholic and Protestant Communion.

¹⁴⁴ Marion, *God without Being*, 150.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

“Simon of Cyrene: A Thought for Easter Sunday,” W.P. Nowlin wrote that Simon “came to love” Jesus, talked with him personally, and “had carried back to Cyrene the marvelous story of Christ” before the event of the Passion.¹⁴⁶

In Ethiopianism, Simon demonstrated that because black believers could bear witness to Jesus’ messiahship *before* the Passion, they could bear the cross *to* the Crucifixion, and thereby facilitate the revelation of the gift of redemption to the fallen world. The title of the Simon mural that Scott painted for another viewing room at Stuart Mortuary, *Peace I Leave With You*, was based on a Bible verse often used by funeral homes and in eulogies, John 14:27: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”¹⁴⁷ In John, this is one of Jesus’ sayings preparing his disciples for the imminent Crucifixion. As the title of a mural of Simon bearing the cross, it underscored Simon’s bearing the gift before and to its general revelation. Simon’s bearing the cross signified what Marion calls “the lifting of the given”: a “suspending of the gift given, so that it would allow the process of its givenness, namely, the given character of the gift...to appear in its own mode, instead of crushing it in the fall from the given into a pure and simple found object.”¹⁴⁸ Viewed through the prism of givenness, Simon bears the cross neither for the Romans, nor even, in the strictest sense, for Jesus: he lifts high the given gift of redemption for all to see, thereby, in Scott’s words, “do[ing] his bit to bear the burdens of the world.” Nowlin’s *Defender* short story demonstrated this in how Simon’s love interest Elizabeth, an apocryphal non-black Jewish woman and niece of the high priest Caiaphas, experienced Simon’s labor as an

¹⁴⁶ W.P. Nowlin, “Simon of Cyrene: A Thought for Easter Sunday”

¹⁴⁷ Pinder, “Painting the Gospel Blues,” 90-91.

¹⁴⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Reason of the Gift*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 86.

unexpected gift. “Elizabeth gave up in despair” watching Jesus bear the cross by himself, but she “cried with joy when Simon arrived and the burden that Simon had lifted from the shoulders of the Savior seemed to lighten her own heavily pressed heart.”

Thus in notable ways the Afro-Protestant conception of Simon seemed to align with how Western philosophy’s understanding of how blackness can facilitate the fulfillment of white universality reflected the historical role of black slave labor in the creation of the modern world. The most prominent interwar depiction of Simon of Cyrene suggested this sentiment. In his acclaimed 1927 collection of sermon-poems *God’s Trombones*, a folk jewel of the Harlem Renaissance, James Weldon Johnson wrote some lines on Simon: “Then they laid hands on Simon / Black Simon, yes, Black Simon / They put the cross on Simon / And Simon bore the cross.”¹⁴⁹ Accompanying this poem, “Crucifixion,” in the book was an illustration by Scott’s rival Aaron Douglas. In it, unlike Scott’s stooped, all too human Simons, a Simon rendered in Douglas’ classic angular, opaque abstractionism bears the cross with proud heroism on an upward trajectory, undaunted by the piercing Roman spears about him. Together, particularly when contextualized with Johnson’s evocation of black Christian redemptive suffering in his earlier poem “O, Black and Unknown Bards,” Johnson and Douglas suggest the pathos of black people whose hard labor has borne the cross for world progress.¹⁵⁰ However, in contrast to this, by identifying cross-bearing with self-denial and the rejection of sovereignty, Dean H. M. Smith evinced redemptive black labor’s apocalypticism: its intimation that the interaction of black faith and Jesus’ whiteness, rather than securing the West’s fulfillment, actually heralds the end of the

¹⁴⁹ James Weldon Johnson, *God’s Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse, in Complete Poems* (New York: Penguin Books, 1928).

¹⁵⁰ James Weldon Johnson, “Oh Black and Unknown Bards,” *The Writings of James Weldon Johnson*.

world as constituted by sovereignty and Western notions of subjectivity, selfhood, and being. The black faithful were bearers of this “black negativity” in the flesh.¹⁵¹

Black negativity in the flesh was an aporia of annihilative nothingness in the midst of Western philosophical and theological conceptions of being and life.¹⁵² In other words, the black faithful stayed in what Saidiya Hartman and Frank Wilderson have called “the position of the unthought.”¹⁵³ Western philosophy and theology has articulated that, in the abstract, blackness-as-nothingness poses questions to, problematizes, and threatens being. But they have not thought that people bear this nothingness in a way that makes them a concomitant threat. This is because Western discourse, as it has developed from the ancient Greek philosophy of being (ontology), has been dominated by notions of being and nonbeing, which, as Frantz Fanon famously argued, cannot account for the fact of blackness.¹⁵⁴ Even when attempting to overcome the legacy of Greek ontology, the Western tradition has followed the Apostle Paul’s analogical formulation of Christ calling nonbeings *as if* they were beings (Romans 4:11), thereby extending the hegemony of being. This emphasis on being and life has contributed to the tendency to treat the emancipation of slaves within a slave society—the new birth of freedom—as if it were the abolition (death) of the slave society, which then enables considering former black slaves and their descendants as if they were white workers. In contrast to this discourse of being and life,

¹⁵¹ Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*.

¹⁵² My thinking here is influenced by Calvin L. Warren, *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018); and Jacob Taubes, “From the Adverb ‘Nothing’ to the Substantive ‘Nothing’: Deliberations on Heidegger’s Question Concerning Nothing,” in *From Cult to Culture: Fragments Toward a Critique of Historical Reason* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 124-136.

¹⁵³ Saidiya V. Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson III, “The Position of the Unthought,” *Qui Parle*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Spring/Summer 2003): 183-201.

¹⁵⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

cross-bearing's openness to the sanctity of death and nothingness was part of a broader Afro-Protestant vocation to pray, think, and live apocalyptically the eschatological death of slavery.

Martin Heidegger's denial of the annihilative capacity of nothingness provided the phenomenological basis for Marion's analysis of nothingness.¹⁵⁵ For Heidegger, anxiety about nothingness leads people to ponder not just their own being or this or that being, but the being of all beings, i.e., being as such: why is there being instead of nothing?¹⁵⁶ But this formulation meant that Heidegger denied that the nothing had destructive potential: the nothing is "neither an annihilation of beings nor does it spring from negation"; it "does not merely serve as the counterconcept of beings; rather, it originally belongs to their essential unfolding as such."¹⁵⁷ The nothing appears on the horizon, illuminating Being's border, but it is merely Being's vassal, not an antagonistic rival power.¹⁵⁸ (Similarly, in "Black Orpheus" Jean-Paul Sartre integrated Negritude's portent of black revolt into the unfolding of universal Being, thereby aligning it with his notion that being cannot be annihilated.)¹⁵⁹

By loosing phenomenology from Heidegger's focus on the individuated selfhood of human being,¹⁶⁰ Marion's theory of being as a gift from beyond the self enables him to move toward thinking that blackness-qua-nothingness is not limited to its service to what it makes possible. This leads him to think of blackness-qua-nothingness as more fundamentally threatening to beings than it is in Heidegger's theory. While discussing the religious devotion

¹⁵⁵ Marion, *Being Given*, 54.

¹⁵⁶ Martin Heidegger, "What Is Metaphysics?" *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 93-110: 100-103.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 103, 104.

¹⁵⁸ Here I'm thinking of Marion's notion of the "horizon of Being": see Marion, *God without Being*, 3, 37-38.

¹⁵⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Black Orpheus," trans. John MacCombie, *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Autumn, 1964-Winter, 1965): 13-52; Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992).

¹⁶⁰ Marion, *Being Given*, 260-261.

evoked when a spectator gazes at a painted religious icon that gazes back, Marion notes that the gazes always remain invisible because one cannot see pupils even while looking directly into them: they are “empty spaces” indicating that the gaze comes from a “black hole.”¹⁶¹ The effect of the pupils’ gaze, which “I look for or flee from, I want to capture or avoid, precisely because its unreal space fascinates me,” manifests the duality of the role of blackness in Christian painting.¹⁶² Through the blackness-qua-nothingness of the pupils, the paintings “effect two contradictory attractions” upon viewers: “the fascination of the gaze by the irresistible attraction of its weight of glory. But also terror in the face of the power that it exerts in the name of the darkness from which it arises.”¹⁶³ Thus via blackness, “glory threatens, even when it saves.”¹⁶⁴ There is terror because the darkness is not exhausted in, and is not property to, its role in giving an experience of glory.

But for Marion, humans whom the world treats as nonbeing bear no relation to the ability of blackness-qua-nothingness to reveal the threatening edge of salvation. Most directly, this stems from a conception of human beings and human nonbeings derived from the Apostle Paul. Marion considers 1 Corinthians 1:28, “And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are,” as signifying not the “destruction” of being in the world by nonbeings faithful in Christ, but rather Christ’s spiritual annulment of the world’s dividing people into beings and nonbeings.¹⁶⁵ Thus, faithful nonbeings do not convey salvation as threat in the way that the nothingness of pupils in devotional paintings does. Marion roots his interpretation in Paul’s formulation of the *as if*, in

¹⁶¹ Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 21.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 31.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid; on the terror of God’s incomprehensibility, see Marion, *In Excess*, 161-162.

¹⁶⁵ Marion, *God without Being*, 89.

which God calls nonbeings as if they were beings (Romans 4:11).¹⁶⁶ Paul's notion of beings and nonbeings was rooted conceptually in Greek ontology (philosophy of being) and Roman laws concerning slave manumission.¹⁶⁷ For Paul, a Christian was the spiritual equivalent of a slave who was not only emancipated, but also adopted into a household as a son and heir.¹⁶⁸ Marion notes that in his discussion of nonbeings in First Corinthians, Paul wrote of, and to, the "slaves" who made up a significant proportion of Corinth's Christians, and observes that Paul's Greek even turns "from masculine plural to neuter plural," signifying the slaves' ungendered disconnection from patrilineal lines of household belonging.¹⁶⁹ Paul states that in the spiritual annulment of worldly stratification, those who are slaves are free in Christ, and those who are free are slaves to Christ.

Marion uses the *as if* as the basis for a general theory of freedom, arguing that even in the most oppressed circumstances, freedom remains a possibility as long as one can act as if one is free.¹⁷⁰ For Marion, this is a "freedom without being," a freedom undetermined by whether, according to a rational interpretation of circumstances, it is or is not.¹⁷¹ For Marion, "not even the nothing in which Being announces itself" can determine this freedom.¹⁷² Thus, freedom without being is also freedom without nothingness. Other continental philosophers have similarly used Paul's quasi-analogical rhetorical formulas, the *as if* and the *as not* (which could be thought

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Orlando Patterson, *Freedom: Volume 1: Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* (New York: BasicBooks, 1991), 331, 339; Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 69, 141; Francis Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons: Legal Metaphors in the Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1984), 44-45, 68-71.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Marion, *God without Being*, 92. For slavery and ungendering, see Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics*, 1987.

¹⁷⁰ Jean-Luc Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 47-49.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 51.

¹⁷² Ibid.

of as an anti-analogical analogical formula) to reinvigorate radical political theory. For Giorgio Agamben, Paul announced that Jesus heralds the messianic revocation of every vocation, practice, identity, and social position; for Alain Badiou, Paul promulgated the transcending of identities into the universalist category of “God’s coworkers,” or in the King James Version’s language, “laborers together.”¹⁷³ (1 Corinthians 3:9) The recent *as if* commentary has built upon a long, unruly genealogy of Pauline thought. In conflicting ways, Kant, Hegel, Marx, and the liberal and Social Gospel theologians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries built upon Paul’s formulations to argue that realizing universal freedom necessarily involved a superseding of Judaic particularism.¹⁷⁴ The recent philosophers have echoed the way that earlier heirs of the long nineteenth century’s Pauline supercessionism, interwar leftist black social scientists, interpreted the Civil War and Reconstruction: the *as if* freed slaves into new realms of human possibility, perhaps leading to new political orientations. For Badiou, Paul’s universalism emphasized only the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, not the greater Easter Week narrative: “in Paul, there is certainly the Cross, but no path of the Cross. There is Calvary, but no ascent to Calvary,”¹⁷⁵ and therefore no Simon of Cyrene.

Contra this discourse, the Simon of interwar black religion was discordant with the world according to Paul’s Epistles. In black depictions of Simon, Simon did not fit the generic category

¹⁷³ Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 23; Alain Badiou, *St. Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 60. Agamben distances his interpretation from Badiou’s universalism, but his notion of the revocation of “every” vocation has its own universal valence.

¹⁷⁴ Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*; Jerrold Siegel, *Marx’s Fate: The Shape of a Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 118-119; Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, 47; Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Liberalism, and Modernity, 1900-1950* (2003); Gary Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and the Hegelian Spirit: The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2012); Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, ___), 217.

¹⁷⁵ Badiou, *St. Paul*, 67.

of slave; blacks could portray him as a household patriarch, or, as in Nowlin's story, a scion of the Ethiopian elite.¹⁷⁶ In black renderings, Simon was not made to bear the cross due to his position in the social order, or in reaction to an act of his own. Nor was Simon's cross-bearing perpetual, Sisyphean, or of unlimited duration. Nowlin wrote that in the Resurrection's aftermath, while the non-black twelve apostles die as martyrs, the newlywed "Simon and Elizabeth returned to Cyrene and established a church and taught there." Like Scott's painting the midwife Salome, Nowlin here demonstrated knowledge of Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. Since the Coptic Church holds that Mark the Evangelist, the author of the Gospel of Mark, was from Cyrene, Nowlin's implication here was that Mark was a student of Simon and Elizabeth. Additionally, Nowlin ended the story by mentioning that "Tradition says that Pontius Pilate"—the governor of the Roman colony of Judaea who adjudicated Jesus' trial—"an exile, died in the home of Simon and Elizabeth." Here Nowlin referenced Ethiopian Orthodox veneration of Pilate as a saint who repented for the Crucifixion, accepted Jesus as the Christ, and then suffered Roman persecution himself.¹⁷⁷ By writing "Tradition" in the singular and without a modifier, Nowlin claimed this tradition has his own, and that of the *Chicago Defender's* readership. The Afrodiasporic Christianity Nowlin depicted was incomprehensible, even heretical, to European Christendom and the Roman world and Greco-Roman terms at its foundation. Black redemption therefore would also not coincide with the terms of that foundation.

This also meant opposition to notions of subjectivity and selfhood that center in Western philosophy. Dean H. M. Smith argued that black cross-bearing in Simon's mode meant

¹⁷⁶ "One Place Where Herod's Soldiers Did Not Look," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 1929, 1932, 1939.

¹⁷⁷ Stefan Weninger, "Laha Maryam," *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica: He-N*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig (2007), 477; etc.

unsovereign “self-denial”; indeed, as Calvin Warren points out in his discussion of antebellum blacks described as “bearer[s]” of freedom papers, not only is there a distinction between bearing and possessing, but to be deemed a bearer may be to be deemed someone who cannot possess.¹⁷⁸ Interwar black Christianity’s embrace of “bearing” evinced its relation to the notion of rest. Gospel songs rooted in the “Dr. Watts” repertory often combined the “Must Jesus bear the cross alone” lyric with the congregational hymn lyrics on rest. Simon’s bearing the cross to Calvary paralleled and completed Salome’s bearing the infant Jesus during the Flight into Egypt.

The Simon discourse’s ambivalence concerning who or what enacted Simon’s bearing extended how Scott’s depiction of Salome and the Holy Family upset liberal contrasts between active subject and passive object and valorizations of the automotive self struggling for freedom. What was important was that Simon bears the cross. While the Gospel accounts may indicate the Romans choose Simon because he was from faraway Cyrene and thus was not a factor in Jerusalem’s or Judaea’s civil society, interwar Simon discourse did not identify his foreignness as the reason. The Crucifixion and Resurrection that follow the cross-bearing might facilitate the revocation of the status of slave or free, Jew or Greek, being or nonbeing; but the Romans’ oppression of Simon does not stem from such categories. It exists in what Marion calls a “black hole”: a void of reason, of legible self-authoring decision making, and of position in Paul’s Hellenistic schema of being and nonbeing.¹⁷⁹ Simon bears the cross because, in the Roman world, he is nothing—the black nothing that bears the everything that is given in the whiteness of Christ.

¹⁷⁸ Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 104. For a meditation on what blackness “bears,” see Fred Moten, *Black and Blur (consent not to be a single being)* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017).

¹⁷⁹ Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 21.

Yet in his nothingness, Simon “enfleshes” the dark terror that Marion’s spectator perceives in the gaze of the pupils in the devotional painting.¹⁸⁰ Phenomenology’s and black studies’ overlapping, but not shared, discourse on the body and the flesh reveals—perhaps even performs—how this fleshly terror might interact with Jesus. For Marion, while Christ epitomizes glory, this glory is paradoxically revealed in Jesus’ suffering “flesh.”¹⁸¹ Alexander Weheliye states that “If the body represents legal personhood qua self-possession, then the flesh designates those dimensions of human life cleaved by the working together of deprivation and deprivation.”¹⁸² Marion, like other philosophers in phenomenology and theorists in black studies, argues that “flesh” is paradoxical: it is both sublime in that it transcends the worldly enlightened rationality that orients categories of subjectivity, self-possession, sovereignty, and being; and abject in that the world denigrates and excludes it.¹⁸³ In this paradox, Marion argues, as one passes “from body to flesh,” the flesh in its suffering becomes the site of the reception of what is given: “The essential property of my flesh has to do with its suffering, its passivity, and its receptivity, which are not of the world, but without which nothing of the world would ever appear.”¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, flesh is the fixed site of the unbearable, without hope of analogical movement in the world of possibility: “To the contrary of the physical body, for which there is always an ‘*over-there*’ in the world in order to replace a perhaps unbearable *here*, my flesh fixes me definitely to its *here*, which becomes my *here*, the only one possible for me.”¹⁸⁵ Being

¹⁸⁰ For this and other verb forms of “flesh” in relation to black people (especially black women) and black (womanist) theology, see M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Fortress Press, 2010).

¹⁸¹ Marion, *Being Given*, 239.

¹⁸² Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 39.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 231-232, 239; Marion, *In Excess*, 82-103; Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*; Eric L. Santner, *The Royal Remains: The People’s Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

¹⁸⁴ Marion, *In Excess*, 88, 87.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

“absolved from all relation” in the world, flesh “only ever refers back to itself...without compromise, without anything like it or equal to it.”¹⁸⁶ For Marion, flesh is the site where being is received, thus ultimately where the self-possessive “body” is received. However, flesh is never analogous; thus according to Hortense Spillers’ seminal discussion of trans-Atlantic slavery turning African “body” into black “flesh,” black flesh was not absolved but rather “seared, divided, ripped-apart” from the coordinates of family and genealogy that orient the subject’s standing in the world.¹⁸⁷ As an heir of seared flesh (which is to say, an heir to nothing), rather than thinking in terms of a Popular Front coalitional politics or a Pauline subversion of ontology, Smith suggested the unique threat to sovereign ways of being posed by a black believer and Christ bearing, in their more-than-ontological difference, in the flesh, a “common cross” of “self-denial.”¹⁸⁸

Emphasizing this difference, Afro-Protestantism often embraced the notion of Jesus as excessively white. Black people made use of, but importantly modified, seemingly antiblack conceptions of the contrast between blackness and whiteness that were ready to hand in a world awash in antiblackness.¹⁸⁹ Like Marion, Afro-Protestantism emphasized Jesus’ transfiguration in Mark 9:3—in a Gospel that Nowlin indicated was Afrodiasporic: “And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them.” The black sacred music repertory abounds with references to the above as the power of the blood of Jesus to wash believers “white as snow”—perhaps most famously in the Chicago gospel tradition in Sallie

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 99-100.

¹⁸⁷ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 67.

¹⁸⁸ Smith, “‘Losses May Be Gains’ for Race Facing Christ”; K. Aarons, “No Selves to Abolish: Afropessimism, Anti-politics, and the End of the World,” Ill Will Editions, 2016, <https://illwilleditions.noblogs.org/files/2016/03/Aarons-No-selves-to-abolish-REVISED-READ.pdf>, accessed 5.14.2019; for paraontology, see Chandler, *X—The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought*, and Moten, “Blackness and Nothingness.”

¹⁸⁹ For ready to hand see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper, 2008).

Martin and Brother Joe May's duet version of "He'll Wash You Whiter." On Holy Saturday 1931, the *Chicago Defender* explained that the Easter egg's "color, that is, white, expresses the purity of our Lord's life on earth. Its shape is oblong and has neither beginning nor end, which designates the everlasting existence of God...the white of the egg represents the linens in which our Lord's body was wrapped in the tomb."¹⁹⁰ This whiteness was most visible, most exceedingly white, as garments on the skin of the predominantly women saints of the black sanctified church inspired by the Apocalypse of John: "And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints" (Revelation 19:8). Excessive whiteness visually and philosophically registered as diametrically opposed to blackness, but also shared "a common cross" with the idea of blackness as exorbitant of the boundaries of Being that frame the modern subject and/or self.¹⁹¹ Unlike Marion's notion of "freedom without being," this common cross suggested the subject's annihilation into nothingness rather than its fulfillment in being given access to the possible. In prose suggestive of Mark 9:3, Krista Thompson observes in *Shine*, her study of Afro-diasporic photography, that the interplay of "blackness and white light" produces "a form of excess" manifesting as a "transfiguration" that "induces a sublime state of visibility in which the subject is so hypervisible that it disappears from view."¹⁹² The prominent Afrofuturist mid-twentieth century gospel lyric "I'm going to walk that milky white way one of these days" envisioned the *eschaton* as an endlessness of black space and white light after the end of human possibility.

¹⁹⁰ "A Comparison of Egg with Jesus Christ," *Chicago Defender*, April 4, 1931: 17.

¹⁹¹ Smith; David Marriott, "On Decadence: *Bling Bling*"; Nahum Dimitri Chandler, *X: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

¹⁹² Krista Thompson, *Shine: The Visual Economy of Light in African Diasporic Aesthetic Practice* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), 14, 264.

This excessive whiteness apocalyptically represented what terrorized Marion's spectator gazing into the opaque pupils in the devotional painting: that glorification was inseparable from destruction. It resonated with strains of Christian and particularly Jewish religious thought that, contra the Greek philosophical heritage, affirmed nothingness as divine substance and conceived of the annihilation of Being as a real possibility.¹⁹³ The *Defender* article on the Easter egg stated, "while the egg looks very hard and cold," the chick that emerges when the egg hatches—when the white shell shatters—"represents our Lord's glorified body after He had risen from the tomb."¹⁹⁴ Thus, Jesus' whiteness resonated with what Ishmael, the narrator of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), calls "the whiteness of the whale": it is "at once...the very veil of the Christian's Deity; and yet...the intensifying agent in things the most appalling to mankind...and...stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation."¹⁹⁵ By Melville's time, whites had long conceived of the prospect of this annihilation as the "internal enemy," the idea that the drive for riches, power, conquest, and freedom fueling the expansion of slavery would eventually lead to the nation's destruction in slave rebellion, civil war, or both.¹⁹⁶ Thus, it is fitting that such a combination of glorification and annihilation powered Marian Anderson's version of a militant Civil War-era Negro spiritual lyric: "King Jesus rides a milk-white horse / no man can hinder me!"¹⁹⁷ Like the garments of the saints, this whiteness also derived from the

¹⁹³ Taubes, "From the Adverb 'Nothing' to the Substantive 'Nothing,'" 132-134; Martin Buber, *God and Magog: A Novel*, trans. Ludwig Lewisohn (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 230, 146; Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1962), 338.

¹⁹⁴ "A Comparison of Egg with Jesus Christ."

¹⁹⁵ Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*.

¹⁹⁶ Taylor, *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772-1832* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013); Michael J. Klarman, *The Founders' Coup: The Making of the United States Constitution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Gerald Horne, *The Counterrevolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2014); Gerald Horne, *Negro Comrades of the Crown: African Americans and the British Empire Fight the U.S. Before Emancipation* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2012).

¹⁹⁷ Marian Anderson, "Ride on King Jesus," *Spirituals*; "No Man Can Hinder Me," in William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison, eds., *Slave Songs of the United States* (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books,

19th chapter of the Apocalypse of John: the “white horse” upon which Jesus “doth judge and make war” (Revelation 19:11). The excessiveness of Jesus’ whiteness signified that what Jesus gives, he gives apocalyptically.

Civil War era apocalypticism and the destructive encounter between the black faithful and the Christ shaped one of the most intriguing passages in W.E.B. Du Bois’ 1935 tome *Black Reconstruction*. Du Bois posed a rhetorical question about encountering Christ in Chicago’s downtown Loop district: “Suppose on Michigan Avenue, between the lakes and hills of stone, and in the midst of hastening automobiles and jostling crowds, suddenly you see living and walking toward you, the Christ, with sunshine and sorrow on his face?”¹⁹⁸ Du Bois stated that in the modern day this image would seem “foolish...because no American now believes in his religion.”¹⁹⁹ And yet during the Civil War, Du Bois continued, the slaves fleeing their plantations in the “general strike” were inspired by their meeting Christ “in a wild orgy of religious frenzy,” which convinced them that the war was “the Apocalypse.”²⁰⁰ It was, for Du Bois, a general strike of redemptive black labor. With rhetoric anticipating aspects of Dean H. M. Smith’s essay of the following year, this passage accorded with many aspects of the discourse on cross-bearing. In the years since the Christmas 1918 edition of *The Crisis*, Du Bois seemed to have moved closer to Scott’s position. Yet contrary to Du Bois’ reference to modern secularization, black people *were* testifying to meeting Christ in Chicago—albeit usually south of the segregated Loop. And as Du Bois said of their enslaved forbears, meeting Christ inspired messianic and apocalyptic

orig. 1867), 10-11:11; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (Boston: Fields, Osgood & Co, 1870), 202; Robert E. Darden, *Nothing but Love in God’s Water: Volume 1: Black Sacred Music from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), 44.

¹⁹⁸ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 123-124.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 124.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*.

interactions with the wars engulfing the world. These interactions will be the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter Two

In the Whirlwind: Divine Violence, Foreign Missions, and Black Chicago Protestants' Exilic Internationalism

*Lord, I'm trying to break myself open...
This song of mine must become a weapon.
This song must become a whirlwind.*
-Terrance Hayes¹

*Look for me / lost in the whirlwind...
Trapped in this world of sin
Born as a ghetto child
Raised in this whirlwind
Look for me...*
-Tupac Shakur²

I. Introduction

While incarcerated for mail fraud in 1925 during the U.S. government's lengthy campaign against him that would end in his deportation and exile, Jamaican Pan-Africanist and black nationalist leader Marcus Garvey wrote his "First Message to the Negroes of the World from Atlanta Prison."³ The speech contained one of Garvey's most famous passages: "If I die in Atlanta...Look for me in the whirlwind or the storm, look for me all around you, for, with God's grace, I shall come and bring with me countless millions of black slaves who have died in America and the West Indies and the millions in Africa to aid you in the fight for Liberty, Freedom and Life."⁴ Sociologist E. Franklin Frazier was taken enough with what he called the passage's "apocalyptic message" to quote it in mid-1920s essays on Garvey published in *The Nation* and the National Urban League's journal *Opportunity*, remarking that "by this promise

¹ "III. Whirlwind," from Lawrence Brownlee, *Cycles of My Being*, composed by Tyshawn Sorey, lyrics by Terrance Hayes. Du Sable Museum of African American History, Chicago, IL, February 22, 2018.

² Makaveli (2pac), "Me and My Girlfriend," *The Don Killuminati: 7 Day Theory* (Death Row/Interscope, 1996).

³ Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁴ Marcus Garvey, "First Message to the Negroes of the World from Atlanta Prison," *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, Volumes I and II*, ed. Amy Jacques-Garvey (New York: Atheneum, 1971 [1923, 1925]), 237-239: 238.

Garvey raised himself above mortals and made himself the Redeemer of the black world.”⁵

Frazier likely had in mind Garvey’s conjuring of the messianic and apocalyptic whirlwind imagery scattered throughout the Bible. In particular, in the speech Garvey seems to compare himself to Elijah, a Hebrew prophet the Bible associates in various ways with heralding the messianic redemption and with divine violence against the unrighteous.⁶ In the Bible, Elijah ascends to heaven by a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:1).

In the *Nation* essay, Frazier also quoted Garvey's critique of black liberals from 1924--
"Some of us do harp on our constitutional rights, which sounds reasonable in the righteous interpretation thereof, but we are forgetting that righteousness is alien to the world and that sin and materialism now triumph"--and stated that "this is essentially what most Negroes believe in spite of the celebrated faith of the Negro in America."⁷ The epitaphs above align with Frazier's underscoring the importance of Garvey’s whirlwind imagery to the critique of the worldly suppositions of the mainstream black freedom struggle. The “whirlwind”—bequeathed to Tupac Shakur by his mother Afeni Shakur, whose contributions to the “New York 21” Black Panthers’ collective autobiography *Look for Me in the Whirlwind* included a letter written while she was incarcerated to her already-born children and to the in utero fetus that would become the rap icon—indicates the extent to which Garvey the messianic, apocalyptic seer wisps through the ruins of the black radical tradition.⁸ This apocalyptic Garvey resonated with and influenced black

⁵ E. Franklin Frazier, "Garvey: A Mass Leader," *The Nation*; E. Franklin Frazier, "The Garvey Movement," *Opportunity* Vol. 4, No. 47 (November 1926), 346-348: 347.

⁶ Compare Garvey’s speech with 1 Kings 18-19, 2 Kings 1, and 2 Kings 2:1. For Elijah and messianism, see John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Scriptures* (New York: Anchor Bible Reference Library, 1995), 113-122; Elizabeth Weber, "Elijah’s Futures," in Richard Rand, ed., *Futures of Jacques Derrida* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 201-218: 217-218; and Richard Bauckham, *The Jewish World around the New Testament* (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 4-38.

⁷ Frazier, "Garvey: A Mass Leader"

⁸ Kuwasi Balagoon, Joan Bird, Cetewayo, Robert Collier, Dharuba, Richard Harris, Ali Bey Hassan, Jamal, Abayama Katara, Kwando Kinshasa, Baba Odinga, Shaba Ogun Om, Curtis Powell, Afeni Shakur, Lumumba Shakur, and Clark

Protestantism in Chicago in the half-century following the First World War. In its political-theological engagement with the world, black Chicago Protestantism developed an exilic internationalism, a matrix of internationalist theologies and practices concerning black people's redemption from the world-as-antiblack and the world-as-fallen, the world of sin.

The preferential option for redemption from exile led black Protestants in Chicago to hold positions on world affairs discordant with the ideological and political coordinates that have generally set the terms for the study of mid-twentieth century African American internationalism: the antifascist Popular Front left, the World War II “Double Victory” or “Double V” campaign encouraging blacks to connect fighting fascism abroad to fighting racism at home, the United Nations and its human rights paradigm, and Cold War liberalism and its “Cold War civil rights” corollary promoting domestic racial reform as a foil to the Soviet Union's allegations of American racism.⁹ From the perspective of exilic internationalism, each of the above alignments erred by privileging an inclination toward incorporation into the frameworks of the fallen, antiblack world, rather than redemption from that world. Black Chicago Protestants instead meditated on how redemption might intersect with the violence

Squire, *Look for Me in the Whirlwind: The Collective Autobiography of the New York 21* (New York: Random House, 1971).

⁹ Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009); Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2003); Robin D.G. Kelley, “This Ain't Ethiopia, But It'll Do': African Americans and Spanish Civil War,” in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: the Free Press, 1994), 123-158; Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1997); Azza Salama Layton, *International Politics and Civil Rights Policies in the United States, 1941-1960* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Lauren Rebecca Sklaroff, *Black Culture and the New Deal: The Quest for Civil Rights in the Roosevelt Era* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Thomas L. Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2009); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004).

engulfing the middle of the century. They did this by envisioning a particular manifestation of the broader category of what Walter Benjamin termed divine violence, a manifestation of the only violence that could facilitate redemption from both the anti-black world and the world of sin.

Black Chicago's exilic internationalism was oriented by African American Christian mission organizing, especially missions to Africa. African American missions tended to propagate Western-centric notions of uplifting Africans from heathen backwardness to "civilization," particularly in the nineteenth century.¹⁰ However, while often exhibiting this civilizationism, Chicago missionary ideology's conception of two interconnected redemptions elaborated the Ethiopianist critique of Western conceptions of being in the world and subjectivity discussed in the previous chapter. Nahum Chandler argues that W.E.B. Du Bois's articulations of two-ness and in-betweenness, such as *The Souls of Black Folk's* first essay's opening phrase "Between me and the other world," did not just manifest hybridity or pluralism—i.e., that black Americans possess a dynamic, heterogeneous mixture of, say, African and European cultural traits.¹¹ More importantly, Chandler suggests, Du Bois posited blackness as "para-ontological," i.e., as irreducible to and "exorbitant" of Western philosophy's notions that for a human, being is constituted by the individual subject's conception of objects in the world (in the Enlightenment sense associated with the Cartesian "I think therefore I am" and the Kantian transcendental "I") and/or the individual self's experience of the world (in the phenomenological sense extending

¹⁰ James T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African American Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 96; Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (Cambridge, UK, New York, and Melbourne, AUS: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹¹ Nahum Dimitri Chandler, *X—The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

from Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger).¹² As shown in the previous chapter on Ethiopianism, Protestantism in black Chicago foreshadowed Black Studies' critical analyses of Western conceptions of being and of black nonbeing, i.e., the Western understanding that black being was not worthy of the respect of the state and civil society—indeed, was oxymoronic—except as being for non-black others.¹³ This notion effectively denied that black people had the capacity for subjectivity and selfhood, for worldliness.

Yet Black Chicago mission consciousness was not primarily concerned with the denial of black being in the world. Black missions' principle task was to convert black diasporans to Christianity. This conversion had a particular relationship to being in the world. Mechal Sobel observes that the principle difference between white conversion narratives and the conversion testimonials of African Americans who lived through emancipation, testimonials compiled in the 1920s in the collection *God Struck Me Dead*, was that the black testimonials recalled an epiphany, given by Christ, that the convert was not one being: in fact, there was “the little me in the big me” (and variations of this phrase).¹⁵ Sobel argues that this was the converts' realization that they were not only slaves lost in the world: their spiritual being (“little me”) had, in a West African sense, been inside their (non)being all along, albeit now understood in Afro-Christian and English terms.¹⁶ The above conversion formulation replaced the subjective “I” not with *one* of what in *Being Given* Jean-Luc Marion calls the “empirical me”—the “me” who is constituted (given) rather than the “I” who self-constitutes by thinking—but with *two* me's, two beings given, and thus two antagonistic relationships to being in the world, that of the black and that of

¹² Chandler, X—The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought; Moten, “Blackness and Nothingness.”

¹³ Spillers, “Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe”; Wilderson, “The Prison Slave as (Hegemony's) Silent Scandal.”

¹⁵ Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1979), xix-xx, 108-109.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, xx, 109.

the Christian.¹⁷ Correspondingly, the theological-intellectual project of Afro-Christian missions was an attempt to explore the relationship between the redemption of black people from the exile of the anti-black world order established by the slave trade and colonization, *and* the redemption of the world from the exile from God begun by the Fall of Adam and Eve.¹⁸

Thus, missionary ideology fostered an outlook on and participation in world affairs oriented by redemption(s) from exile rather than by being in diaspora. In the black diasporic paradigm, the black diaspora is, if not a state of black liberation, at least a triumph of heterodox, porous, fluid black being in the world, and the study of diaspora an epistemological transcendence of the ethnocentric essentialisms of prior generations.¹⁹ Therefore, specific intra-diasporic differences are of limited importance to the diasporic paradigm, because all diasporans are equally in diaspora, and diaspora has no goal, telos, or eschaton beyond its own being in the world.²⁰ The goal and purpose of diaspora is diaspora. By contrast, the exile paradigm's premium on redemption instead of being in the world led blacks to invest intra-racial difference with eschatological import, as they tried to assess who in the diaspora was more poised to help facilitate God's redemption(s) from exile.²¹ These assessments precipitated African American (as well as African) civilizationism toward Africa. Yet by the 1950s, as Africa decolonized while

¹⁷Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kolsky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 252-254.

¹⁸For exile as both theological (exile from God) and sociopolitical (e.g., the Babylonian Exile), see Arnold Eisen, "Exile," in Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr, eds., *20th Century Jewish Religious Thought: Original Essays on Critical Concepts, Movements, and Beliefs* (Philadelphia, PA: JPS, 2009), 219-225: 220.

¹⁹Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 435-438: 438; Stuart Hall, "What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" in *Black Popular Culture: A Project by Michele Wallace*, ed. Gina Dent (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1992), 21-33; Paul Gilroy, "The Dialectics of Diaspora Identification," in *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, ed. Les Back and John Solomos (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 490-502.

²⁰This formulation is influenced by the critique of the diaspora paradigm in Chandler, *X—The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought*, 13-15, 189 fn. 7; see also Fred Moten, "Black Op," *PMLA*, Vol. 23, No. 5, Special Topic: Comparative Racialization (Oct., 2008), 1743-1747.

²¹For the tension between exile and diaspora, see Eisen, "Exile," 223-224; and Edward W. Said, "The Mind of Winter," in Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 439-442.

Jim Crow remained intact and the local urban crisis deepened, black Chicagoans' understanding of their relation to broader horizons of redemption changed in critical ways. Understanding these changes requires conceiving of African American Christianity less as a manifestation of American religion, than as Ethiopianist Christians in Chicago and around the black diaspora thought of it: as a node of African Christianity exiled within the United States, the new epicenter of the fallen Western interregnum between Christianity's ancient African origins and its redeemed African future.²²

Black Chicagoans' exilic internationalism thereby fostered a different understanding of African American engagement with the world than that of diasporic and internationalist consciousness as they are often understood by scholars. In a rather subversive 1951 letter published in Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church's *Sunday School Informer* counterintuitively positioning President Harry Truman's and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's rhetoric against the logic of Cold War militarism, Ebenezer's Director of Christian Education, Simon Heard, argued that "armaments," "the thing that so many of us thought of as a blessing and god of our National protection and existence," should be "discarded" in order to edify "the immortal destiny of human souls, which the Master referred to as being worth more than all the world."²³ Heard's invocation of "being worth more than all the world," even better than "para-ontology," renders the Afro-Protestant conception of the relationship between black Christians and worldliness. His rejection of Cold War liberalism echoed Apostle Paul's notion that the Christian life involves eschewing "peace and safety," or what in 1952 the black Chicagoan Cold Warrior Edith

²² For the diaspora, see Ogbu Uke Kalu, "Experiencing Evangelism in Africa: An Africanist Perspective," in *The Collected Essays of Ogbu Uke Kalu, Volume 2: Christian Missions in Africa: Success, Ferment and Trauma* (Trenton, NJ and Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, Inc., 2010), 191-233: 202-213; and Andrew E. Barnes, *Global Christianity and the Black Atlantic: Tuskegee, Colonialism, and the Shaping of African Industrial Education* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 7-30.

²³ Simon E. Heard, "A Personal Letter," *Ebenezer Sunday School Informer*, November, 1951: 2. Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church Archives (hereafter EBMCA), Box 3, Folder 5. Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Culture, Carter G. Woodson Branch, Chicago Public Library (hereafter VHRC).

Sampson called "the search for security": the peace *of* safety provided by the U.S.'s nuclear arsenal, the peace that was the Cold War's reason for being.²⁴ At a time when the U.S. was fighting on the Korean peninsula, Heard did not indicate that American disarmament would in itself remove the possibility of violence with Communist powers. Rather, anti-Communist violence was not his paramount concern, since Afro-Christian (non)being was worth more than the world that American Cold Warriors sought to make safe for liberal capitalism.

Heard's formulation was rooted in three-plus decades of post-World War I black Chicago Protestant reflection on the meaning of violence for those whose being was not in the world, but worth more than all the world. Post-Great War missionary consciousness laid the groundwork for black Chicago Protestants' eschewing normative, worldly conceptions of violence, such as antifascist violence and Cold Warrior violence, in favor of divine violence. Black Chicago Protestants envisioned divine violence as the only category of violence that could at once redeem both the "little me" from the exile of the world of sin and the "big me" from the exile of the anti-black world. In such visions, an imminent cataclysm would reveal Jesus' redemption. Reading Marcus Garvey through Walter Benjamin enables the interpretation of these visions of divine violence. Several years after his deportation and exile from the United States, Garvey sketched a theology of violence in "Christ," Lesson No. 6 of 1937's "The Course of African Philosophy," a three week course he gave in Toronto to aspiring future leaders of his fading UNIA three years before his death. In a variation of the Ethiopianist conception of redemptive black labor discussed in the previous chapter, Garvey stated that "Man was redeemed by Christ to reach the perfect state as man, through his soul. The symbol of the Christ was the Cross...The black man has a greater claim to the Cross than all other men. If it is a symbol of Christ's triumph, then the

²⁴ Edith Sampson, "The Search for Security," 1952; for a phenomenological discussion of Paul on "peace and safety" see Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 72-75.

Negro should share in the triumph because Simon the Cyrenian bore the cross.”²⁵ A few sentences later, Garvey analyzed the Lord’s commandment, “Thou shall not kill”: “‘Thou shalt not kill’ does not refer to the flesh because flesh is matter, and matter passes from one stage to another. By change, it is always matter, but if the soul does wickedness and evil, it dies. It only lives when it is perfect in keeping with God’s goodness. Therefore, when it is said ‘Thou shall not kill,’ it means you must not kill the soul of man.”²⁶ This could at first read as sanctioning violence against the body. Yet at the beginning of the lesson, Garvey stated that Christ’s “special mission” was to “teach man how to lift himself back to God” by setting “a high spiritual example of how he should live.”²⁷ It would appear contradictory that black people could share in Christ’s triumph as Simon did if they committed even revolutionary violence against the body, as doing so would seemingly violate Christ’s example of how to live.

However, Walter Benjamin’s reflection on the same commandment in his 1921 essay “Critique of Violence,” his seminal theorization of divine violence, shows how to interpret Garvey beyond a justification of killing rooted in body-soul dualism: the commandment aims to prevent lethal violence that would kill the soul of the killer and offend God—which would be most lethal intentional violence.²⁸ Benjamin’s point anticipates, and helps clarify, Garvey’s: redemption is fundamentally about recreating a world where the soul is protected, or to phrase it more apocalyptically, ending the world that oppresses the soul. Thus, the connection between divine violence and redemption manifests in the world and amid world affairs, but cannot be reduced to worldly politics. The biblical scholarship of Benjamin’s and Garvey’s contemporary

²⁵ Marcus Garvey, *Message to the People: The Course of African Philosophy*, ed. Tony Martin (Dover, MA: The Majority Press, 1986), 57.

²⁶ Ibid, 58.

²⁷ Ibid, 50.

²⁸ Walter Benjamin, “Critique of Violence,” in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 277-300: 297-299; Ted A. Smith, *Weird John Brown: Divine Violence and the Limits of Ethics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 74-76.

Martin Buber showed as much. In his 1932 text *Kingship of God*, Buber indicated that the purpose of God's direct fighting against Israel's enemies, as depicted in the Book of Judges, is not to demonstrate God's might, wrath, or control—actually, God's direct rule over Israel is so militarily and socio-politically unsatisfactory for the Israelites that they eventually reject it in favor of a human monarchy.²⁹ Rather, when Israel faces existential threat, God fights to preserve the one kingdom organized not by human hierarchical authority but only by faith in God, that it may endure and be God's light unto the peoples.³⁰ God fights not to demonstrate God's being through a mighty act or to fulfill the worldly political hopes of faithful people, but only to maintain the peoplehood of faith.

In a related formulation, Benjamin indicated that one cannot claim a particular action or event as an example of divine violence, no matter how much it might align with one's political hopes. He stated that while “revolutionary violence, the highest manifestation of unalloyed violence by man, is possible...Less possible and also less urgent for humankind, however, is to decide when unalloyed violence has been realized in particular cases. For only mythical violence, not divine, will be recognizable as such with certainty.”³¹ Because people cannot recognize divine violence with certainty, divine violence cannot reveal in the world simply by being labeled or understood as divine violence, nor can humans intentionally engage in it.³²

From here, the Afro-Christian concept of divine violence departed from Benjamin. Benjamin argued that violence is revealed as divine only after the fact, if it contained an “expiating moment” that led to redemption.³³ This formulation annexed divine violence within the realm of being by determining it first according to whether or not it is, or more specifically,

²⁹ Martin Buber, *Kingship of God*, trans. Richard Scheimann (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1967).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Benjamin, “Critique of Violence,” 300.

³² Smith, *Weird John Brown*, 76.

³³ Benjamin, “Critique of Violence,” 297.

by whether or not it has happened. However, Afro-Christian faith in divine violence was not determined by the being of divine violence. Garvey stated in the Atlanta prison speech that if black people “look for me in the whirlwind,” then “with God’s grace, I shall come,” indicating that the look precedes, and perhaps even calls forth the redemption.³⁴ In this, he anticipated Fred Moten’s notion of blackness as an “insistent previousness,” but related this previousness to apocalypse.³⁵ Garvey’s apocalypticism also adumbrated the Roberta Martin Singers’ classic 1949 Chicago gospel song and theme song “Only a look at Jesus,” which proclaims that “just a look, one look will bring salvation.”³⁶ (This was a look of faith, not of sight—or as Second Corinthians says, “We live by faith, not by sight.”) As Garvey himself indicated, it was the same notion of the previousness of black faith according to which Simon of Cyrene bears Jesus’ cross *to the Crucifixion before* Jesus’ redemption is revealed to the world *via* the Crucifixion and Resurrection (see Chapter One).

Thus in mid-twentieth century Afro-Christianity, divine violence was the intimation of apocalypse, in the face of imminent violent catastrophe, that revealed the redemption. In defending the apocalyptic sight of the Hebrew prophets of the Babylonian Exile from Buber’s critique of postexilic apocalypticism, Jacob Taubes observed that “the apocalyptic seer confronts us with the challenge of whether we perceive the change, the new beginning in history, or whether we are blind to the new day that is actually dawning...It is out the spirit of this new set of alternatives”—the alternatives perceptible via apocalyptic disclosure—“that the apocalyptic

³⁴ Garvey, “First Message to the Negroes of the World from Atlanta Prison,” 238.

³⁵ Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

³⁶ Roberta Martin Singers, “Only a Look,” 1949.

congregations throughout history have gained an intense stimulus to action.”³⁸ Garvey’s speech indicated that redemption would hinge on whether blacks could discern it coming amid the maelstrom of the twentieth century’s violence.

Due to the inability of people to enact divine violence as subjects, in black Protestantism, faith in visions of divine violence sparked alternatives to the philosophical presumptions of both violent and nonviolent religious strains of humanist racial liberalism geared toward enabling black people to be as free subjects in the world unconstrained by the objectification of white supremacy. In his famous defense of nonviolent direct action, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., invoked Martin Buber’s “I and Thou” philosophy to challenge the objectification of black people: “Segregation, to use the terminology of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, substitutes an ‘I it’ relationship for an ‘I thou’ relationship and ends up relegating persons to the status of things.”³⁹ Indeed, Buber assailed apocalypticism for seeming to deny human agency in affecting history and thereby creating “an atmosphere of false objectivity where each sees the other no longer as a partner in his existence, but merely as an object among objects.”⁴⁰ Yet black Chicago Protestantism shed the yearning for the recognition of black subjectivity, of the “I,” and instead theologized from of the position of the two “me’s,” of the objects, the position in which Fred Moten in particular has located black radicalism.⁴¹ For Moten, blackness is “the resistance of the object” to being subjected to “subjectivity,” which “is defined by the subject’s possession of itself and its objects.”⁴² Correspondingly, divine violence

³⁸ Jacob Taubes, “Martin Buber and the Philosophy of History,” in Jacob Taubes, *From Cult to Culture: Fragments Toward a Critique of Historical Reason*, ed. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Amir Engel (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 10-27: 20.

³⁹ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”

⁴⁰ Martin Buber, “Prophecy, Apocalyptic, and the Historical Hour,” in *Pointing the Way*, ed. and trans. Maurice S. Friedman (New York: Schocken Books, 1957), 192-207: 205.

⁴¹ Moten, *In the Break*; Fred Moten, *Black and Blur* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017).

⁴² Moten, *In the Break*, 1.

cannot be enacted or possessed by anyone; even in the Bible, as Buber showed, God's warring is far from commensurate with God's capacity for power and action, or with Israel's hopes. God's biblical use of violence aligns with Apostle Paul's statement that God chose "the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are" (1 Corinthians 1:27-28).

Thus one could say, with Jean-Luc Marion's *God without Being* in mind, that divine violence is unconditioned by the interpretive "screen of being," is irreducible to being: it does not, first and foremost, have to be, in a manner that would make being determinative of divinity.⁴³ Divine violence, violence without agency, possession, or subjection, violence without being, was the violence of the object, of the "thingified" (to modify a Kingian term), of those who were exorbitant of being in the world and treated by the world as nonbeing. Having faith in divine violence meant having faith that what is not according to being would redeem from the fallenness of what is.

The five chapter sections that follow trace the development of black Chicago's exilic internationalism from the post-World War I heyday of Garveyism through the early Cold War. The first discusses the attempt of Samuel Wadiei Martin, the Nigerian founder of the Nigerian mission of black Chicago's Pilgrim Baptist Church, to progressively achieve the two redemptions via evangelization and education under colonialism beginning in the 1920s. The second shows how Pilgrim Baptist Church's pastor Rev. J.C. Austin, a leading Garveyite minister and supporter of African missions, attempted to use aviation to turn Pilgrim into a center of exilic internationalist praxis from the 1920s to the 1935-36 Italo-Ethiopian War, but struggled

⁴³ Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012 [1991]), 37-49.

against the practical and ideological constraints of black diasporic being in an antiblack world. Next, the chapter turns to how, in its meditations on the terror of Fascist Italy's onslaught against Ethiopia, Elder Lucy Smith's women-predominant All Nations Pentecostal Church theologized an apocalyptic divine violence in a manner unbound by diasporic being or a progressive concept of time. The chapter then limns the divergence of black Protestant conceptions of redemption from notions of anti-fascist and anti-totalitarian violence between the coming of the Second World War and the early Cold War, a divergence that left Chicago Afro-Protestant foreign mission ideology out of joint with militant Cold Warrior religion. The final section examines the ideological breadth and depth of this divergence, showing how the prospect of atomic war inspired a nonaligned global conception of redemption in the foreign mission ministry of J.C. Austin's chief rival in the black Baptist clergy, Chicago's Rev. Joseph H. Jackson, who is often dismissed as a conservative due to his later opposition to nonviolent direct action. As this section shows, before Martin Luther King, Jr. emerged as Jackson's main opponent in the black Baptist church in around 1960, the controversy over Jackson's presidency of the black National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., centered on his approach to evangelism and foreign missions, not civil rights. Through exilic internationalist intimations of divine violence, black Chicago Protestants connected their city to the warp and woof of world history, and formed their understandings of Chicago's relationship to the very idea of making progress in the world. These intimations thereby structured how their critique of progress evolved across the mid-twentieth century.

II. Of Two Redemptions: Rev. Samuel Wadie Martin and the Pilgrim Baptist Mission of Nigeria

Rev. Samuel Wadie Martin was a Nigerian who became an early minister of black Chicago's Pilgrim Baptist Church before returning to Nigeria in 1922 to found and run of Pilgrim's Nigeria

Mission in his home town of Issele Uku. Martin, known as Rev. Nwadie in Nigeria, exemplified how exilic internationalism fostered an interconnected but tense relationship between the two redemptions, the redemption from the anti-black world and from the world of sin. The structure and narrative of Martin's autobiography reveal the two-ness of his conception of redemption. Martin was born Olisemeke Kosinadi (commonly known by the name Olisemeke Nwadie, after his father) in 1875 or 1878 in Ogboli village in the southeast Nigerian town of Issele-Uku, about 250 miles east of Lagos, in what is now Nigeria's Delta State. In his autobiography's first major discussion of Christianity, Martin praised the Issele leadership of his youth and young adulthood for welcoming white British missionaries and allying with the Royal Niger Company in order to subdue indigenous revolts in the area that targeted Christian missions, and for agreeing with the British to end "the alleged" practice of human sacrifice.⁴⁵ Martin's praise reflected the exceptionally enthusiastic response to Christianity in Igboland in southeast Nigeria, as compared to the Yorubaland of the southwest and especially the Muslim Caliphate dominating northern Nigeria, in which the British practiced "indirect rule" and attempted to keep missions from operating to maintain stability.⁴⁶ His narrative tied this enthusiasm to the alternative colonialists and missionaries seemed to present to indigenous slavery. After his father died in 1890, young Olisemeke left Issele-Uku and generally made his way up the Niger River to Lokoja, a town at the bottom of northern Nigeria. He attended Catholic school in Oritsha, and then found employment as a servant to a black river boatman, a British army major, and finally a white American missionary, Rev. E. A. Martin, whom he would christen himself after. Narrating his itinerancy, he indicated that he was prepared to fight to prevent being enslaved, and juxtaposed

⁴⁵Samuel Wadie Martin, *The Autobiography of the Rev. Samuel Wadie Martin, Founder and President of the Pilgrim Baptist Mission of Nigeria, Inc., Mid-Western Nigeria* (Aba: International Press, 1965), 15-16; E.A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914* (London: Longmans, Cgreen and Co. Ltd, 1966), 114.

⁴⁶Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria*, 343-345.

the brutality of the boatman, whose casual use of potentially deadly force against him approached John Locke's definition of slavery as the right "to kill...a laborer," with the major who apparently treated him like a "son." His next "master," E.A. Martin, was based at the Sudan Interior Mission's Rumasha Freed Slaves' Home near Lokoja. There Olisemeke encountered "recaptives," Africans rescued from slave ships by the British and American navies, who had narrowly avoided a fate that, he earlier suggested, could easily have snatched him away as well. Thus, at this point, the narrative depicts Olisemeke's Christian conversion experience—one day while in E.A. Martin's service, he prayed, "Lord, help me to help my people," and "the Lord heard me and I accepted Jesus Christ as my Saviour"—as a spiritual and social redemption from indigenous culture, facilitated by Anglo-American benevolence. [Quote: "To know Christ is life. To not know Christ is death and hell."]

Likely sensing that Olisemeke had exceptional potential to help lead the development of indigenous Christianity, a central goal of the Sudan Interior Mission, the Kansas native E.A. Martin acceded to Olisemeke's wish to accompany him on his trip to America, and paid for Olisemeke to attend the Kansas Industrial and Educational Institute, a black school in Topeka modeled after Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute. In America, Olisemeke was baptized as Samuel Wadie Martin at Topeka Baptist Church in 1910. At the urging of other missionaries, after a stint in the U.S. military he took courses at the University of Chicago Divinity School and the Moody Bible Institute. While in Chicago, he joined a roving prayer band that had broken off from Olivet Baptist Church, one of the oldest black churches in Chicago. As the borders of segregation between black and non-black Chicago hardened, the band purchased the building of a synagogue on 33rd and Indiana for its house of worship in 1919 and established itself as Pilgrim Baptist Church in honor of its peripatetic history, which Martin epitomized. Martin was one of

Pilgrim's founding members, and was ordained there as an assistant minister. After 2 years at Pilgrim, Martin resolved to return to Africa and open a Pilgrim mission there. The all-black National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., purportedly the largest black organization in the world with over twenty thousand member churches and with which Pilgrim and its mission were affiliated, had agreed to pay for half of the mission's financial costs, but this never really went into effect in the mission's first couple of decades. Unlike most African American church missions in Africa, for at least its first two decades Pilgrim Mission operated virtually independent of direct African American organizational influence.

Martin's return to Nigeria was anchored in a deepening reckoning with imperialism in Africa. As Martin narrated his time in Chicago, the story, which early on hardly refers to anti-black racism at all and portrayed whites in largely benevolent terms, began to manifest a critique of imperialism. In a lecture he gave frequently, He gave a speech at an ethnic Swedish church in Chicago, "The Reconstruction of Africa," [briefly describe]. Martin's time in black America paved the way for his reconsideration of colonialism in Africa. Whereas as a member of Pilgrim's largely middle-class and respectable founding body, he conceived of black Chicago as a land of black progress, of "pleasures and palaces" such as Pilgrim's new edifice (64), upon his return to Nigeria he perceived its capital of Lagos as a "slum" in need of Christian redemption (66-67).

This shift in understanding had implications for his sense of being. He wrote that in "my first new African experience" upon disembarking at Lagos, he recalled his horror at watching one "head labourer" strike another man repeatedly with a whip. Martin asked the striker, "...Is [the whipped man] a beast or a human being? Do you not have a feeling?' His reply was, 'I do my work.' His reply raised a cold feeling in me. Nigerians were still looked upon as slaves." (65)

Whereas earlier in his autobiography, Martin depicted slavery as an indigenous affair that the Westerners sought to stop, he now conveyed that purportedly antislavery Western colonialism in fact caused even Africans to view Africans as “slaves,” as beasts rather than human beings. If Martin had early on discovered the fallenness of the non-Christian, now he depicted the fallenness of colonialism. The autobiography was therefore more than a *bildungsroman*; it not only charted the intellectual and spiritual trajectory of one relation to being, but also added another relation to being, the non-being of colonized blacks, to be held in correspondence with but also in tension with the former.

Martin opened the 1st Pilgrim Baptist School of Issele Uku on April 7th, 1922. Like many anticolonial African Christian leaders of his day, he saw Booker T. Washington's philosophy as a model for African education. Like William Edouard Scott, Martin was deeply marked by Midwestern Bookerism, having learned skilled manual labor techniques at the Kansas Industrial and Educational Institute. The seeming independence of the Institute's all-black teaching and administrative staff likely also made an impression on him.⁴⁷ Martin attempted to apply the examples of the Institute and of Chicago's Pilgrim to the Mission. A small house for the first group of converts to worship was built in 1924, but it was soon destroyed by colonial authorities (85). In the early years, the Mission attempted to educate in reading, writing, and arithmetic as well as manual agricultural labor amidst poverty, famine, and attacks by the colonial police upon the Mission specifically and more generally upon Issele-Uku, which the authorities thought was a rebellious town. Samuel Martin's wife Letticia, who he met and married in 1923, was central to this. The Martins exemplified how, as Nigerian historians of gender Chima J. Korieh and Gloria Chuku have shown, the transformations in the Nigerian economy and society during the era of

⁴⁷ Thomas C. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas, 1865-1915: A Social History* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 157.

British colonialism enabled men to exert greater patriarchal control over what had been women's agricultural spheres, yet also enabled women to create different opportunities for agricultural and social leadership.⁴⁸ In his autobiography, Samuel depicted Letticia as a respectable, modest household wife essentially in the Victorian terms promulgated by the British and Booker T. Washington (85-87). Yet he also described her as a hard "co-worker" whose initiative and expertise in grain cultivation, soap- and cloth-making; in Afro-Christian pedagogy (such as teaching Nigerian children American Negro spirituals); and in organizing Issele-Uku's Women's Missionary Union, which took "the most forward lead in the Church at Issele Uku in building, in social services, at the harvest, in missionary enterprises and in evangelism," was indispensable to the Mission (86-96). Samuel stated that "Although we have no children of our own...there is no town or village in Nigeria where we do not come in contact with boys and girls whom we have begotten in Christ." (87)

The Mission school blended Bookerism with a cooperative communitarianism likely influenced by indigenous cultural traditions. In contrast to theologian Nimi Woriboko's harnessing the indigenous communitarian religious traditions of a southeastern Nigerian people, the Kalabari of the Niger Delta, to construct an Africanist theology of work for a more just globalized economy, Martin did not view communitarianism as a model for a global economy in which black being could flourish.⁴⁹ Rather, for Martin, communitarian cooperation could provide Isseles refuge from the ravages of the anti-black global economy despite their nonbeing in the world. He recalled how colonial administrators complained that his school drew the local "big boys" away from doing "the normal free labour; for in those days people worked and carried the

⁴⁸ Chima J. Korie, *The Land Has Changed: History, Society, and Gender in Colonial Eastern Nigeria* (Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 2010); Gloria Chuku, *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation in Southeastern Nigeria, 1900-1960* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005).

⁴⁹ Nimi Woriboko, *The Depth and Destiny of Work: An African Theological Interpretation* (Trenton, NJ and Asmara, Eritrea: African World Press, 2008).

luggage of Government Officials with compulsion and without pay.” (85) Martin strove for a black labor that transcended colonial de facto slave labor and met the needs of local Isseles. He wrote that Issele-Uku was wracked by famine because “people looked down on manual labour and farm work and hoped to be fed by the earnings of the few relatives who had gone abroad to earn wages by way of salaries...to avert this evil notion,” the school hoped to model a version of work that “would demonstrate the true objective of education which is, ‘to become useful members of the community in which one lives.’” (90) For Martin, the economy of diasporic labor, in which migrant wage laborers abroad sent remittances back home, only reinforced colonial domination; indeed, the more successful and diasporically minded laborers abroad were, the worse was the effect on local Isseles. Martin practiced an alternative to the free agent wage labor model among his teaching staff through a communitarian cooperative economics. In 1943, a colonial education official inspecting the school reported that “so far none of the trained teachers have left for other work; this I think, is due to the co-operative attitude of the Manager, who takes the senior men into his confidence about the School finances.” (105)

Over the years, Martin made a few trips back to the United States to secure funds from American Baptists, indicating that he did not think of this aid as “evil” as he did remittances. This was likely partly because he could control these resources. But it was also because this aid was doubly redemptive: it both helped the Mission build the worldly infrastructure necessary for Nigeria’s self-governing postcolonial future, and allowed the Mission to expand its work of saving souls. In the early decades of the Mission, Martin had little contact with Pilgrim and little financial support from the then-under-resourced National Baptist Convention Foreign Mission Board, which also likely viewed the Mission as a backwater compared to those in Liberia, South Africa, and the Caribbean. His strongest American support at this stage in fact came from the

Southern Baptist Convention, U.S.A. (SBC), which was far more active in mission work in Nigeria than the NBC. Pilgrim Baptist Mission developed such a strong relationship with the SBC's local body, the Southern Baptist Convention of Nigeria, that Martin was "tempted" to accept its offer to "transfer the Mission and all its branches to the Southern Baptist." However, he wrote, "I was convinced that to do so would just make me a small man, their subordinate...how could we show our white co-workers that we could stand on our own?" (102) For Martin, to be a co-worker with white missionaries for the coming eschatological Kingdom of God was not to be what Du Bois called "co-workers in the kingdom of culture"—co-workers across racial lines in secular, worldly time and space—because the fact of anti-blackness meant such work could only perpetuate black subordination, despite the best humanist intentions and even praxis.⁵⁰

While Martin had to contend with the constraints of nonbeing in relation to white Christians, the particulars of his diasporic location as opposed to that of black American Baptists led to differences in their navigating the relationship between redemption from anti-blackness and from the Fall. The SBC-USA was formed out of the schism in the white American Baptist church over slavery, as an organization that condoned slavery. By the early- to mid-twentieth century, although much of its higher leadership nominally supported desegregation measures such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, and its foreign mission board was a bastion of racial moderation, albeit infused with civilizationist condescension, the SBC remained in many ways unreconstructed, and local SBC-USA preachers crafted anti-black theologies in defense of segregation.⁵¹ Thus for African American Baptists, aid from the SBC-USA could help redeem

⁵⁰ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*.

⁵¹ Jane Dailey, "Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after *Brown*," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 90, No. 1 (June, 2004), 119-144; Louis M. Duval, *Baptist Missions in Nigeria* (Richmond, VA: Educational Department, Foreign Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, 1928).

from the Fall, but not white supremacy. Gary, Indiana Afro-Baptist Rev. L.K. Jackson's outlook on foreign missions aligned with Martin's: within the NBC, he supported Martin's allies and opposed Martin's antagonists, and surely approved of the Nigerian's efforts.⁵² Yet, he sighed, it was "a shame" that the NBC was "stooping, bowing, bending and begging" the SBC for resources when the SBC "does not recognize the Negro as a human being with any rights, whatsoever, that the white man should respect."⁵³ However, unlike the African American Baptists, Martin only interacted with the SBC-USA's moderate mission leadership. Furthermore, the highly successful Southern Baptist expansion in Nigeria, particularly among the Yoruba of the southwest, was predominantly led by black West African missionaries.⁵⁴ Thus there would be little reason for Martin to perceive the SBC as a threat to Nigeria's postcolonial future as long as it did not lead to whites running Nigerian Christian institutions.

III. The Diasporic Limits of Liberationist Violence: Rev. J.C. Austin and Pilgrim Baptist Church

Three years after Samuel Martin left Pilgrim Baptist Church for Nigeria, Junius Ceasar Austin became Pilgrim's pastor. Born in New County Virginia in 1887 and educated at Virginia Seminary and College in Lynchburg and then Temple in Philadelphia, Austin had first pastored Pittsburgh's Ebenezer Baptist Church from 1915-1925 before moving to Pilgrim. Since for the time, Pilgrim had all but lost contact with Martin and the Issele Uku mission, Pilgrim's missionary ideology instead developed in relation to Garveyite aviation. It would be a quarter century before Austin and Martin met and assessed each other's work.

⁵² L.K. Jackson, "Seven Reasons Why Young, Talented, Trained, Christian Ministers Should Resist the Efforts of the 'Lift-Tricksters' and Support the Constitution of the National Baptist Convention," ca. 1957, 1-7. Claude A. Barnett Papers [hereafter CABP], Box 385, Folder 4. Chicago History Museum [hereafter CHM]. Viewable as part of online resource the Black Freedom Struggle in the 20th Century, Organizational Records and Personal Papers.

⁵³ Ibid, 2.

⁵⁴ Olufemi Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 30-32.

Austin's missionary ideology stemmed from his exilic understanding of the role of the church. "The management of the Church must be set to the tune of Christ's commission to the early disciples—"Occupy Until I Come,"" Austin told an audience at the black Wilberforce University's Tawawa School of Religion in 1935.⁵⁵ Therefore, departing from W.E.B. Du Bois' understanding of the black church as principally the hub of a black world of parallel institutions behind the veil of segregation, Austin insisted that the church was "Not a Social Club," "Not a School of Culture," "Not a Burial Society," "Not an Insurance Company," and "not a Merchandise Mart."⁵⁶ Rather, it was "a spiritual body," "a redemptive force," and "the evangelizing leaven unto the saving of all humanity."⁵⁷ Correspondingly, pastors' calling was to "sell...God's program of redemption to this misguided, confused, and lost world."⁵⁸ The remarks reflected Austin's long held commitment to evangelization, and particularly to missions in Africa. He was elected chairman of the National Baptist Convention's Foreign Mission Board in 1924, serving for seven years [footnote].⁵⁹ In 1926, a year after he moved from Pittsburgh's Ebenezer to Chicago's Pilgrim, both churches were among the five that gave \$1,000 or more to the Foreign Mission Board; and Ebenezer was reportedly "'slack in her donations because she is without a pastor,'" underscoring his centrality to Baptist missionary organizing.⁶⁰

However, African American missions were not mere variants of white missions and imperialism. By the 1920s, black American Christians often viewed their missions as anticolonial, criticized white mission's tendency to view indigenous Africans as barbaric, and

⁵⁵ J.C. Austin, "Church Management," *Negro Journal of Religion*, Vol. 1, No. 7 (August, 1935): 7, 11:7.

⁵⁶ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*; Austin, "Church Management," 7.

⁵⁷ Austin, "Church Management," 7.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Randall C. Burkett, "The Baptist Church in Years of Crisis: J.C. Austin and Pilgrim Baptist Church, 1926-1950," in *African American Religion: New Interpretive Essays in History and Culture*, ed. Timothy E. Fulop and Albert J. Raboteau (New York and London: Routledge, 1997: 311-40), 327.

⁶⁰ Edward A. Freeman, *The Epoch of Negro Baptists and the Foreign Mission Board* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 160.

complained of racism in white mission boards.⁶¹ Both moderate and radical strains of anti-colonial African Christianity tended to view African American Christianity as anticolonial, as did imperial powers (particularly Britain), who by the post-World War I years sought to limit black American missions to Africa, fearing that they brought with them dangerous Garveyite and Ethiopianist ideas. In 1926, another prominent but far smaller African American mission organization, the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Society, found that “the two most stubborn barriers to American Negro Missions in Colonial Africa were the Garvey Movement and the Pan-African Conference” because they “constitute a real fear among the powers of Europe.”⁶²

In 1920, a Bureau of Investigation agent reported that Austin abhorred Garveyism, but Ebenezer’s trustees and deacons forced him to allow a UNIA event at the church that attracted a crowd of 2,000; Austin did not attend, and shortly thereafter delivered a sermon “vehemently against Garvey.”⁶³ But Austin soon became one of Garvey’s most important supporters in the clergy; Garvey introduced Austin before his address at the 1922 Third International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World in Harlem. Austin’s other introducer, Rev. W. W. Brown of Metropolitan Baptist Church, perhaps Garvey’s most important Baptist support in Harlem as well as a major contributor to the Foreign Mission Board, told the audience, per a surveilling agent’s paraphrasing, of Austin’s “zeal in preaching the principles of the [UNIA] to the people of Pittsburgh at every opportunity.”⁶⁵ For his newfound Garveyism, Austin faced opposition both from anti-Garveyites within Ebenezer and other Baptist

⁶¹ Wilber Christian Harr, “The Negro as an American Protestant Missionary in Africa,” Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1945.

⁶² A.A. Graham, Annual Report of the Corresponding Secretary, Lott Carey Foreign Mission Society of U.S.A., 1925-1926, 27. CABP Box 387, Folder 6.

⁶³ Report by Bureau Agent H.J. Lenon, October 6, 1920, in Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume III: September 1920-August 1921* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1984), 41-44: 41-42.

⁶⁵ Report of Special Agent Andrew M. Battle, in Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume IV: September 1921-September 1922* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1985), 853-882: 880

preachers.⁶⁶ The following year, black socialist leader A. Philip Randolph's journal *The Messenger* disparaged Austin as a "fanatic over glory, praise and applause" who opportunistically "rode down Broadway with Garvey at the last convention. When he discovered there *was to be nothing in it for him*, he jumped out and looked for other worlds to conquer."⁶⁷ Indeed, throughout a ministry that spanned six decades, Austin displayed a talent for identifying and supporting controversial new political and cultural movements. In fact, while Garvey and Randolph were bitter rivals, Austin assisted both the UNIA and Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in the 1920s.⁶⁹

Beyond politicking and opportunism, Austin likely found Garveyism ideologically attractive because its use of Christian rhetoric and imagery resonated with his own attempts to think eschatologically about the relationship between the redemption of Africa from anti-blackness and the redemption of humanity from a world of sin. According to the UNIA newspaper *The Negro World's* paraphrase of his speech at the 1922 International Convention of Negro Peoples of the World in Harlem, Austin stated that whereas Moses "led a people who were willing to give up the fleshpots of Egypt and march in one solid phalanx," Garvey had "only a fragment of the great black race, with war within and war without."⁷⁰ Austin's statement conveyed the unsuitability of the Exodus paradigm for the black race. Martin Buber argued that "the exodus, recognized and proclaimed by the helper...as...the experience of common deliverance by the God, formerly so indefinite, [established] the bond for an association" between the Israelite tribes.⁷¹ For Austin, the secular dissension within the African diaspora

⁶⁷ Report by Bureau Agent H.J. Lenon, in Hill, ed., *Garvey and UNIA Papers, Vol. III, 44*, fn. 1.

⁶⁹ Burkett, "The Baptist Church in Years of Crisis."

⁷⁰ Report of Special Agent Andrew M. Battle, 881.

indicated that the wave of slave emancipation that roiled the black Atlantic in the nineteenth century was categorically unlike the God-given Exodus from slavery to freedom that forged the covenantal collective of Israel. Only missionaries bringing Christ and modernity would enable the race to make its own way to redemption and liberation. Austin called Garveyites to “turn the wheels of progress and light up the benighted land of Ethiopia [Africa] from whence come the pitiful cries of help.”⁷² He urged them to “send men and women to move among the people...and finally, you will have to stand by Marcus Garvey, who will push the electric button, and Africa will be won.”⁷³

Austin’s rhetoric indicated that technology would be crucial to Garvey’s final, eschatological victory over colonialism in Africa. Most importantly, the race had to develop the capacity for flight. Historically, African Americans had identified spiritual and magical technologies of flight with the transcendence of the world of slavery well before the development of modern aviation in the West.⁷⁴ These evocations of flight generally did not align with contingent escapes from slavery such as manumission and maroonage, which operated within the slave system and from which a return to slavery was very possible, or with resistance to slavery, which could be contained. Rather, they conjured enslaved persons’ final overcoming of slavery, either via return to Africa or in the afterlife. Furthermore, Jazz Age commentary often described pilots in religious terms, as prophets and messiahs in communion with the heavens, testing the limits of Creation.⁷⁵ Thus, modern flight technology enabled Pan-Africanists to translate

⁷² J.C. Austin, “Dr. Austin’s Speech,” in Hill, ed., *Garvey and UNIA Papers, Vol. IV*, 801-804: 802.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 803.

⁷⁴ Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Durham and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 117. See also Virginia Hamilton, *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales* (New York: Knopf, 2000). Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 209-210.

⁷⁵ Douglas Mongrel *Manhattan*, 434-435, 454.

spiritual-magical conceptions of flight from visions of personal or communal overcoming, to a gambit both more world-historical and more eschatological: the race could harness modern aviation to end its condition of exile once and for all.

Austin and two Garveyite pilots, Chicago migrant and Pilgrim attendee Bessie Coleman and Trinidadian-born parachutist-turned-pilot Hubert Julian, may have met at the 1922 Third International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World, the UNIA convention in Harlem. Julian arrived at the convention's opening day in a plane mounted with UNIA placards.⁷⁶ It appeared to the audience that Julian flew the plane over the conference's inaugural parade, leading Garvey to introduce Julian to the cheering crowd of 10,000 later that night.⁷⁷ In Austin's address to the convention, he declared that the "ship of the air manned by a blackman was a prophetic declaration of what the world may expect of us in the activities of the new day."⁷⁸ Later during the conference, Coleman appeared to promote and raise funds for her stunt exposition at New York's Corliss Field, further interesting the UNIA in black aviation.⁷⁹ A month after the conference, Julian parachuted from the wing of Bessie Coleman's airplane at around 1,500 to 2,000 feet above New York City.⁸⁰

For Austin and the emerging coterie of black pilots, the dream of Pan-Africanist aviation survived Garvey's 1923 arrest and the waning of the formal UNIA's organizational capacity. When black aviation's brightest star, Bessie Coleman, died tragically during a stunt over Georgia in 1926, she was honored by funerals in Jackson, Fla., Orlando, Fla., and Chicago's Pilgrim

⁷⁶ Jill D. Snider, "'Great Shadow in the Sky': The Airplane in the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 and the Development of African American Visions of Aviation, 1921-1926," in Dominick Pisano, ed., *The Airplane in American Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003) (105-146), 122.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Snider, "'Great Shadow in the Sky,'" 123.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Freyberg, *Bessie Coleman*, 87.

Baptist Church, her home church where Austin had just become the pastor earlier that year.⁸¹ At the Pilgrim funeral, Austin praised Coleman and castigated the race for not providing more support to her cause of black aviation before 5,000 mourners; an estimated 10,000 viewed Coleman's coffin as it lay in state in the city.⁸² Two years later, at a Pilgrim Sunday service, Austin and Hubert Julian attempted to raise funds for a stunt to cement Coleman in Bronzeville's memory and carry on her legacy: they would build a monument to her by her gravesite, and Julian would parachute out of a plane over the gravesite on Decoration Day.⁸³ To help persuade his congregation to contribute to the plan, Austin hung Julian's parachute in the church rafters, where it distracted congregants throughout the service.⁸⁴ Money was raised, and on Decoration Day, Austin and a crowd of thousands gathered at Bessie Coleman's gravesite for her monument's unveiling, featuring Hubert Julian's jump.⁸⁵ Austin addressed the crowd at the dedication ceremony, but Julian was unable to jump; instead, he arrived late in an army vehicle.⁸⁶ A *Chicago Defender* headline quipped, "Lieut. Julian flew in an army truck."⁸⁷

William Powell recalls that despite the sometimes embarrassing setbacks, Austin remained dedicated to black aviation:

"One would think that Julian's previous failures would cause Rev. Austin to curse Negro aviation...but, to Julian's surprise, Rev. Austin invited him in and gave him quite an inspiring lecture on going forward in this field. The minister even carried Julian to the airport in his car, rented an airplane for

⁸¹ "Brilliant Military Honors Accorded Fallen Aviatrix; Three Funerals Held," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 15, 1926, p. 1.

⁸² Evangeline Roberts, "Chicago Pays Parting Tribute to 'Brave Bessie' Coleman: Pioneer Aviatrix Starts Last Journey," *Chicago Defender*, May 15, 1926, p. 2.

⁸³ Powell, *Black Wings*, 48.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁸⁶ Powell recalls that Julian was delayed by difficulty in readying the parachute, so the pilot, citing a busy schedule, abandoned the attempt; the *Pittsburgh Courier* states that airport authorities told Julian that if he jumped he risked having his international flight license revoked. See Powell, *Black Wings*, 50, and "Monument to Bessie Coleman Unveiled in Chicago: Multitude Attends Service," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 9, 1928, p. A1.

⁸⁷ Powell, *Black Wings*, 50.

the afternoon, and had Julian fly him and his daughter over Chicago. He then had him carry up his deacon and a trustee, all to prove a Negro really could fly."⁸⁸

Persevering, Pilgrim became the home church of black aviation. In the 1930s, devout members of the Challenge Air Pilot's Association, part of a new generation of black fliers, made Pilgrim their place of worship, and the church sponsored the group's activities.⁸⁹ Foremost among these pilots was Pilgrim congregant John C. Robinson, who as the future leader of Ethiopia's air force in the Italo-Ethiopian war would come closest to fulfilling the aspirations of Garveyite aviation.

Despite the painful progress black flight seemed to have made over the previous decade-plus, the Italian Air Force's spectacular appearance at Chicago's Century of Progress International Exhibition that summer just miles from Robbins underscored how overwhelming the task of creating a black air force capable of fighting for black freedom remained. In mid-July 1933, General Italo Balbo, Mussolini's virulently Fascist minister of aviation, led a squadron of 24 Savoia-Marchetti SM.55X flying boats, or seaplanes, on a 48 hour flight from Rome to the.⁹⁰ The whites-only U.S. Army Air Force flew in a formation spelling *Italia*, accompanying the Italians as they [flew] past the largely-segregated fair grounds and landed in Lake Michigan.⁹¹ Mayor Edward J. Kelly proclaimed the day "Italo Balbo Day" in front of a crowd of 100,000 gathered around Navy Pier, and rechristened Seventh Ave as Balbo Avenue.⁹²

⁸⁸ Ibid., 150.

⁸⁹ Phillip Thomas Tucker, *Father of the Tuskegee Airmen: John C. Robinson* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2012), 60.

⁹⁰ Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York and London: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013), 58; Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 19.

⁹¹ Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 65.

⁹² Von Hardesty, *Black Wings: Courageous Stories of African Americans in Aviation and Space History* (Smithsonian, 2008), 31, 33; Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 65; Reed, *The Depression Comes to the South Side*, 127.

The *Chicago Defender* joined the American chorus of praise for Balbo's pilots.⁹³ For the *Defender*, the Fascist flight gave African Americans a special lesson in the prerequisites of group progress. Columnist Jack Ellis noted that since "[i]t took a long time for them to learn how to fly and plenty of nerve to make that trip," the flight taught blacks that "to succeed, we must be prepared."⁹⁴ Declaring that "General Balbo and his gallant men have done something marvelous," reporter Nahum Brascher presented his encounter with the Italian pilots as a spiritually enlightening experience.⁹⁵ As Brascher "shook hands with several" of Balbo's men on fairgrounds, their "intelligence without affectation" reminded him of lines from a poem by 18th century English hymnist Isaac Watts: "If I could reach from pole to pole, / Or hold the ocean in my span, / I would still be measured by my soul; / the mind's the standard of the man."⁹⁶ Brascher wrote that the investment of money, mind, and soul underlying Italy's aerial achievement showed African Americans that "we cannot fly oceans...by...being satisfied with the glamour of life rather than the glow of a sincere and striving soul."⁹⁷

The *Defender's* praise for the spiritual quality of Balbo's men echoed the Fascists' own longstanding association of aviation with the spiritual strength necessary for effective governance.⁹⁸ But this differed from literary scholar Mark Christian Thompson's depiction of a Great Depression-era profusion of "black literary fascism," black adoption of fascism's illiberalism, hermetic racial separatism, bellicose critiques of Judeo-Christian religion, and

⁹³ "World's Greatest Pilots in Big Air Show," *Chicago Defender*, July 15, 1933.

⁹⁴ Jack Ellis, "The Orchestras," *Chicago Defender*, July 22, 1933.

⁹⁵ Nahum Daniel Brascher, "Random Thoughts," *Chicago Defender*, July 22, 1933, p. 10.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Robert Wohl, *The Spectacle of Flight: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1920-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 51.

opposition to British culture and politics.⁹⁹ Rather, the praise aligned with the cultural pluralism of the music criticism of W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke. In particular, many *Defender* readers (and those listening to it being read aloud, as was common practice) would have recognized the Isaac Watts referenced in Brascher's column as the namesake of the "Dr. Watts" hymn singing long prevalent in African American churches. Dr. Watts hymn singing imbued the eighteenth century hymns of Watts, Charles Wesley, and other English theologians in Africa-derived musical aesthetics and communal practices.¹⁰⁰ For Brascher, Fascist aviation's spiritual enlightenment represented the fulfillment, rather than the refutation, of mainstream Anglo-American and Afro-American religious traditions and aspirations.

The oncoming of the Italo-Ethiopian War in 1935 quickly change black Chicago's discourse on Italian Fascism. [Hubert Julian and John C. Robinson became the only two African Americans from the Western Hemisphere known to have fought in Ethiopia's defense—Robinson in particular to great renown. This was on some level a triumph of the black aviation dreams of Bessie Coleman and J.C. Austin that Pilgrim had nurtured. However, Brascher's formulation anticipated the difficulty African American Protestants had in identifying and practicing the black capacity for oppositional violence in a manner that could redeem the world from the exilic condition caused by humanity's Fall from Eden and the black diaspora from Africa's world-historical fall without quixotically tethering the cause of black liberation to the anti-blackness shared by the era's fascist, non-fascist, and anti-fascist political movements. Early in Richard Wright's 1940 novel of black Chicago, *Native Son*, protagonist Bigger Thomas remarks that "Maybe [whites are] right in not wanting us to fly...Cause if I took a plane up I'd

⁹⁹ Mark Christian Thompson, *Black Fascisms: African American Literature and Culture between the Wars* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2007).

¹⁰⁰ William T. Dargan, *Lining Out the Word: Dr. Watts Hymn Singing in the Music of Black Americans* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2006).

take a couple of bombs along and drop ‘em as sure as hell...’’¹⁰¹ For Bigger, black peoples’ segregation from flying epitomizes the black incapacity for militant action. Wright commented that Bigger’s longing for action contained the potential for both reactionary and revolutionary violence.¹⁰² After Bigger commits two murders, he feels that “Never had he had the chance to live out the consequences of his actions; never had his will been so free as in this night and day of fear and murder and flight.”¹⁰³ Wright’s line of thinking, subsequently deconstructed by Frantz Fanon and elaborated by Harold Cruse, suggested that acts of violent self-making were possible for black people, if those acts were properly and collectively aimed at the goal of black liberation, *and* shorn of both fascistic tendencies and the ultimately debilitating tendrils of non-black progressive ideologies such as New Deal liberalism and Communism.¹⁰⁴

A related obstacle to redemptive black oppositional militarism was the difficulty of practicing exilic politics while in diaspora. In *Black Skin/White Masks*, Fanon referenced the Italo-Ethiopian war while reflecting on the fleshpots of being black in diaspora, i.e., the interconnected promises and constraints of being in governing formations either belonging or beholden to the West. “The Negro race has been scattered, and can no longer claim unity. When Il Duce’s troops invaded Ethiopia, a movement of solidarity rose among men of color. But, though one or two airplanes”—Hubert Julian and John C. Robinson—“were sent from America to the invaded country, not a single black man made any practical move. The Negro has a country, he takes his place in a Union or a Commonwealth.”¹⁰⁵ For Fanon, diaspora prevented practical moves—self-making action—because it encouraged a dialectical disposition.

¹⁰¹ Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993 [1940]), 17.

¹⁰² Richard Wright, “How ‘Bigger’ Was Born,” in Wright, *Native Son*, 445.

¹⁰³ Wright, *Native Son*, 239.

¹⁰⁴ Wright, *Native Son*; Wright, “Introduction,” in Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*; Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin/White Masks*; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*; Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*.

¹⁰⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin/White Masks*, 173.

Diasporans sought recognition from the West: from their host nations, the imperial metropole, the League of Nations (or later the United Nations), and/or from white people interpersonally. Thus, diaspora induced backsliding away from “the zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval”—self-making action unbound by recognition—“can be born.”¹⁰⁶

Black Chicago’s midsummer 1935 debate over how to ballast Ethiopia anticipated Fanon’s reading of how diaspora suppressed the race’s capacity for action. The debate played out within the *Chicago Defender’s* pages. J.C. Austin conceived of the war within the paradigm of the inextricable relationship between the redemption of humanity from Adam’s Fall and the redemption of the African diaspora from anti-black subjugation. Thus for him, maintaining the sovereignty of the ancient Afro-Christian nation, the Biblical fountainhead of eschatological black redemption, epitomized the missionary calling. The *Defender* recounted how, speaking in front of a crowd of 1,100 at an August 4th meeting at Pilgrim about the crisis, Austin quoted from the Book of Acts’ depiction of the apostle Philip’s conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, which precipitates Ethiopia’s adoption of Christianity: “Arise and go toward the South...Join thyself to the chariot of the Ethiopian.”¹⁰⁷ Stating that “the distance between you and Ethiopia is the distance between your consciousness [and] your color,” he declared that “I am willing to go to Ethiopia today and aid her in any way I can to carry out my conviction that the Negro everywhere is blood of her blood.”¹⁰⁸ Austin professed a total solidarity with Ethiopia, in faith, mind, skin, body, and blood. Pilgrim’s own John C. Robinson realized this solidarity in practice,

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 10; Michelle M. Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004); Patrice Douglas, “At the Intersections of Assemblages: Fanon, Capecia, and the Unmaking of the Genre Subject,” in Paul Khalil Saucier and Tryon P. Woods, eds., *Conceptual Aphasia in Black: Displacing Racial Formation* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2016).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.
¹⁰⁸ Dr. Austin in Offer to Go to Ethiopia,” *Chicago Defender*, Aug 10, 1935: 4.

having already departed to command Selassie's air force. While the article printed only a few of Austin's "vivid remarks," elsewhere in the speech he likely hoped others wanted to travel to the imperiled country.¹⁰⁹ Importantly, the meeting took place before the U.S. government enacted measures specifically to keep Americans from serving in the war. Disagreeing with Austin, *Defender* publisher Robert S. Abbott gave a statement at the meeting titled "Why Go to Ethiopia?" that, the article described, "hit the nail on the head as to why American Negroes would do better fighting their battle at home."¹¹⁰ Abbott and his paper's foreign news editor, Dan Burley, argued that Ethiopia had enough manpower, so black Americans planning to help should send, as Burley put it, "Bullets, not Bibles."¹¹¹ The dispute appeared subdued in the *Defender*'s rendering because, since Austin's assistant minister R.C. Keller served as religious editor, it was essentially among the paper's leadership.

The Pilgrim faction used the next week's issue to clarify the stance of "Chicago churchdom," back off from Austin's rhetoric, and present a more united front with Abbott: "The church seeking the common good of its constituency with other agencies for Race welfare recorded the opinion that the battle of our people for social and economic justice in America should be of so vast a concern that recruiting for the war abroad is a thing of folly. Practical proxying with funds is the best recruiting."¹¹² Thus, to conciliate the secular "Race welfare" organizations that privileged the domestic struggle for equality over worldwide black redemption, mission-oriented churches took up "Bullets, not Bibles" as the slogan for a fundraising campaign in which "the churches whose mission contributions to Africa are more than \$200 yearly should send \$100 each and forward it to Emperor Selassie for the purchase of

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² "Church Takes Stand for Ethiopia in Sunday Meeting," *Chicago Defender*, Aug 17, 1935: 18.

ammunition.”¹¹³ The campaign hoped that “5,000 church organizations” would fund this “Missionary defense of Ethiopia.”¹¹⁴ It is not clear how many churches ultimately participated in the effort, though Pilgrim was reportedly one of the first, and reprinted its \$100 check to Selassie in the *Defender* to promote the campaign. A few months later, the paper published a letter Robinson wrote to Austin relating Selassie’s gratitude to Pilgrim.

While "Bullets, not Bibles" can appear at first to have anticipated later expressions of black nationalist militancy such as Malcolm X's speech "The Ballot or the Bullet," it was in fact a significant departure from Pilgrim's variant of Pan-Africanist religion and a major concession to the ontology of normative African American progressive politics, i.e., to the fight to be in the world as free subjects and equal citizens with white Americans. As Fascist Italy overran the biblical seat of Afro-Christianity and historical redoubt of African sovereignty seemingly with the assent of the very Western metropolises that black diasporans struggled to be in and with, the diasporic limits of liberationist violence compelled black Christians to think and pray differently on what form of violence might make way for the two redemptions.

III. Fascist Terror and Divine Violence: Elder Lucy Smith and All Nations Pentecostal Church

Missionary and secular liberationist dreams of black flight were shaped by the quest for manliness, despite Bessie Coleman being the most celebrated black flier before John C. Robinson’s emergence. J.C. Austin connected the redemption of Africa to the cultivation of “manhood.” In *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas contrasts his dreams of flight with an Afro-Christian culture he perceives as a quaint, matrifocal, feminizing acquiescence to ghetto enclosure.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Wright, *Native Son*, 114, 240.

Wright argued that Bigger Thomases worldwide marched toward Communism or Fascism because they lived in a secularized “world in which God no longer existed as a daily focal point of men’s lives’ a world in which men could no longer retain their faith in an ultimate hereafter,” a point echoed by Theodor Adorno (with regard to fascism).¹¹⁶ Distancing himself from “his mother’s religion,” Bigger “did not want to sit on a bench and sing.”¹¹⁷ Rather, “It was when he read the newspapers or magazines, went to the movies or walked along the streets with crowds, that he felt what he wanted: to merge himself with others and be a part of this world, to lose himself in it so he could find himself, to be allowed a chance to live like others, even though he was black.”¹¹⁸ Mass culture’s hailing Bigger as an aspiring manly enlightenment subject seeking to live like other subjects, a central aim in liberal articulations of black freedom, also stokes his capacity for fascism.¹¹⁹

Ernst Bloch, like his Frankfurt School colleagues Adorno and Max Horkheimer, argued that fascist anti-Semitism was about vengefully destroying and then taking the place of the Jews’ supposed economic hegemony, a formulation resonant with Wright’s trepidation regarding Bigger’s dreams of militarily overthrowing white supremacy and making a place for himself in mass culture.¹²⁰ In “Beautiful Mask, Ku Klux Klan, The Glossy Magazines,” a fascinating section of his epic *The Principle of Hope*, Bloch posited that the Klan’s violence during Reconstruction and after the Great War presaged Hitler’s Night of the Long Knives and

¹¹⁶ Wright, “How ‘Bigger’ Was Born,” 446; Theodor Adorno, “Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda,” in Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 132-157: 144.

¹¹⁷ Wright, *Native Son*, 240.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 240.

¹¹⁹ This formulation is influenced by William Mazzarella, *The Mana of Mass Society* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 119.

¹²⁰ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope, Volume One*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice & Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1986), 31; Theodor W. Adorno & Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 137-138; Wright, *Native Son*.

Kristallnacht.¹²¹ Ultimately, he argued in another book, fascism could not be negated through oppositional violence or even policies that reduced the socioeconomic hardship and sense of lack that fostered hateful resentment, for such action “offers the human soul nothing...without the music we ought to hear” in a socialist utopia.¹²² In “Beautiful Mask,” Bloch invoked this music, excerpting a lyric by second-generation Jewish American brothers George and Ira Gershwin’s song “Summertime,” the first aria in George Gershwin’s 1935 opera of African American Gullah folk life, *Porgy and Bess*.¹²³ Bloch’s point was that “Summertime,” sung in the opera by a black mother, Clara, to her child, represented the ultimate challenge to fascism, which was not on the battlefield, the picket line, or in public policy, but in the soul.

Bloch’s invocation of “Summertime” also challenged the_. Rather than attributing the lyric specifically to “Summertime,” the Gershwins, or *Porgy and Bess*, which would underscore the piece as a manifestation of black-Jewish cross-cultural antifascism, Bloch refers to the lyric’s source as simply a “jazz song.”¹²⁴ The non-attribution left Bloch’s analogy of anti-black and anti-Jewish violence tantalizingly unconsummated, because he was not in fact making such an analogy. For Bloch, racist violence was fascistic due of its desire for vengeful replacement. Thus, the Reconstruction-era Klan’s violence, *qua* fascist violence, was directed not at black people but at white Republicans, the ostensible apostates of white supremacy. The Klan advertisement Bloch excerpted to support his analysis called for the “Followers of Brutus” to “wash your hands in tyrants’ blood; and gaze upon the list of condemned traitors,” language drawing from the lineage of various insurrectionary American white supremacist invocations of Caesar assassin Brutus’ legendary quote, “*sic semper tyrannis*,” most infamously by John Wilkes Booth, who

¹²¹ Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 345-349.

¹²² Ernst Bloch, *Man on His Own: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, 37.

¹²³ Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 345.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

claimed to have shouted the phrase after shooting Lincoln.¹²⁵ The advertisement defined the Klan's task as the destruction and replacement of the amalgamationist, carpetbagger white Republicans, not their hapless colored wards. Bloch's argument subtly aligned with Horkeimer and Adorno's distinction between anti-blackness and anti-Jewishness: "the blacks must be kept in their place, but the Jews are to be wiped from the face of the earth."¹²⁶ Thus, as Fanon averred, the black struggle against anti-blackness was not a struggle for being in the world, not an ontological struggle as the Jewish fight to survive Nazism was.¹²⁷ Rendering the two struggles as analogously concerned with being in the world would place black people in mass culture's petit bourgeois liberalism-fascism continuum, which stirred Bigger Thomas and in which redemption from anti-blackness could not be realized (and in which black politics was prone to oscillate between Zionism and, Horkeimer and Adorno observed, anti-Semitism). Thus, "Summertime" resonated for Bloch due to the black mother's lullaby conveying that a final, eschatological triumph over all racisms meant, to paraphrase one of Afro-Protestantism's favored Hebrew Bible verses, Zechariah 4:6, not the negation of fascism by might or by public policy right, but the negation of the anti-black world by spirit.

Black Chicago exuded such spirit during fascism's ascent. Bloch wrote that "the masks of the Ku Klux Klan were the first fascist uniform," donned by members who called themselves names such as "Clan-wolves," "the Great Dragon," and "Great Cyclops."¹²⁸ By contrast, one of the countless black Chicago youth clubs of the 1930s named itself the Kute Kittens Klub, subverting the Klan's fetish for wild predators and mythical monsters with a Blochian burlesque

¹²⁵ Ibid, 348.

¹²⁶ Horkeimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 137.

¹²⁷ Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 348.
¹²⁸ Fanon, *Black Skin/White Masks*, 110, 115-116.

of the domesticated.¹²⁹ In a 1934 Easter story on Simon of Cyrene published in the *Chicago Defender*, the non-black Jewish protagonist Elizabeth is terrorized by a Roman centurion who absolves the Roman Empire of the Crucifixion by condemning her with an anti-Jewish, blood-libeling variant of Matthew 27:25, “you bloodthirsty Jews are alone guilty of this crime,” but her spirit is lifted when she sees Simon bear the cross.¹³⁰ An essay in a mid-1930s edition of Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church’s newsletter stated that the “recent inhuman invasion by Italy of Ethiopia” made black Americans wonder “if ‘Might is not ‘Right’” [sic].¹³¹ Yet, the piece asserted, although the Negro “still lives as a slave to hate, greed, prejudice and the economic and social order,” nevertheless “He strives for the promised redemption and feels that it will come through although 19 centuries have passed since the promise was made.”¹³² William Edouard Scott’s 1940 painting *Aid to Ethiopia*, composed for the city’s American Negro Exposition held that summer, exemplified how black Chicago’s Ethiopianism countered fascist aesthetics.¹³³ In the piece, John C. Robinson stands in front of his biplane saluting Haile Selassie. By the summer of 1940, the biplane would have appeared particularly antiquated in the wake of the German *Luftwaffe*’s state-of-the-art monoplanes waging blitzkrieg from the skies, epitomized aesthetically by the terrorizing wail of the *Stuka* dive bombers. However, against Scott’s background of modest ancient ruins signifying Ethiopia’s Afro-Christian heritage, the biplane represented not how Fascist Italy had technologically overwhelmed the Ethiopian military, but that Afro-Christian spirit countered a fascist war materiel fetish that lent existential foreboding to

¹²⁹ “Kute Kittens Klub” Party Invitation, 1930s. Susan Cayton Woodson Papers, Box 33, Folder 56, VHRC.

¹³⁰ W.P. Nowlin, “Simon of Cyrene: A Thought for Easter Sunday,” *Chicago Defender*, March 1934.

¹³¹ Robert Smith, “The Negro,” *The Reminder* (1936?). Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church Archives, Box 3, Folder 38, VHRC.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ William Edouard Scott, *Aid to Ethiopia*, 1940. William Edouard Scott Papers, Box 6, Folder 125, VHRC.

Scott's circa-early 1930s critique of the artistic futurism pioneered in Italy: "when you paint man and distort him with this futuristic stuff, he can't live."¹³⁴

All Nations Pentecostal Church's conceptualization of apocalyptic divine violence during the Italo-Ethiopian War presented a more radical break with the manliness of being than did the Ebenezer essayist, Scott, or Fanon, all of whom remained invested in exploring being and manliness in various ways. This was due to both the ___ of the church and its _____. [Background on the church]

All Nations' iteration of black woman-predominant Pentecostalism amounted to a black womanist apocalyptic critique of theological subjectivity. In Genesis 2, the second creation story, God aims to make a helper for Adam, and so creates all the world's creatures. Adam names each one, thereby bringing them under his possession and domestication, but still "for Adam there was not a help meet for him" (Gen. 2:20).¹³⁵ Finally God creates someone from Adam's rib whom Adam calls Woman and names Eve, "because she was the mother of all living" (Gen 2:23, Gen 3:20). With Eve, Adam consummates his subjectivity by inaugurating patriarchal generational household temporality: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife." Not only does temporality become countable by marking generations of household succession, but the very notion of humanity consciously experiencing a transformative event within time is established. Furthermore, the comedy and erotic profligacy of the passage—a "bumbling" God producing all manner of creatures for Adam to, the narrative implies, copulate with unsatisfyingly—suggests a pagan, polytheist, and mythic valence to Adam's being in the world before Eve.¹³⁶ Thus Eve enables the conceptualization of progressive salvation history, the

¹³⁴ "Compete with White Artists..."

¹³⁵ Roland Boer, "From Plato to Adam: The Biblical Exegesis of Walter Benjamin," *The Bible and Critical Theory*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2007), 1-13: 8.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 2.

form of eschatological temporality that oriented Martin’s and Austin’s understandings of progressing toward the two redemptions. However, trans-Atlantic slavery excluded enslaved black women from the wifely, motherly mode of Eve, most directly with stipulations that a baby was born slave or free according to the condition of its mother.¹³⁷ Black women were thereby cast into the lot of the cornucopia of God-created creatures Adam possesses as objects and with whom he copulates but cannot complete the household. The idea of black women as theologically prior to and in excess of the patriarchal household haunted post-emancipation depictions of African American religion, such as W.E.B. Du Bois’ notion that black households fell short of Victorian social norms because the Negro church “antedated by many decades the monogamic Negro home,” as well as complaints that the overabundance of black churches and an “overchurched” black social landscape pulled women away from maintaining sufficient domesticity.¹³⁸

Myth structured depictions of Lucy Smith herself. [how she was viewed—“mannish” etc] Yet as Zakiyyah Iman Jackson posits, black women’s working through, rather than just trying to overcome, the constitutive myths of their representation has had the potential to illuminate the interconnections between myth and the establishment of fact, and thus reveal the ideological (and ontological) underpinnings of Western notions of empiricism and possession.¹³⁹ In this mode, All Nations’ apocalyptic temporality revealed the myth of Adamic subjectivity. A young Walter Benjamin remarked to Gershom Scholem that “the years are countable but not numerable,” which Peter Fenves interprets as indicating that “messianic completion is nonnumerable because

¹³⁷ Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics*, Vol. 17, No.2, Culture and Countermemory: The “American” Connection (Summer, 1987), 64-81.

¹³⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Of the Faith of the Fathers,” *The Souls of Black Folk*; Barbara Dianne Savage, *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us: The Politics of Black Religion* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

¹³⁹ Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, “Sense of Things,” *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* Vol. 2, No.2 (2016), 1-48: 7-11.

its unity is of a higher ‘power’ than any countable unit”—particularly any periodization of time.¹⁴⁰ In messianic perspective, periodization itself is a mark of unredeemed mythology. Some of the twentieth century’s most brilliant sociologists counted the number of black churches or otherwise tabulated the church-home (im)balance in black communities, but in their conclusions, their empiricism gave way to an innumeracy—“overchurched,” “too many churches”—grounded in the myth of deficient black motherhood. However, unlike the un-numerated creatures Adam names before Eve, black women did not simply antedate the complete household; rather, the “condition” of possibility for the white household passed through the denial of black women’s capacity for household, a passage Hortense Spillers termed black women’s “being for the captor.”¹⁴¹ This intersection between myth and progressive salvation history revealed the origins of progressive history’s temporality in the struggle for power. It indicated that progressive salvation history represents not an advance over mythology, but is rather another mythology that periodizes time in a way that justifies its superseding the other myth, justifies its possession of temporality. Benjamin stated in the same piece quoted above that “the possession, as something caught in the same finitude, is always unjust. No order of possession, however articulated, can therefore lead to justice.”¹⁴² The only truly divine salvation temporality would therefore be one that was not justified by a periodization, but rather accounted for everything by redeeming the fullness of Creation in a manner that left Creation in an unceasing temporality of redemption.¹⁴³ Thus, from this intersection, or what Jackson terms a “portal,” All Nations conceptualized a

¹⁴⁰ Walter Benjamin, “Notes Toward a Work on the Category of Justice,” trans. Peter Fenves, in Peter Fenves, *The Messianic Reduction: Walter Benjamin and the Shape of Time* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), Appendix: Translations, 257-258: 258; Fenves, *The Messianic Reduction*, 124.

¹⁴¹ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe”

¹⁴² Benjamin, “Notes Toward a Work on the Category of Justice,” 257.

¹⁴³ Fenves, *The Messianic Reduction*, 121-122.

totalizing apocalyptic critique not just of fascism, but of its ultimate, Adamic origins in the historicist temporality of possession.¹⁴⁴

All Nations' critique featured a different conceptualization of how the black faithful could harness the air than Pilgrim Baptist Church. All Nations' booklet of General Principles stated, "We believe in the second coming of Christ and that the Church, the bride, the Lamb's wife, will be caught up to meet Him in the air. 1st Thess. 4:16-17."¹⁴⁵ Thus, the church would participate in the *eschaton* as an aerial bride. The front page of the church's newsletter, *The Pentecostal Ensign*, also proclaimed from Revelation 1:7 that "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him," underscoring the totality of Jesus' firmamental return.¹⁴⁶ Yet if, as the Apostle Paul formulated, Christ is a (in Adam Kotsko's term) "second Adam" who redeems the world from the first Adam's Fall, All Nations' image of the second Adam's wife would not redeem the Adamic subject in the mode of Eve, but rather would unravel him at the intersection of myth and God's innumerable power.¹⁴⁷ The Church as aerial bride epitomized the notion of black women as overchurched. Lucy Smith's popular nationwide radio broadcast, "The Glorious Church of the Air," spread All Nations' witness throughout Chicago and the nation. Both the broadcast and the *Ensign* featured testimonials of God's healing power through the air. Henrietta Lee of Bronzeville testified that "Elder Smith prayed over the air she said to place your hands on your pains and believe God for your healing. I obeyed and did as she said and God wonderfully healed my stomach."¹⁴⁸ Importantly, these testimonials of healing often involved sacred objects.

¹⁴⁴ Jackson, "Sense of Things," 10.

¹⁴⁵ General Principles of the All Nations Pentecostal Church, p. 8, Lucy Smith Collier Papers [Hereafter LSCP], VHRC.

¹⁴⁶ *The Pentecostal Ensign*, No. 18 (February 1936), p.1, LSCP Box 1, Folder 16.

¹⁴⁷ For a discussion of Paul's "first and second Adam schema" in relation to black womanist and black feminist theology, see Adam Kotsko, *The Politics of Redemption: The Social Logic of Salvation* (London and New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 3-5.

¹⁴⁸ "The Glorious Church of the Air," 1936.

Surphrania Conway of Camden, Mississippi “sent a handkerchief to Elder Smith to be anointed and [prayed] over. [After] I placed it on my body God healed me that very night.”¹⁴⁹ Against black male social scientists' attempts to safeguard the home from the church, All Nations' abundance of faith brought services into homes via the radio, and even brought healing objects into bedrooms. These women's accounts of the healing power of objects, a syncretic belief partly derived from West African spirituality, remained in excess of attempts to distinguish between “pre”-Christian “myth” or animism and the progressive, civilizing *telos* of Christian salvation history modeled after Adam's inauguration of patrilineal household temporality.

The idea of black women's faith accessing God's aerial power inspired All Nation's vision of divine violence. Vaughn Rasberry and other critics have alleged that the rise of the notion of “totalitarianism” led both Cold War-era thinkers in the West and subsequent generations of poststructuralists and postmodernists to conceive of virtually all concepts of the total as at least proximate to fascism, which arguably has helped extend liberalism's dominance over antifascist discourse in the West since the early Cold War years.¹⁵⁰ Yet as Martin Buber and Jacob Taubes showed in direct opposition to fascist theorist Carl Schmitt's political theology, Jewish and Christian understandings of the totality of God's rule have often inspired anarchic faith critical of state formations and their national-cultural bulwarks.¹⁵¹ The All Nations “Rhythm” gospel choir's version of the Negro spiritual “Ain't That Good News,” played often on the church's broadcasts, evinced that the church's conception of the redemptive labor of cross-bearing anticipated that God's firmamental apocalypse would be no respecter of nations:

God's going to burn up this wicked nation,

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Rasberry, *Race and the Totalitarian Century*, 96-98.

¹⁵¹ Buber, *Kingship of God*, 99-107; Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, trans. David Ratmoko (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 135-136; Jacob Taubes, “Culture and Ideology,” in *From Cult to Culture*, eds. Fonrobert and Engel, 248-267: 252-253.

Ain't that good news;
You'd better come and seek salvation,
Ain't that good news
I'm going to lay down my burden, I'm going to shoulder up my cross and I'm
going to take it home to Jesus
Ain't that good news

Some of these mornings bright and fair,
Ain't that good news;
I'm going to meet Jesus in the air,
Ain't that good news
I'm going to lay down my burden, I'm going to shoulder up my cross and I'm
going to take it home to Jesus
Ain't that good news¹⁵²

The faith that “God’s gonna burn up this wicked nation” evinced how divine violence recast the process of the two redemptions from the progressive teleology subscribed to by Martin and Austin, to an apocalypse that intervened suddenly, without regard to such a teleology. Divine violence would at once destroy “this wicked nation” that oppressed African Americans, and precipitate the messianic redemption. An anecdote from Sister Mattie Neely, an All Nations missionary to Africa, sheds light on how such violence presented an alternative to the redemption promised by progress. At a New Years Day 1936 church meeting recounting in the *Ensign*, Neely “described to us how wonderfully the Lord saved a native and right away he wanted his house cleaned out and burned up his jujues. These jujues are very expensive costing from \$5.00 to 40.000 dollars. She related how 30 educated natives were killed and their heads cut off.” (It is unclear where in Africa this account referred to, but perhaps most likely in Liberia, where All Nations founded a mission church as of the early 1950s.) The immediacy of the Lord’s salvation was necessary because one could die at any time during the ideologically complex and often paradoxical educational process championed by Martin. While the depiction of the episode might appear to be simply civilizationist, the *Ensign*’s use of “burned up” connected it to the apocalypse the Lord was going to soon wreak upon “this wicked nation,” underlining that divine

¹⁵² “Ain’t That Good News,” “The Glorious Church of the Air,” 1936.

violence was no respecter of nations or cultures. That the “native” himself burned them up evokes Cedric Robinson’s notion of black oppositional violence manifesting itself in what Western logic considers paradoxical ways: setting “the community against its material aspect” in a destruction and forsaking of property that signified a “renunciation of actual being.”¹⁵³ Being burned up, the jujus did not linger in the world as de-spiritualized objects circulating in intertwined diasporic and colonial artifact economies, and thereby silently testifying to historical change; instead, they existed only insofar as they were given in an account of salvation.¹⁵⁴ Considering All Nations’ own neo-African use of objects with divine healing power, deemed heretical, cultish and backwards by most Christians, the church condemned jujus not so much because of the supposed cultural backwardness of sacred objects, but insofar as the church did not consider the objects redemptive. The church therefore prioritized redemption over the preservation or celebration of diasporic being in the world. The account also testified to how God’s dominion over the whole of the world enabled the women of All Nations to bear witness to and help spiritually catalyze saving acts of fire-baptism half a world away, in the homes of men who were not their husbands, fathers, captors or employers.

The accounts thereby enable an analysis of All Nations’ discourse on the Italo-Ethiopian War. Unlike most Ethiopianist approaches, the *Ensign* piece on the war had little investment in locating Ethiopia within a particular historical schema. It offered uncertainly that the Ethiopians “were apparently a powerful people in the days of David and Solomon,” but made no more specific reference to Ethiopia as a wellspring of Afro-Christianity. Its depiction of Ethiopia’s recent history and embattled present was more evocative. *The Ensign* claimed that Haile Selassie

¹⁵³ Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983 [2000]), 168.

¹⁵⁴ This formulation is inspired by Michele Wallace, “The Prison House of Culture: Why African Art? Why the Guggenheim? Why now?” in Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed., *The Visual Culture Reader: Second Edition* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 371-382: 375.

“voluntarily gave to his country a representative parliament similar to that of [Great Britain]. Selassie says: We don’t want territorial expansion, but to live in peace, and more fully contribute our part toward human progress. He has done seeming everything in his power to bring about a peaceful settlement with Mussolini, and in doing so has won the sympathy of the nations of the world.” And yet, as of February 1936, several months into Italy’s invasion, neither Ethiopia’s reforms nor international sympathy had led to any significant help from the liberal West or the League of Nations. Fascist violence revealed, in a way that liberal imperialist violence had not, that no historical contextualization or schema, no narrative of progress, could make a black people such as the Ethiopians worth a practical effort to defend, neither for the West nor, as we have seen, for many black diasporans. Progress could not be redemptive, in either the worldly or otherworldly sense. Therefore, there was little reason to engage in the complex redemptionist maneuvers of Martin and Austin.

Thus, All Nations eschewed practical historical defense for eschatological defense. The piece’s section “Egypt fears” rooted this defense in an Egypt-based view of Italy’s aggression: “In Egypt we constantly see airplanes roaring overhead, and are [reminded] that war, ruthless and cruel, is near. Just now Italy has 80,000 and 350 bombing planes on the west coast of Egypt read to come any moment bringing death and awful destruction. We are only safe in God’s keeping.” Disagreeing with the “Bullets, not Bibles” campaign, in a paragraph titled “Mussolini and the Bible,” the *The Ensign* piece stated that “as an [asset] to many paragraphs being [published] at the present time against Mussolini and especially in his attitude toward Abyssinia. All teachers and school-masters should read the New Testament and should explain this divine book to the children and see that they learn its divine passages by heart.” All Nations’ conception of space disrupted the notion of the Robert Abbott faction of the *Chicago Defender* that the Bible

was ineffective in the war because it would not help practically defend the Ethiopians against Mussolini. Rather, All Nations' invocation of the Bible indicated that the rise of fascism was not only temporally violent, but heralded the apocalypse in which the wicked would be burned up and the righteous saved. Therefore, the Bible was the best safeguard with regard to the eschatological implications of sinful fascist hatred and warmongering.

V. The Divergence of Redemption from Anti-Fascist and Anti-Totalitarian Violence

The years between the Italo-Ethiopian War and the rise of the Cold War saw a shift in Black Chicago Protestantism toward All Nations' mode of internationalism and apocalypticism. Exilic internationalism increasingly dis-identified with not only the goals of various U.S. and Western political formations, but the philosophical, historical, and ontological suppositions underlying those goals. Strikingly, this occurred as both the black economic situation and the prospects of civil rights progress seemed to improve. In their representations of the conflict, two touchstones of World War II U.S. cinema, *Casablanca* (1942) and Frank Capra's propaganda series *Why We Fight* (1943) obscured, yet harnessed, paradoxes of anti-blackness in order to position Ethiopia as the suffering servant that facilitates the recognition of the universalist humanism that must propel the Allied cause. In one of many sins of omission, *Why We Fight* presents Italy's invasion of Ethiopia as the first fascist assault on a free people while ignoring that nearly all of the rest of Africa had been overrun by the militaries of liberal European nations. In *Casablanca*, expatriate American club owner Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart)'s connections to Afro-diasporic people—the early mention that he had been “running guns to Ethiopia” during that conflict, and his friendship with his employee, the expatriate black American house musician Sam (Dooley Wilson)—first indicate to the viewer that he is more than just a coldhearted, politically neutral

businessman, thereby enabling the twin rekindling of his antifascism and his romantic feelings for former lover Ilsa Lund (Ingrid Bergman). Yet imperialism is literally the ground of possibility for *Casablanca*'s humanism, as the film is set in French colonial Morocco, at the time controlled by the collaborationist Vichy government. Meanwhile, despite his distance from U.S. domestic racial policy, Sam lacks social relationality in the world outside of Blaine and Lund, including a last name; like Ethiopia, he exists in the film to bear the white narrative. *Casablanca* illustrated the anti-blackness of representations of black freedom: just as Ethiopia's prior sovereignty enabled its utility here, the film is only credibly able to have Sam facilitate both white love and white anti-fascist resolve *because* of the character's relative freedom, the white protagonists' interpersonal recognition of his humanity, and Wilson's brilliant and dignified performance. The paradox of progress that enabled *Casablanca* inspired the All Nations Pentecostal Church-aligned turn in apocalyptic exilic internationalism and foreign mission ideology.

During its publication run from 1935-1940, the *Negro Journal of Religion* evinced how African American Protestantism interpreted the rising specter of world war through a missionary framework. Published out of Wilberforce University's Tawawa School of Religion as the organ of the Fraternal Council of Negro Churches (FCNC), the monthly was a center for 1930s black religious thought, particularly from Midwestern cities. The journal printed J.C. Austin's aforementioned Wilberforce lecture on the role of the church in the summer of 1935, and Austin joined its editorial staff by the end of the year. Founded in 1934, the FCNC defined itself essentially as an ecclesiastical corollary to the National Negro Congress (NNC), the black Popular Front umbrella organization. The journal voiced support for black labor activism (including in an essay written by NNC Executive Secretary John P. Davis), probed the New

Deal's rapprochement with Jim Crow, and printed a glowing advertisement for W.E.B. Du Bois' controversial Marxian tome *Black Reconstruction*. However, it agreed with Austin's argument for the premium of redemption over social progress. In his withering assessment of NAACP elder statesman James Weldon Johnson's book *Black Americans, What Now?* reprinted in the journal, Wilberforce's president Richard R. Wright, Jr. wrote that "The Negro can't be raised by the N.A.A.C.P. or the Urban League or the Y.M.C.A., all of which are fine well meaning institutions. The Negro cannot be saved by politicians who are proteges of white men. Of course, these have their influence. But in the last analysis the Negro must work out his own salvation with fear and trembling."¹⁵⁵ Thus, missions to black people were a primary concern: the journal covered Africa extensively, published an essay on "The New Negro's Attitude to Theology" by the former editor of the UNIA's paper the *Negro World* (William H. Ferris), and ran a monthly "Missionary Activities in West Africa" column.¹⁵⁶ The journal also emphasized saving the souls of black people in the U.S., as Wright's piece conveyed. The FCNC's "Address to the Country" urged that since about half of black Americans were not members of a church, black churches must have a "united march against sin, and for the salvation of souls. This, we regard as our first duty above any of the financial, political economic or other social problems. The church must, in the spirit of the Christ, go out into the highways and by-ways and compel these 6,000,000 to come in."¹⁵⁷ Thus, despite having a leadership comprised of respectable Methodists, Episcopalians, and Baptists, "[r]epeatedly the JOURNAL has praised...store-front churches and missions" as well as charismatic Holiness churches—churches similar to Elder Lucy Smith's—for bringing "saints and sinners" to the Christian faith via the Christ-centric witness of the

¹⁵⁵ Richard R. Wright, Jr., Review of *Negro Americans, What Now?* by James Weldon Johnson, *Negro Journal of Religion*, Vol. 1, No. 10, 1935: 6.

¹⁵⁶ William H. Ferris, "The New Negro's Attitude Towards Theology," *Negro Journal of Religion* Vol. 1, No. 6 (July, 1935): 6, 16.

¹⁵⁷ FCNC, "Address to the Country," *Negro Journal of Religion*, Vol. 2, No. 2, (March 1936), 5.

Apostle Paul: “they ‘know nothing save Jesus, and Him Crucified.’”¹⁵⁸ Sanctified fervor testified that even though the disappointments of the Great Migration’s “Exodus” from the South sunk many “hopeless” migrants into “the wiles of slum life,” “the church should work.”¹⁵⁹

Thus while the *Negro Journal of Religion* joined the African American press’ general sounding of the alarm concerning fascist militarism and racism, it indicated that fascism’s greatest threat was to redemptive mission work. To the journal, Western imperialism was an obstacle to redemption that the black world had to develop the capacity to overturn, but missions could still save souls and also pave the way for eventual decolonial redemption. Fascism, however, corrupted the evangelist cause and suppressed authentic missionary activity. The journal argued that Italy used the pretense of bringing Christian uplift to Ethiopia to justify murderous conquest, thereby damaging the credibility of mission work elsewhere in the world; for “there is no Christian authority for slaughtering men on the pretext of saving them for God and civilization.”¹⁶⁰ It reported on the Nazis’ three-month ban on a German Catholic newspaper for “printing a letter from Brazil announcing that colored missionaries would be sent to Germany... ‘in order to convert the modern pagans,’”¹⁶¹ and in 1939 detailed Japanese police’s suppression of foreign missionaries in colonized Korea.¹⁶² Thus when the journal reprinted then-radical leftist and fellow traveler Max Yergan’s speech against the Munich Pact, with Yergan’s crescendo of “no Munich for Spain, no Munich for China, no Munich for Africa,” it did so within the framework of its critique of fascism’s global assault on redemption.¹⁶³ Yet this focus on redemption already prompted debate during the Italo-Ethiopian war over the ethics of praying

¹⁵⁸ “The Church Must Evangelize,” *Negro Journal of Religion*, Vol. 4, No. 11 (December 1938):10; “Those Holiness People,” *Negro Journal of Religion*, Vol. 1, No. 10 (November 1935), 4.

¹⁵⁹ “I Have Seen Both,” *Negro Journal of Religion*, Vol. 2, No. 9 (November 1936), 3-4.

¹⁶⁰ “Your Questions Answered,” *Negro Journal of Religion*, Vol. 1, No. 7 (August 1935), 10, 16: 10.

¹⁶¹ “A World View of Religion,” *Negro Journal of Religion*, Vol 1, No. 7 (August 1935), 16.

¹⁶² “Japan Closes in on the Church,” *Negro Journal of Religion*, Vol. 4, No. 12, (Jan 1939), 12.

¹⁶³ Max Yergan, “The Significance of the Munich Pact for the Negro People,” *Negro Journal of Religion*, Vol. 4, No.12 (January 1939), 7, 13:13.

for Italian casualties to be higher than reports claimed, and over whether disease or natural disasters ravaging Italy's otherwise seemingly unstoppable military would constitute divine intervention.

The significance of the redemption orientation of black religious antifascism surfaced with the onset of World War II. In part because the Western democracies had failed to support Ethiopia and heed the black press's warnings about Hitler's insatiable racism, and had waited until the war manifested as primarily a European conflict, many African Americans felt that the war was now simply a fight between rival racist imperialist systems.¹⁶⁴ Once the U.S. entered the war, both black leaders and U.S. government observers were alarmed by black America's apparently low war spirit.¹⁶⁵ In response, in February 1942 the black paper the *Pittsburgh Courier* launched what became the nationwide "Double V" campaign for victory over racism at home and fascism abroad, while the U.S. government and culture industries promoted black patriotism through film, music, and celebrations of heroic Negro soldiers.¹⁶⁶ Yet in his 1953 history of Afro-Baptist foreign mission organizing, Edward A. Freeman wrote of "the sagging morale of Negro Baptists who were becoming rather indifferent to the national emergency and the status of things in general" circa 1942.¹⁶⁷ Addressing the National Baptist Convention's annual meeting late that summer, NBC president Rev. D.V. Jemison remarked that he was "sorry to say that the morale of the Negro for fighting this war is not what it was in World War I" because "[i]n our racial life we have reached a fork in the road... The road to the left ahead is supine submission to every illegal and criminal villain. The road to the right is full of hardships

¹⁶⁴ Raspberry, *Race and the Totalitarian Century*, 31.

¹⁶⁵ Sklaroff, *Black Culture and the New Deal*.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. Stephanie Leigh Baptiste, *Darkening Mirrors: Imperial Representation in Depression-Era African American Performance* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 234-248; Raspberry, *Race and the Totalitarian Century*.

¹⁶⁷ Freeman, *The Epoch of Negro Baptists and the Foreign Mission Board*, 189.

and danger.”¹⁶⁸ Baptists were also receiving mixed messages on the war from their leadership. Jemison’s address encouraged them to buy war bonds, but also said that “The nation that gives ear to its Lords, that keeps swords burnished and multiplies battleships is building a civilization that shall certainly fall,” a difficult statement to reconcile with Double V considering that the U.S. was replenishing the battleship fleet decimated at Pearl Harbor.¹⁶⁹

However, at the same time that the status of things in general seemed to leave them without a viable path, black Baptists began pouring unprecedented energy and resources into mission infrastructure. In the previous decade, as black America reeled from the Great Depression, the NBC Foreign Mission Board had found itself striving to climb out of debt.¹⁷⁰ The low priority the NBC gave to foreign missions in the 1930s was reflected in the decision to suspend the Board’s publication, the *Mission Herald*, and merge mission coverage into the Convention’s flagship organ, the *National Baptist Voice*, from 1936 through 1938.¹⁷¹ But the Board began to recover by the turn of the decade, and in 1939 the *Mission Herald* was again in circulation.¹⁷² Then seminally in September 1942, J.C. Austin “organized and headed” a \$100,000 fundraising drive for the National Baptist Convention’s Foreign Mission Board. Launched with a 5,000-person parade in Memphis led by “indefatigable” Chicagoan mission field worker Primrose Funchess, the successful drive was, Freeman wrote, “a momentous effort by Negro Baptists [that] was new and untried before”; “Some people said it could not be done—but it was done.”¹⁷³ Several years later, the campaign “was lingering in the hearts of Negro Baptists and reduced the fear, timid, dubious state of mind which had dominated all previous big

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 190.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 191.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 176.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 178-179.

¹⁷² *Ibid*.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 188.

efforts.”¹⁷⁴ The drive ushered in an era of rapid growth in mission contributions. In 10 years, annual contributions grew over six fold, from \$61,300.10 in fiscal year 1941-42 to \$378,675.91 by 1951, although there was concern about to what degree inflation lessened the contributions’ real value.¹⁷⁵ Contributions to the smaller Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Society, largely comprised of mid-Atlantic and Upper South churches, exploded from \$16,000 in 1940 to over \$172,000 in fiscal year 1961-62, enabling it to increase its number of foreign missionaries from 10 to 105.¹⁷⁶ By comparison, buoyed by the expanding industrial economy, from 1940 to 1950 the median income for urban blacks increased from \$700 to \$1,263, or slightly less than two fold.¹⁷⁷ The simultaneity of Baptist pessimism about the aims of Double V and new excitement about missionary organizing revealed an increasing discrepancy between the Afro-Christian imperative of redemption, and the analogical (fascism abroad is like anti-black racism) and Manichean (fascist slavery vs. democratic freedom) formulations underlying the mainstream wartime black freedom struggle—even at a time of relative black prosperity.

Manichean discourses were remarkably consistent across the Allied ideological spectrum. During the war, the arch-anticommunist imperialist Churchill, the Popular Front-oriented American film series *Why We Fight*, and the Communist, avowed anti-imperialist Stalin gave similar accounts of the global zero-sum clash between democracy and fascism. Thus as the Cold War dawned, this Manicheanism was easily reapplied: in the United States, the clash between democracy and fascism became a battle between capitalism and communism. While *Casablanca* and especially *Why We Fight* were infused with the spirit of the leftist Popular Front coalition

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 193.

¹⁷⁵ Marshall L. Shepard, “Ten Years with ‘C.C.’: A Review of Our Missionary Program under C.C. Adams,” in Freeman, *The Epoch of Negro Baptists and the Foreign Mission Board*, Appendix H, 254-258: 257; Freeman, *The Epoch of Negro Baptists and the Foreign Mission Board*, 193.

¹⁷⁶ Associated Negro Press, “Baptists Give \$172,865 for Lott Carey Missions,” 1962: 1. CABP, Box 387, Folder 6.

¹⁷⁷ Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 10.

against fascism, Rick Blaine's heralding the world-historical "changing of the guard" from European imperialism to a U.S.-led free market order symbolized the U.S.'s wartime trajectory toward postwar centrism.¹⁷⁸ The rise of the notion of "totalitarianism" helped facilitate the equation of communism and fascism. The Cold War led to a governmental crackdown on radicalism of all kinds, devastating the American left. Many black intellectuals and artists moved toward the center, some even to the rightwing. Perhaps most extraordinarily, Max Yergan, who in his leftist and anticolonial period had contributed to the *Negro Journal of Religion*, fervently embraced anticommunism in the late 1940s. His exploits included aligning with black clergymen such as Harlem Baptist minister Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., one of black America's foremost leaders, to expel Doxey Wilkerson, Paul Robeson, and other black radicals from erstwhile black Popular Front organizations such as Powell's newspaper the *People's Voice*, and the New York-based anticolonial organization the Council on African Affairs.¹⁷⁹ Powell, making his own transition from left-leaning internationalist to Cold Warrior, joined a broad front of prominent Protestants embracing Cold War militarism. From the evangelical Billy Graham to the mainline theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, Protestants argued that the notion of an achievable sin-free condition on Earth promulgated by people hailing from the "millenarian sides of Enlightenment and liberal Christianity" was dangerously close to the "totalitarian ideologies of the fascist right or the Communist left."¹⁸⁰ Anti-totalitarianism led an ecumenical, interfaith,

¹⁷⁸ Brinkley; Herman Wouk, *The Winds of War*. Episode: "Changing of the Guard," 1983.

¹⁷⁹ Lawrence P. Jackson, *The Indignant Generation: A Narrative History of African American Writers and Critics, 1934-1960* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 309; David Henry Anthony III, *Max Yergan: Race Man, Internationalist, Cold Warrior* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006), 228-232.

¹⁸⁰ Stevens, *God-Fearing and Free: A Spiritual History of America's Cold War* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 3. For more on the theological affinities of Niebuhr and Graham, see Andrew S. Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich in an Age of Anxiety* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

interracial front of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews to support a militant foreign policy in defense of capitalist democracy.¹⁸¹

Powell and other African American leaders such as A. Philip Randolph and the NAACP's Walter White embraced Cold War anticommunism in the belief that alignment with U.S. foreign policy, which included countering Soviet propaganda alleging American racism, would help secure government support for civil rights reform (although Randolph had long been anticommunist).¹⁸² At the 1955 Asian-African Conference of Nonaligned Nations in Bandung, Indonesia, Powell pronounced that "racism in the United States is on the way out" as he represented a pro-civil rights American anticommunism in order to counter postcolonial leaders' attempt to harness Afro-Asian affinity to forge a path distinct from both American capitalism and Soviet communism.¹⁸³ By contrast, in his February 1950 National Freedom Day address in Philadelphia on the "Meaning of Freedom" to an audience full of the day's prominent black civic leaders, Austin declared that "In the name of freedom, Joseph Stalin and Mao Tse Sung are frantically mobilizing and organizing the masses of all Asia," listing the Communist leaders apparently without irony or subtext alongside Nehru, Gandhi, Indonesia, Africa, and the British West Indies as examples of how "Everywhere, on all tongues of tribes, races and nations, there is the cry of freedom."¹⁸⁴ In the global arena, the U.S. cried the same: "In the name of our freedom, we and our allies are marshalling our forces and are massing to the limit of our resources."¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Wendy L. Wall, *Inventing the "American Way": The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁸² Pal Singh, *Black is a Country*, 166-169.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 178; Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic*, 41-43.

¹⁸⁴ Associated Negro Press, "Ninth Annual Freedom Day Observation Held Feb. 1: Dr. J.C. Austin Delivers Keynote Address, 'Meaning of Freedom,' 23 States, D.C. Send Official Delegates," CBP Box 386, Folder 1.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

However, domestically, “Our nation struggles to exist half slave and half free,” as it had before the Civil War.¹⁸⁶

Austin’s month-long tour of West African missions alongside nine other Baptist ministers later that February reinforced his deepening sense that the combination of the persistence of the anti-black racial order within the U.S. and the intertwined spiritual and political emergence of the postcolonial world meant black redemption would emanate from other shores. He found Lagos and Accra “quite tense and ready to fight for Freedom,” a sentiment shared by stubborn remnants of the anti-colonial African American left at the time, and came away “convinced that not only the hope of the black man, but the hope of the world rests in Africa.”¹⁸⁷ He and other black Americans could still contribute from afar. The trip included a visit to Issele Uku’s Pilgrim mission, where Samuel Martin held a ceremony dedicating its new Teachers Training College as the Austin Building, in Austin’s honor.¹⁸⁸ Austin remarked shortly after that the Issele chiefs “were so pleased with the work of Dr. S.W. Martin who [represents] Pilgrim Baptist Church, and with the support I have given him, that they clothed me with the honor of Royal Chiefhood.”¹⁸⁹ Austin disassociated redemption from anti-totalitarianism, but continued to link it to a civilizationist redemption from the world-historical exile of white supremacy, with Africans now ready to take over the role of catalyst from black Americans.

Austin worried that black Americans found themselves on the horns of a peculiarly American dilemma. By the Cold War, the United States seemed on the brink of an eschatological precipice of power and prosperity. Reinhold Niebuhr’s 1952 text *The Irony of American History*

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ J.C. Austin to Claude Barnett, March 4, 1950, CKP Box 386, Folder 1; Associated Negro Press, “Chicago Welcomes Rev. Austin Back from African Mission; Mayor Joins Throng at Pilgrim Reception,” CBP Box 386, Folder 1; Lindsey R. Swindall, *The Path to the Truer, Greater, Freer World: Southern Civil Rights and Anticolonialism, 1937-1955* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2014), 149.

¹⁸⁸ Adams, “Report of the Commission of Ten Representative Churchmen to West Africa,” 269.

¹⁸⁹ J.C. Austin to Claude Barnett, March 4, 1950.

was brimming with eschatological prose. He depicted an America that had achieved “the ironic climax of its history,” in which a self-proclaimed “‘innocent’ nation” possessed an “ultimate” weapon that “perfectly embodie[d]” warfare’s inability to solve the “ultimate moral issues in life.”¹⁹⁰ Thus, “the moral predicament in which all human striving is involved has been raised to a final pitch” to safeguard “a culture which makes ‘living standards’ the final norm of the good life and which regards the perfection of techniques as the guarantor of every cultural as well as of every social-moral value.”¹⁹¹ Niebuhr warned that with the Cold War, the *telos* of American progress approached its (ironic) end: “The progress of American culture toward hegemony in the world community as well as toward the ultimate in standards of living has brought us everywhere to limits where our ideals and norms are brought under ironic indictment.”¹⁹² A few years later, the Martinican intellectual Aime Cesaire essayed such an indictment of America’s eschatological power in his *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955): “American domination—the only domination from which one never recovers. I mean from which one never recovers unscarred.”¹⁹³ Trapped between Niebuhr and Cesaire, between postwar prosperity and the afterlife of slavery, Austin intimated that perhaps it was African Americans, not the Africans whose redemptive anti-colonial potential he had strived to help develop for so long, who were irredeemably marked by domination, who were damned.¹⁹⁴

Austin’s prophecy in some ways proved correct in its resonance with the observations of Niebuhr and Cesaire, at least with regard to his own church. In the 1950s, Pilgrim entered into a slow decline it never overcame, as slum clearance and urban renewal, deindustrialization, intra-

¹⁹⁰ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago, 2008 [1952]), 38-40.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 39, 57.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁹³ Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000 [1955]), 77.

¹⁹⁴ Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: 2007), 6.

racial class stratification, and the compounding effects of ghettoization precipitated an ebbing of its congregation and the depopulation and devastation of the surrounding neighborhood which had so filled Samuel Martin with black pride circa World War I. Yet simultaneously, the 1950 West Africa tour Austin took part in inaugurated what Martin labeled as the Pilgrim Mission's "expansion in the 1950s," buoyed by the increased resources African Americans were giving to the NBC Foreign Mission Board (133). In addition to the Pilgrim Baptist Teacher Training College, the decade saw the construction of Pilgrim Baptist Church, Issele Uku; Pilgrim Baptist Maternity; and Pilgrim Baptist Grammar Schools in Issele Uku and elsewhere in colonial Nigeria's Mid-West Division (133-139). The expansion paralleled Nigeria's accelerating transition to independence, which was formally established on October 1st, 1960. The year before C.C. Adams' 1947 visit to Pilgrim Mission, Nigerian anticolonial leader Nnamdi Azikiwe visited Issele Uku. Martin stated that "Zik was the God-sent political leader needed to free our people from the political and economic slavery that was partially responsible for their unhappiness and backwardness." (112) Thus, Martin "encouraged" Mission members to "take an active part" in Azikiwe's Crusade for National Freedom, because "political and spiritual freedom must develop concurrently if Nigeria would be completely reconstructed." (111) Simultaneously, the ability of the Pilgrim Mission's co-affiliate churches in the NBC across the Atlantic to similarly pair political and spiritual freedom seemed increasingly frustrated.

VI. Atomic War and Divine Violence: Rev. J.H. Jackson and the Politics of Missions

J.C. Austin's main rival in the black Chicago clergy and in the National Baptist Convention, Rev. Joseph H. Jackson, perhaps epitomized the complexity of African American missionary attempts to conceive of the two redemptions while making a way out of no way in an anti-black world. Born in Rudyard, Mississippi in 1900, Jackson rose swiftly from a childhood of hard farm labor

through the Baptist clerical ranks, and was president of the NBC Foreign Mission Board from 1934-1940, when he left to replace Lacey Kirk Williams as pastor of Chicago's Olivet Baptist Church following Williams' death. In 1953, Jackson became President of the NBC, a position he held until 1982. Always something of a Bookerite, Jackson grew increasingly conservative over the course of his tenure, and by the end of his pastorate his sermons often parroted the Reaganite dogma that ruled the day. Still, the scholarly focus on Jackson's battle with Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement has obscured the deeper historical, ideological, and theological schism within the NBC, as well as the idiosyncrasy of Jackson's earlier thought. Before a very young, very junior King emerged as Jackson's main Baptist rival around 1960, Jackson's longtime opponents within the Convention did not view him as too "otherworldly" or politically accommodationist, but as too *secular*. His approach to foreign missions epitomized his secularity, and was often the centerpiece of their critique. Jackson did not believe that the goal of missions should be the redemption of the black race from anti-blackness and of the world from the Fall. Rather, Jackson thought that the Convention's relationship to Africa should reflect his philosophy of intra-racial institution building through entrepreneurship and hard work. Thus, he encouraged the Convention to focus on helping African Americans do business in Africa—particularly in the black settler colonial state of Liberia—an emphasis at odds with the priorities of those who worked for the two redemptions, who ultimately put faith in giving over business as the paradigmatically redemptive mode of trans-Atlantic intra-racial fellowship in Christ.¹⁹⁵ His philosophy was neo-Bookerite, but shorn of the redemptive critique of Samuel Martin or William Edouard Scott. Despite this, the more Jackson thought theologically, the more progressive and idiosyncratic were his formulations. His mid-1950s discussion of nuclear war as divine violence

¹⁹⁵ Wallace Terry, "U.S. Baptists Project Liberian Negro Colony," *Washington Post, Times Herald*, March 31, 1962: A15. For Liberia and African American Protestant settler colonialism, see Sylvester Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000: Colonialism, Democracy, and Freedom* (2015), ____.

while reflecting on his own mission to the Soviet Union articulated an apocalyptic view of mission work that was at odds with Cold War liberalism and Bookerite developmentalism, and rooted in black Chicago's exilic internationalist religious culture.

Dissatisfaction with Jackson dated at least as far back as his 1930s tenure as president of the Foreign Mission Board. Jackson's emphasis on intra-racial self-help and institution building might have seemed the pragmatic strategy during the Board's lean Depression years, and might have appealed with its approximation of strains of economic nationalism. But he was no political or cultural nationalist, and sought publicly to disassociate the NBC missions' focus on Africa from Pan-Africanism and Ethiopianist Afro-Christian exceptionalism.¹⁹⁶ He emphasized African American economic opportunity in Africa, rather than the redemption of Africans. Thus to him, Pilgrim's outpost in Issele Uku village, isolated from the larger NBC mission presences in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and southern Africa, must have seemed an unimportant backwater—and a backwater affiliated with a major Convention and local neighborhood rival, J.C. Austin (Olivet, at 31st and South Park, and Pilgrim, at 33rd and Indiana, were only a few blocks apart in the heart of Bronzeville). Samuel Martin recalled that Jackson was “not impressed” when he visited Pilgrim Mission in the 1930s, and that his visit “did not yield us any material gain.”¹⁹⁷ Martin believed that the Depression accounted for the paltriness to some extent.¹⁹⁸ Still, when praising Jackson's successor as Foreign Mission Board president, Rev. C.C. Adams, for forging a strong bond with Pilgrim Mission in the 1940s and 1950s, Martin remarked that “unlike Rev. Jackson, [Adams] saw us as God's children, who needed all kinds of help and encouragement in order to become angels of God,” (132) underscoring Jackson's disinterest in African redemption.

¹⁹⁶ J.H. Jackson, “Negroes in the Work of Foreign Missions,” An Address Delivered at the Baptist World Alliance, Atlanta, Georgia, July 26, 1939, in Freeman, *The Epoch of Negro Baptists and the Foreign Mission Board*, Appendix F, 244-249: 247.

¹⁹⁷ Martin, *Autobiography*, 99.

¹⁹⁸ Martin, *Autobiography*, 101.

Mission-oriented churches had opposed Jackson's presidency of the National Baptist Convention from the start. In perhaps the first mass demonstration of opposition to Jackson, as of the tumultuous 1961 Kansas City convention, 1,855 NBC churches had refused to contribute to the Foreign Mission Board since Jackson's election in 1953, evincing their disapproval of his mission outlook.¹⁹⁹ Concern mounted in the first year of Jackson's presidency, when he replaced progressive Morehouse College president (and King mentor) Benjamin E. Mays as NBC representative to the World Council of Churches with what one observer viewed as his own retinue of under-qualified acolytes.²⁰⁰ But at a time when Jackson still voiced support for civil rights activism, the main critique was not over his ideological conservatism. Rather, it was his secularism. In 1957, as Jackson attempted to invalidate the NBC Constitution's tenet that presidents could only serve four successive yearly terms, one critic wrote that Jackson "wants white people to obey the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments...but he does not want to obey the Constitution of the Baptist Convention...How can Negroes insist that the United States Constitution be obeyed and disobey a religious constitution."²⁰¹ Shortly before that year's annual meeting, black Philadelphia councilman Marshall L. Shepard argued that once "our Constitution" was protected from Jackson's coup, Baptists must rededicate themselves to "the objectives of our convention; namely evangelism, missions, [Christian] education...we shall then give to America, and the world, spiritual guidance as we witness the struggle of underprivileged peoples around the globe for full equality. We must aid and insist upon...our membership in the family of nations and as heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ."²⁰² Shepard's use of

¹⁹⁹ Bob Queen, "Another Group Quits Baptist Parent Body," *The Courier*, September 30, 1961: 2.

²⁰⁰ Letter to Claude Barnett, "Re: Negro Baptist Politics and the World Council of Churches," 1954. CABP Box 385, Folder 4.

²⁰¹ "My Views on Some of the Important Issues before the National Baptist Convention," 1957 [N.A.]. CABP Box 385, Folder 4.

²⁰² Matthew L. Shepard to Claude A. Barnett, August 26, 1957. CABP Box 385, Folder 4.

Paul's Spirit of adoption passage from Romans 8:15-17 to formulate the intertwined redemption of black people from anti-blackness and of the world from the Fall echoed the underlying meaning of W.E.B. Du Bois' allusions to the same scriptural passage in his depiction of the slaves' general strike in *Black Reconstruction*: the Reconstruction amendments to the U.S. Constitution that ultimately resulted from the general strike were only meaningful to the extent that they reflected a deeper "Apocalypse."²⁰³ The secularist view of civil rights reform Jackson at the time endorsed would be as problematic as the first Reconstruction, which, according to Du Bois, the freedpeople had been mistaken to view as such an apocalypse.²⁰⁴

By 1957, as he tightened his hold on the presidency indefinitely, Jackson signaled that Foreign Mission Board president and Samuel Martin ally C.C. Adams, who oversaw the explosion in mission fundraising and construction in the 1940s and 1950s, was, in the words of an Adams supporter, "unacceptable and must go."²⁰⁵ Jackson's successful maintaining of the presidency at the 1957 convention compelled Rev. J. Raymond Henderson, who had organized the Baptists' 1950 tour of West Africa, to deem the NBC "hopeless," initiate his church's departure from it, and urge younger preachers—surely with King in mind—to "Get out, get out quietly, but get out and do it now."²⁰⁶ Although his church, Second Baptist Church in Los Angeles, joined the integrated American Baptist Convention, it "voted to do its missionary work through the Lott Carey Foreign Mission Society," indicative of an enduring commitment to black redemption.²⁰⁷ When Jackson "deposed" Adams as Foreign Mission Board president in 1961, shortly after the Kansas City convention some NBC ministers formed the Baptist Foreign

²⁰³ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ L.K. Jackson, "Seven Reasons Why Young, Talented, Christian Ministers Should Resist the Efforts of the 'Lift-Tricksters' and Support the Constitution of the National Baptist Convention," 4.

²⁰⁶ "National Baptist Convention, Inc. Loses Its Strongest Supporter," October 1957. CABP Box 385, Folder 4.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

Mission Bureau, USA, Inc., representing churches that altogether had given about \$40,000 to the Foreign Mission Board annually.²⁰⁸ Adams served as secretary, J.C. Austin as Mid-West Area Chairman.²⁰⁹ In 1963, the new organization brought Samuel Martin and Letticia Martin to Chicago to fundraise for a mission hospital.²¹⁰ The Martins were feted by a program featuring Pilgrim musical director Thomas Dorsey leading a combined mass choir nearly thirty years after doing the same for the campaign to aid Ethiopia.²¹¹ Also participating were some of the most prominent local Afro-Baptist churches that opposed both Jackson's presidency and the Democratic Party machine of Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley, including churches that would support the Martin Luther King, Jr.-led Chicago Freedom Movement three years later, such as Greater St. John Baptist Church.²¹²

Yet despite his in many ways deserved reputation as a conservative, Jackson's discourse on world affairs manifested a more idiosyncratic worldview that converged with more progressive and apocalyptic strains of black Chicago Protestantism regarding divine violence. Understanding this demands foregrounding that Jackson upset ideological binaries by fusing a neo-Bookerite vision of race relations with a deep faith in the Social Gospel. One of Jackson's ministry's main intellectual projects was the elaboration of the Bookerite theme of cultivating racial goodwill between blacks and whites. He set this project in a global context. In a 1932 "Prayer for International Good Will and Cooperation," Jackson prayed for harmony between the world's principal rivals: "Russia and the capitalist world," the U.S. and the League of Nations, France and Germany, China and Japan. Voicing the social gospel idealism that Reinhold Niebuhr

²⁰⁸ Queen, "Another Group Quits Baptist Parent Body."

²⁰⁹ Flier, "Mammoth Religious Mass Meeting Honoring Reverend and Mrs. Samuel W. Martin from Issele Uku, Nigeria, West Africa," Progressive Baptist Church, Chicago, June 14, 1963. CABP Box 387, Folder 7.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Program, Religious Mass Meeting Honoring Reverend and Mrs. Samuel W. Martin, Progressive Baptist Church, Chicago, June 14, 1963. CABP Box 387, Folder 7.

²¹² Ibid.

famously attacked that same year in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Jackson stated that “To pray for international cooperation and good will is to pray that human nature the world over will be so remade or reborn that all nations and people will live for the benefit and good of each other.”

Jackson gave a number of speeches on international relations during the 1950s as he climbed to the summit of power in African American Christianity. At times, these speeches adopted the standard Cold War civil rights line. He argued that the U.S. government should pass the 1957 civil rights bill because in order to “carry the burden of the Free World” against the USSR, “one of the most formidable enemies that any nation has ever known,” the U.S. had to show the world that it adhered to its own rhetoric concerning freedom and democracy.²¹³ When making such Cold Warrior arguments, Jackson limited his religious rhetoric to exhortations to secular political activity (“We as Christians must rally around the civil rights program.”)²¹⁴ However, the more he prioritized religion over politicking, the more he departed from Cold Warrior ideology. His discussions of the role of prophetic religion and liberal Christianity in international relations were rooted in his interwar social gospel idealism. Jackson defined “prophetic religion”—the witness of “Amos, Isaiah, Micah, Walter Rauschenbusch etc”—as “religion that has vital concern for the highest possible type of human relationship,” a definition approximating soon-to-be nemesis Martin Luther King, Jr.’s reference to Martin Buber’s I-Thou dialogic in “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”²¹⁵ For Jackson, since “the half-way mark between Democracy and Communism is the right order for the peoples of the world,” prophetic religion

²¹³ J.H. Jackson, “The Security of the Nation,” May 6, 1957. JHJP Box 61, Folder: “The Security of the Nation,” Speech before Baptist Ministers Conference May 6, 1957, in N.Y. See also J.H. Jackson, “Excerpts from an Address Delivered Before 40,000 People, in Jackson Park, Winsdor [sic], Ontario, Canada, July 29, 1951.” JHJP Box 61, Folder: “Speech, July 29, 1952.”

²¹⁴ Jackson, “The Security of the Nation,” 2.

²¹⁵ Jackson, “The Prophet’s Right to Speak,” delivered at Tennessee Baptist State Convention, Nashville, TN, October 1953, 2, 4. JHJP Box 61, Folder: “Speech, October, 1953.”

was the world's best hope to reconcile the relationships between East and West and between capital and labor.²¹⁶ This resonated with the nonaligned aspirations of leaders in the decolonizing world, and with liberal Protestants' prayers for the establishment of a Kingdom of God on Earth through peace rather than through democracy's atomic arsenal.²¹⁷

Jackson's travelogue on the Soviet Union opposed the basic suppositions of Cold War liberalism, but also ultimately mulled the shadow that the prospect of atomic war cast over the hope for international prophetic social progress he expressed in other writings. In 1955, he joined a group of American Christian ministers on a good will tour of Russian Christian life in the Soviet Union, and in 1956 published a book reflecting on the experience, *The Eternal Flame: The Story of a Preaching Mission in Russia*. In the book, Jackson at times defended worldly progress in two areas central to his life, black America and American liberal Christianity. He bristled at Russian Christians' empathic sanctification of the suffering of Uncle Tom, protesting that African Americans had made great strides since Stowe's time.²¹⁸ He also held up the Hebrew prophets, Jesus, and the social gospel of Rauschenbusch as a riposte to the Marxian notion that religion was an opiate of the masses anathema to working toward justice in this world.²¹⁹ Yet his critique did not extend to the rest of Marxist philosophy, or even to the Soviet political system or economy. Jackson's characterization of the USSR was, like J.C. Austin's invocation of Stalin and Mao, utterly out of step with the U.S.'s prevailing anticommunism. In his assessment, "the past thirty-eight years have justified the heroic deeds of the leaders of the

²¹⁶ Jackson, "The Church's Responsibility in this Transitional Period," February 26, 1952, 4, 5. JHJP Box 61, Folder: "Speech, Feb. 26, 1952." Jackson, "The Prophet's Right to Speak," 8.

²¹⁷ Angela M. Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares: The Cold War Origins of Political Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 39.

²¹⁸ Joseph H. Jackson, *The Eternal Flame: The Story of a Preaching Mission in Russia* (Philadelphia: The Christian Education Press, 1956), 30-33.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, 49-52.

revolution of 1917.”²²⁰ This justification was not only due to the Soviet Union’s bearing the brunt of the Nazi *Wehrmacht* in World War II; more generally, the “growth, intellectual development, and great achievements of the nation have won for the revolutionaries the right to be called the liberators of the people from the tyranny of the Czars.”²²¹ The sentiment went well beyond, say, *Why We Fight*’s careful allusion to Czarist corruption.

Dispensing with Cold War ideology, Jackson’s fundamental critique of the Soviet Union instead stemmed from his concern that its secular accomplishments had inhibited its capacity to nurture the messianic redemption. To him, the USSR’s progress was inextricable from its suppression of the church. The Russian Orthodox Church had been complicit in “Czarist tyranny”; its conduct “prior to the revolution of 1917 seemed to justify all that Karl Marx had said about religion.”²²² The Communist Party’s confiscation of church property after the revolution helped it socialize the country’s resources, and the Party crushed ecclesiastic resistance by incarcerating clergy and banning religious press and public assembly.²²³ But, Jackson asked rhetorically, echoing Garvey’s rhetorical questions on defeat in his Atlanta prison speech, “Has religion been conquered in the Soviet Union? Has the spiritual nature of man been completely subdued and undermined?”²²⁴ In fact, he argued, the loss of wealth, property, and political influence led the Russian church to a spiritual renewal so pious among the marginalized faithful that it prompted the Party to moderate some of its antireligious policies.²²⁵ Jackson found that in the ensuing revival of Russian Christianity, “the overcrowded churches of the Soviet” that he visited featured more religious fervor than he remembered from his upbringing in “the old-

²²⁰ *Ibid*, 43.

²²¹ *Ibid*.

²²² *Ibid*, 42-43.

²²³ *Ibid*, 44-47.

²²⁴ *Ibid*, 47.

²²⁵ *Ibid*, 62-69.

fashioned revival meetings of the South, where men and women wept for their sins, and then shed tears of joy because of the blessings of redemption and the coveted prize of eternal salvation.”²²⁶

For Jackson, the specter of atomic war made the spread of Christianity in Russia a crucial development, increasing the chances for the salvation of humanity in case prophetic religion did not cultivate the human relationships that could prevent an apocalyptic nuclear showdown. Preaching at a “small Baptist church” in the Crimean town of Yalta, the site of the famous Churchill-Stalin-Roosevelt wartime conference, Jackson stated that the ability to manipulate atomic energy has finally made humans “co-laborers with the creative forces of the universe on a vast scale.”²²⁷ But if humans compete with God rather than work with God (quote)—if they use this ability to study war rather than peace—humanity “shall perish, but the work of creation shall still go on...if men desert (God), and resort to atomic warfare, God will yet save the world, though it will be much reduced and much smaller in size. He will take a faithful remnant, and continue the work of his kingdom. It matters not where they are, or who they may be.”²²⁸

Whereas the changing postwar sociopolitical dynamics recalibrated J.C. Austin’s notion of where and through whom redemption from exile might work, in J.H. Jackson’s witness the Cold War’s existential threat deemphasized such worldly differentiation altogether. The prospect of a totally destructive violence revealed the greater, saving grace of God’s total rule, recalling black slaves’ singing that despite their seemingly hopeless worldly circumstances, ultimately, God’s “got the whole world in His hands.”²²⁹ Thus Jackson preached that even after a nuclear holocaust, human redemption could endure in a messianic remnant of believers from, among

²²⁶ Ibid, 65.

²²⁷ Ibid, 95, 98.

²²⁸ Ibid, 98.

²²⁹ For the relationship between God, eschatology, and place, see Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 135-136; and Buber, *Kingship of God*, 99-107.

other peoples, “the scattered tribes of the quiet and woody places on the continent of Africa. Or they may come from the vast dominions of Russia...”²³⁰ The notion of humanity’s redemption from exile from God being realizable from any location, in any supposed stage of development, helped separate redemption from both Cold Warrior ideology and civilizationist notions of progress.

Jackson’s apocalypticism with regard to atomic war reflected attitudes emanating from black Chicago religious culture. Around this time several Chicago gospel groups, including both the Rebert Harris-led and the Sam Cooke-led iterations of the Soul Stirrers, recorded songs that at once renounced the reigning bellicosity and urged audiences to get right with God before the nuclear apocalypse. This Pauline renunciation of “peace and safety” (1 Thessalonians 5:3) refused the peace *of* safety that was, according to Niebuhr, the precipice of the American *eschaton*.²³¹ It also evinced that for all of the respectable black Christian establishment’s seemingly hegemonic patriarchy, the apocalyptic vision of Lucy Smith, whose funeral in 1952 drew more than 50,000 mourners, had become a dominant strain of black Chicago faith.²³² This had profound implications for the gender valence of the theological formulation of a black being that was not in the world, but worth more than all the world.

²³⁰ Jackson, *The Eternal Flame*, 98.

²³¹ See Heidegger’s reading of this verse in Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 2004), 72-73; Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History*.

²³² Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*.

Chapter Three

Minstrelsy and Messianic Justice: The Transfigurations of the Dungill Family Orchestra

I. Introduction

The Dungill Family was a family of African American musicians from Chicago that performed as a band between the mid-1930s and the early-1970s. Beginning as a group that mostly performed Negro spirituals and nineteenth century plantation songs, after World War II they adopted a transnational, multiethnic identity, using their performance of European classical music to project a musical internationalism. Throughout its career, the Dungill family in public performance aligned itself with progressive causes, from New Negro musical uplift in the New Deal period, to the civil rights movement in the postwar period, to internationalism and womanism/feminism and during a Cold War era that demanded Cold Warrior fervor and a retrograde gender politics, respectively. Yet animating their performance was a messianic spirituality that perplexed and upset the very logics of these alignments. That the Dungill Family's project was incomprehensible and illegible (and, phenomenologically speaking, did not appear) to the New Deal order during that order's preeminent decades, despite the Dungills' active and public civic participation in that order, evinced how redemptive black labor could anchor the relationship between annihilative nothingness and what Fred Moten has called blackness as "chromatic saturation."¹

The Dungill Family's project involved the relationship between three paradigms of justice: justice in the household, justice in the city, and messianic justice. For Aristotle,

¹ Fred Moten, *The Universal Machine (consent not to be a single being)* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018).

households were the foundation of cities, and justice in the household was the foundation of justice in the city, but the two justices were markedly different. Justice in the household was based on a patriarch's economic management of the family and property of the household, while justice in the city was meted out among citizens in a political community organized via a constitution.² Angela Mitropoulos observes that while eighteenth and nineteenth century Western politics adopted the ancient Greek understanding of the household and the political community as separate spheres, in the twentieth century, "Fordism and the Keynesian welfare state put them back together as a form of social accounting in the register of the family wage."³ At the same time, social science on the black family—particularly the work of E. Franklin Frazier on black families in Chicago—gained mainstream institutionalization, and institutions such as the New Deal and the CIO opened opportunities for access to civil religion performance, civic participation, policy implementation, and political activism in the mainstream public sphere. Thus, after a half-century of "Redemption" and Jim Crow, and after the Harlem Renaissance's general focus on non-married individuals' cultural experiences at a time when political progress seemingly all but closed off, the Dungill Family, headed by Doyle Dungill, a factory worker at International Harvester's Deering Works plant, was poised to represent all that a consolidating urban black working class could accomplish in the era of social reform that appeared to be dawning under Franklin D. Roosevelt. The budding black civic and academic infrastructure argued that justice in the household would eventually lead to justice in the city.

² Aristotle, *Aristotle's Politics*, trans. and ed. Carnes Lord (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013); D. Brendan Nagle, *The Household as the Foundation of Aristotle's Polis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

³ Angela Mitropoulos, *Contract and Contagion: From Biopolitics to Oikonomia* (Minor Compositions, 2012), 51.

However, while both black and white media portrayed the Dungill Family as an exceptional family, their performances undercut the politics they were supposed to represent. This undercutting involved how they interrelated minstrelsy with visions of justice. This interrelation amounted to a form of transfiguration. Merriam-Webster defines transfiguration as “a change in form and appearance” and “an exalting, glorifying, or spiritual change.”⁴ In the Synoptic Gospel accounts of the Transfiguration of Jesus, Jesus and three apostles go to pray on a mountain, and Jesus becomes gloriously radiant, and is joined by Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). Over the course of thirty years, the Dungills used what Doyle and his wife Yvette Dungill learned from their backgrounds in the minstrel-vaudeville circuit to conceive of minstrelsy as that which, in various ways, facilitates transfiguration. If Afro-Protestantism had historically, and in 1930s cross-bearing discourse, conceived of apocalypse in terms of the relationship between the black faithful qua annihilative nothingness in the flesh, and the excessive whiteness of Jesus’ universality, the Dungills performed themselves encompassing both of these extremes, in their flesh and their heritage. The Dungills transitioned from a mixture of the blackface minstrel and Negro spirituals repertoires in the 1930s, to performing a panoply of international identities and genealogies in the 1940s and early 1950s, to focusing on performing African inspired decolonial music in the mid-1950s and early 1960s. These performances often imagined a messianic event occurring that, in a moment of transfiguration, would deliver black people, and perhaps the world, to a condition of justice beyond the context of what the New Deal and Cold War orders would allow at that time.

But what were the prospects for the occurrence of messianic justice on earth? In *Outlaw Justice: The Messianic Politics of Paul*, Theodore Jennings, conceives of messianic justice as

⁴ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transfiguration>

justice outside of the law, outside of the realm of the world's principalities and powers.⁵ One could indeed conceive of the Dungills' transfiguration project as the ultimate attempt to depict a world that would treat nonbeings as if they were beings. Whereas Afro-Protestant visions of divine violence largely eschewed normative notions of justice, and instead considered how redemption might be related to essentially to forms of war without ethical justification, the Dungills suggested that a messianic redemption borne by African American mission work could co-exist happily with the normative justice claims of the New Deal order. However, over the course of thirty years, the Dungills' performances and lives grew increasingly discordant with the ways and narratives of the U.S. state and civil society, leading their project to be only legible as a patriarchal politics of respectability aiming for civic visibility and civil rights. The Dungills therefore brought black Chicago Protestantism's being worth more than all the world to a certain imaginative limit concerning the question of whether the justice of the world was compatible with, or could be thought in alignment with, messianic redemption.

First, the chapter discusses the roots and upbringings of Doyle and Yvette Dungill before moving into an analysis of their 1930s performances as a skilled yet novelty family band. It focuses on their performance of transfiguration via the satirical popular song "That's Why Darkies Were Born." To analyze this, particular attention is paid to how they and the media figured blackness as opacity and nothingness (particularly when performing as "Dante and His Shadows"), the relationship between their sacred space and secular public place performances, and their minstrel and spiritual repertory. Then the chapter discusses how the service of the two eldest Dungill children, the sons Alex and Gerald, in the Jim Crow U.S. army in North Africa

⁵ Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Outlaw Justice: The Messianic Politics of Paul* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).

and Europe during World War II fostered a new internationalist race consciousness and invigorated patrilineal dreams of postwar middle class leisure and financial and spiritual solvency—dreams aligned with scholarly understandings of how World War II service invigorated civil rights aspirations—but how injuries suffered in the war, coupled with age and blue collar attrition catching up to patriarch Doyle, precipitated the Dungill Family Orchestra’s transition into being a predominantly women’s group centering on the four Dungill daughters. The internationalist correspondence of Doyle, Alex and Gerald is juxtaposed with Doyle and the now predominantly women’s and girls’ group’s working with children in the new Ida B. Wells housing project during the war, and the implications of the contrast for gendered space and place. The third part focuses on their Cold War repertory, the internationalism of which refracted their neo-minstrel constructions of blackness, opacity and nothingness in the 1930s into a claiming of a panoply of worldwide heritages and identities, which were allusively oppositional to the Cold Warrior project in the U.S., and perhaps the U.S. project more generally—for example, the oppositional absurdism of their claiming descent from an Egyptian queen who escaped slavery and married a Seminole Indian. At the same time, black civic culture increasingly constructed them as a respectably patriarchal family indicative of black people’s worthiness and readiness for civil rights. The final section analyzes their 1950s and 1960s performances and narrations of the spread of the African Methodist Episcopal church in Africa as precipitating decolonization. As Doyle’s father had been an itinerant AME missionary in the post-Reconstruction Upper Midwest, these performances are analyzed in relation to Associated Negro Press head Claude Barnett’s investigation into rumors that African American AME missionaries were supporting the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya. At this point, the Dungills had all but replaced their Negro spirituals repertoire with their African-inspired music, and were loath to play spirituals when

asked to by organizations who thought they better represented black people during the civil rights struggle. Also examined is how and why, while Doyle had the group refrained from being marketed as “jazz” in the 1930s, even when playing in famed Bronzeville jazz joints, by the 1950s and 1960s their music was not unrelated to that of Sun Ra and other Afrofuturist and proto-black nationalist Chicago jazz and experimental musicians.

Chicago has traditionally been the site of much canonical scholarship on the decline and fall of black society. Recent scholarship has challenged this theme, painting the image of Chicago between World War I and the civil rights zeitgeist as a vibrant center of the arts, religion, and entrepreneurship, a cauldron of Afro-modernity every bit as important as Harlem.⁶ However, the central tenet of Chicago-based black social declinism, that the black family is pathologically dysfunctional and ill-equipped for modern life, has not received as much criticism from the recent body of historiography. But the Dungill Family proved that black families could thrive in a bustling modern city. At the same time, the Dungills were sometimes somewhat separate from, and sometimes separated themselves from, the undertakings of the average black family in Chicago, so their relation to the discourse of the Chicago School of sociology is complex. At one level, they were a working-class family, the study of which can draw attention away from the often romanticized giants of African American music who receive the majority of scholarly attention. On another level, they were perceived as exceptional within mid-twentieth

⁶ Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Wallace D. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Guthrie P. Ramsey, *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); and William Howland Kenney, *Chicago Jazz: A Cultural History, 1904-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

century black Chicago. Thus, the Dungills raise interesting questions concerning what is exceptional, who determines who is deemed exceptional, and to what degree “exceptional blacks” can challenge stereotypes of blacks as a racial group.

In the last few years, much work has been done to uncover the function of music in the Cold War. However, this work has separated into two insular camps: scholarship on the connection between jazz, Cold War politics, and the civil rights movement on one hand, and scholarship on the role of classical music in Cold War politics and various white and/or European identity formations on the other.⁷ This has the effect of excluding African Americans in classical music from the discourse. It also presents jazz as the only significant African American Cold War music expression in the fifties—despite its decreasing popularity in black America—and excluding classical music and musicals (to say nothing of sacred and popular music). Finally, it has connected to the notion that the aesthetical “blackness” of black music is indicative of its level of political consciousness. But as the Dungill Family shows, racial and musical identities can be highly in flux, and the surface content does not necessarily correspond to the political environment. Indeed, often the Dungills were embedded in, and celebrated by, progressive social movements when they played their most seemingly apolitical, or even politically regressive, music, such as plantation songs associated with minstrelsy, or nineteenth century European Romantic music. Accordingly, the racial remaking the Dungills underwent after World War II shows that black racial identity could change in many different ways, even as

⁷ Recent work on Cold War classical music includes *The Journal of Musicology* Vol. 26, No. 1-2 (Winter-Spring 2009); Barry Seldes, *Leonard Bernstein: The Political Life of an American Musician* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); and Daniel Fosler-Lusser, *Bartok and the Cold War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). Recent work on the relationship between jazz and the Cold War includes Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Musicians Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't: Jazz, Soul, and the Making of the Sixties* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); and Burton W. Peretti, *Jazz in American Culture* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997).

their politics became more transgressive. Furthermore, by examining an African American family, that played classical music, we can understand the surprisingly significant social role of classical music in black civil rights praxis and racial identity formation.

Much Cold War civil rights historiography has emphasized the moderation of the civil rights movement in the face of McCarthyism.⁸ While this certainly occurred, the Dungill family showed that it was possible for a group to radically reinvent their public racial identity in ways that disidentified with American norms and stressed international affinities with nonaligned peoples, and even with Russia.

At mid-century, conservatism on gender resembled conservatism on civil rights. Correspondingly, much of the scholarship on Cold War music focuses overwhelmingly on male musicians. Or, by emphasizing the silencing women faced at the hands of the dominant masculinist dialogue, it overlooks women whose music did in fact challenge phallogentric hegemony. Finally, it portrays various forms of internationalism as traversable only by men. However, the Dungill Family illuminates fascinating connections and tensions between a vibrant mid-century black feminism/womanism and black internationalism, as well as the presence of feminist/womanist connections across lines of race and religious sect, even with McCarthyism at or near its peak.

The Dungills' ability to foreground their success as a family unit allowed them to challenge many fixtures of white supremacist, masculinist, and nationalistic thought. But paradoxically, despite all of the ostensibly transgressive statements the Dungills made from the

⁸ Mary C. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Azza Salama Layton, *International Politics and Civil Rights Policies of the United States, 1941-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Musicians Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

1930s to the 1950s, their image as a wholesome, successful nuclear family proved indelible, and ultimately limited their progressive impact to the progressive communities they performed for.

As a family at once bourgeois and working-class, the Dungills occupied a “third-space” between the politics of respectability of the black upper classes and the “quotidian politics of aversion” practiced by the black lower classes at the time.⁹ The Dungill Family frequently drew upon the consciousnesses of both the “better classes” and the black masses in complex, even contradictory ways. But unlike the postmodern, anti-essentialist prerogative of Homi Bhabha’s conception of third-space, by reaching back through black musical history, or by “reaching out” for music from beyond U.S. borders, the Dungill family occupied a third space in the interstices of essentialism and pluralism, of love and theft. In this space they fashioned a unique racial/ethnic identity and a unique progressive politics.¹⁰

II. Origins: Going to Chicago and Dante and His Shadows

The complexity of the Dungills’ relationship to other black families in Chicago stemmed from the Dungills family’s complex class identity. This would have profound implications for the ambiguous and often paradoxical qualities in their decades-spanning musical, political, and

⁹ See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Harvard University Press, 1993). Michael Hanchard, *Party/Politics: Horizons in Black Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), and Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). Levine depicts the black urban and agrarian masses of the early 1920s turning away from the bourgeoisie’s attempt to ‘uplift’ them with highbrow culture. As they turned away, they developed a preservationist-yet-modernist subaltern black national (not nationalist) consciousness via the technological, market-driven dissemination of the blues. This phenomenon constituted a manifestation of Hanchard’s politics/ethics of aversion. For more on friction between New Negro cultural workers and the black upper classes, see George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*.

¹⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Negro Mind Reaches Out,” in Alain Locke, ed. *The New Negro*; Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*: (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

indeed racial identity formation projects. On one hand, Doyle Dungill's father, John A. Dungill, had been a successful A.M.E. and then Methodist minister, known as "one of the best colored orators in Michigan," and ran a successful barber shop in Kalamazoo, where Doyle was born.¹¹ However, as his father's health declined, pastor opportunities dwindled, and the family farm's crops failed, the family experienced money problems.¹² At this point, Doyle dropped out of high school, and he and his brothers worked in "odd jobs," some in "junkyards," others in "steel mills" around Kalamazoo.¹³ As he matured into adulthood, Doyle moved around the Midwest from job to job, accumulating labor injuries, such as when working at a street car company and "was struck in the eye while digging up brick with a pick, which resulted in temporary blindness,"¹⁴ or when he was worked in a brick yard preparing the lime, but had to quit because of "extreme detriment to his lungs, burning them out."¹⁵ Thus while Doyle maintained a high culture identity in some ways, in terms of day-to-day labor he was very much a man of the working-class.

At this particularly trying time in his life, one bright spot for Doyle was when he met and married Yvette Phillis Wheatley in 1920.¹⁶ The daughter of a prominent chiropodist (foot doctor), Yvette was a Lincoln University graduate working as the director of physical education at the St. Joseph, Missouri YWCA when she met and married Doyle.¹⁷ Unlike Doyle, Yvette's memoirs depict her youth as a bucolic black and tan fantasy, full of thrilling horseback rides through the countryside, exciting Midwest fairs, ethnically diverse environments, and her

¹¹ "John A. Dungill," in *Who's Who of Michigan*. The Dungill Family Papers, Box 1, Folder: "Biographical Sketches."

¹² Doyle Dungill, "Brief Autobiography of Doyle Dungill," p. 14. The Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32. He also had brief, "unsuccessful" labor stints in Chicago and Gary, Indiana.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁷ Hennie Mae Cisco, "Music! Music! Music! This Family Makes It!" *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 29, 1950.

father's eccentric patients.¹⁸ Despite this, by the time Doyle finally found steady employment as a molder at Deering Works in Chicago in 1925, they were a poor young colored couple with an expanding family.¹⁹

Despite the relative social prominence of their parents in earlier years, as a young colored couple, the best and only endowments the Dungills could draw upon from their forbears were faith and music. Yvette's chiropodist father was also a clarinetist, her mother a lyric soprano; Yvette sang in church choir in St. Joseph. Having been introduced to the piano and organ by his parents, Doyle played the organ in the churches his father's ministry took him to, and later learned "the science of orchestration" under a tutor.²⁰ Spirited by a dream in which the then-childless Doyle envisioned four children, his own, singing with him accompanying them on piano, Doyle and Yvette, who "was engrossed with the thought," began training the children.²¹ Doyle was far from a workaholic stage father; Yvette recalls that he "only took 15 minutes a day" to train the children when they were little, because "that made them eager to play."²²

The Dungills' break came when they posed to take a family picture, apparently with their instruments. The woman taking the picture asked them to play, and after hearing them, invited them to perform in three amateur contests, which they won.²³ In 1934, the four oldest children, Alexander, Gerald, Gloria, and Harriet, won the Chicago Defender's Rosenwald Prize at the

¹⁸ Yvette memoir p. 8-13. Black and Tan Fantasy is the name of a 1920s Duke Ellington song. Black and tans were Prohibition-era interracial speakeasies, especially widespread in Chicago (see Kenney, *Chicago Jazz: A Cultural History, 1904-1930*). Indeed, an element of the fantastical may exist in her recollection here, as St. Joseph in the Progressive Era was a segregated town.

¹⁹ "Brief Autobiography of Doyle Dungill," The Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

²² Yvette Dungill, "Mom's Life in the Twenties and Thirties," p. 12. The Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

²³ "Dreams of Four Piece Band, But Gets Six Pieces," *Chicago Tribune*, August 27, 1939.

Century of Progress Fair. During the rest of the decade, the Dungills played, by one count, 508 concerts, including ones at 84 different black churches in the greater Chicago area.²⁴

In this early stage, the Dungill Family troubled distinctions between Du Boisian art-as-propaganda and the aestheticist focus of Alain Locke. They were a novelty act, sometimes nearly a minstrel act, with an uplift ideology. In 1936, seeking engagements in New York City, Doyle wrote a letter to Edward Barnes, the host of the Chase and Sandman Amateur Hour, stating that “we have what we think is quite a novelty family band—six children taking part with a baby director who is only 3 years old.”²⁵ The image of a family of black children playing music together would inevitably allude to the stereotype of “pickaninnies” able to play well through the innate musicality of black folk. However, Doyle adds, “They play all types of music, except jazz.”²⁶ While Doyle acknowledged they were a novelty act, he appears to insist that they were still “better” than jazz: jazz was either beneath them, or was associated with licentious behavior and therefore inappropriate for his children to play. Additionally, their early flyer stresses that they play “real instruments (not a rhythm band).”²⁷ Yvette and Doyle were willing to have the children associated with minstrel signifiers—including flyers that proclaimed their facility with “plantation melodies”—but were unwilling to associate them with jazz.²⁸

The Dungill family frolicked in the porous gradations between “Sorrow Songs” and minstrelsy that had so vexed the discourse surrounding the Fisk Jubilee Singers.²⁹ Doyle and Yvette were conscious of the fact that their family band oscillated between racial uplift and

²⁴ See Paper introducing set-lists. Dungill Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

²⁵ Doyle Dungill to Mayor Albert Barnes, July 2, 1936 (draft). Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Dante and His Shadows flyer (undated). Dungill Family Papers, Box3, Archives II.

²⁸ Prewar flyers. Dungill Family Papers, Box 1, Folder: “Invitations/Flyers/Tickets-Performances [1934-] – Dungill”

²⁹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). p. 88.

racialist novelty, and often changed the name the band performed under depending on which they would evoke. From 1934 to 1941, for informal secular events such as bazaars and fairs, as well as for most church performances, the Dungills usually performed under the opaque name “Dante and His Shadows,” which references the blackness of not only the children, but the father—in the racially charged atmosphere of the 1930s entertainment industry, a black Dante linked with Shadows would inevitably be connected to Darky. In a related way, as the New Deal years progressed and minstrelsy continued its decline, the family’s flyers went from often advertising “plantation melodies,” to “plangent melodies,” and then “plaintive melodies,” showing how seemingly innocuous language could allude to Old South nostalgia.³⁰

The Dante and His Shadows moniker could also be an Ellisonian meditation on the “invisibility” of black folk when they are thrust into the stage’s spotlight: under its bright and Other-ing glare, the amplified frequency of racial stigma eclipses the lower frequencies of common humanity, leaving discernable to white folk only shadows singing “plantation melodies.”³¹ The set-lists for the band’s performances also indicate the extent to which the Dungills were tied to intertwined folk-minstrel traditions. The Dungills performed many songs with deep roots in minstrelsy, including “Carry Me Back to Ol’ Virginny,” “Cotton in the

³⁰ Prewar flyers. Dungill Family Papers, Box 1, Folder: “Invitations/Flyers/Tickets-Performances [1934-] – Dungill.”

³¹ Ellison, *Invisible Man*; Glenn Loury, *The Anatomy of Racial Inequality*. Loury develops the concept of racial stigma, the stigmatization of black people based on visual/physical attributes, and its role in preventing a progressive humanism from developing. While Ellison’s work is from 1952, the widespread popularity of Bert Williams’ “Nobody”; Ellington’s parts in his early film roles, particularly 1929’s *Black and Tan*; the centrality of visibility and invisibility in *The Jazz Singer*, and the black press’ largely positive response to that film; Louis Armstrong’s 1931 performance of “Little Joe,” in which he plays a father declaring his son’s humanity despite the fact that people deride the son because of his black/African features; and Susan Curtis’ analysis of the visuals of Scott Joplin’s sheet music in her *Dancing to a Black Man’s Tune: A Life of Scott Joplin*, indicate that the connection between blackness, racialization and invisibility was a prominent decades before, at least among some musicians.

Pickin,’” “My Old Kentucky Home,” “Swanee River,” “Old Black Joe,” and “Just Picture Me Back Home in Tennessee.”³²

Even the Dungills family’s embrace of minstrel tropes might have roots in their family heritage, roots that would complicate common understandings of minstrelsy’s identification with the lower class and disavowal by the relatively well-to-do. Yvette and the *Pittsburgh Courier* indicate that her grandfather on her father’s side was a violinist and a “traveling troubadour”—in other words, a minstrel, probably one of the early African American blackface minstrels.³³ The first songs Yvette taught her children were “folk songs,” which their early set-lists indicate probably included spirituals and minstrel songs.³⁴ This indicates that Yvette’s father passed these songs down to her despite his ‘respectable’ status as a doctor in an era when the black upper classes attempted to separate themselves from black folk culture.³⁵ Throughout her life, Yvette cherished aspects of minstrel performance: in her memoirs, she savors a reminiscence of the spectacle of “Dan Pat,” who cakewalked, waltzed and two-stepped at a fair she attended in her youth.³⁶ Thus, despite Yvette’s classicized soprano voice and myriad ‘respectable’ affiliations, such as the Alpha Phi Alpha sorority at Lincoln University, she must have been proud to have reprised the family tradition of performing the songs that straddled black folk culture and minstrelsy.³⁷

³² List of Repertory of Dante and His Shadows. Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

³³ Yvette Dungill, “Mom’s Life in the Twenties and Thirties,” p. 12. Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II. Hennie Mae Cisco “Music! Music! Music! This Family Makes It!” *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 29, 1950.

³⁴ Yvette, “Mom’s Life in the Twenties and Thirties,” p. 12. Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*.

³⁵ See Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³⁶ Yvette Dungill, memoir, p. 13. (This piece is not the same as the “Mom’s Life” ...piece. Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

³⁷ Hennie Mae Cisco, “Music! Music! Music! This Family Makes It!” *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 29, 1950. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Harvard University Press, 1993).

The Dungills' seemingly incompatible loves of classicism and folk/minstrelsy probably made their spiritual performances unique. In Yvette, they had a contralto soloist whose classicism probably recalled the Europeanized aesthetics of Roland Hayes' treatment of spirituals.³⁸ But Yvette's wistful love of the minstrel tradition probably meant that her attitude towards black culture in some respects resembled that of Louis Armstrong, for whom performing Southern nostalgia such as "When It's Sleepy Time Down South" "evoked the land of lost content, part real and part imagined."³⁹ Thus, she may have felt more of an affinity with Robeson's folk-inspired spiritual performances, as well as with the vigor and variety of Robeson's presentations.⁴⁰

During this period, the Dungill children frequently performed apart from their parents as "Cookie and His Gang," a name that referenced *Our Gang*, particularly its black characters. Importantly, this reference could have signified contrast as much as resemblance; unlike the ragamuffin black kids in *Our Gang*, Yvette made "Spanish"-style suits for the family to perform in.⁴¹ The children remained immensely proud of how kempt and "presentable" their mother's outfits had made them in the prewar years, revealing how much of a departure this was from the representation of black children at the time.⁴² Nevertheless, while Doyle distanced the children from jazz in the letter quoted above, the Cookie and His Gang and Dante and His Shadows monikers echoed the recalcitrant minstrel appellations prevalent in the popular music of the era. These were exemplified by the Broadway revues *Hot Chocolates*, *Chocolate Dandies*, and

³⁸ Paul Allen Anderson, *Deep River: Music and Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), p. 63.

³⁹ Terry Teachout, *Pops: A Life of Louis Armstrong* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), 161.

⁴⁰ Martin Bauml Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 80. Robeson's internationalism, particularly his love of Russia and Africa, indicate that his appeal to the Dungills would have increased through the years.

⁴¹ Notes on costumes. Dungill Family Papers, Box 6.

⁴² Notes on costumes. Dungill Family Papers Box 6.

Chocolate Kiddies, swing hits such as the Count Basie tunes “Toby,” “Topsy,” and “Dark Rapture,” and the ubiquitous Tin Pan Alley standard “Shine.”⁴³ However, for certain events in sacred spaces or of explicit New Negro salience, the Dungill family performed as “The Dungill Family” or “The Dungill Family Orchestra,” thereby adhering to a politics of respectability appropriate for the cultural context.⁴⁴

The Dungill Family’s most unmistakably New Negro event was their starring appearance at the 1937 Metropolitan Choir Music Festival. The festival was organized by J. Wesley Jones, Metropolitan Choir Director and past president of the National Association of Negro Musicians, an organization of black musicians dedicated to racial uplift through live classical music. Jones wrote Doyle that “on these programs I have the best artists in the country appear. I have had the pleasure of hearing your group twice and I am delighted with their work.”⁴⁵ Newspapers singled out the Dungills’s performance with much anticipation, giving them first billing in lists of the performers, declaring them “famous,” and stating that “the stellar attraction will be the Dungill Family of musicians, ages ranging from four to fifteen years. Now, just to see those children perform will be an extraordinary treat.”⁴⁶

Their Dungill Family’s appearance at the 1938 Negro History Week program at the Shoop School, where all of the Dungill children went to elementary school, also ostensibly centered on musical uplift. However, this program reveals one of the functional roles of novelty

⁴³ Of course not all songs referencing blackness in their titles in this era were so baldly in the shadow of minstrelsy: some were also profound meditations, such as Louis Armstrong’s “Dear Old Southland,” which includes an interpolation of “Deep River,” and Duke Ellington’s “Sepia Panorama,” an ode to the polyvalence of blackness.

⁴⁴ See Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Harvard University Press, 1993).

⁴⁵ J. Wesley Jones to Doyle Dungill, June 5, 1937. Dungill Family Papers, Box 1, “Miscellaneous Folder: Scrapbook [Photocopies].”

⁴⁶ “Eaglewood Group Scores in Festival,” newspaper, date unknown. Dungill Papers, Box 1, Folder: “Miscellaneous.” Unknown newspaper, Saturday, July 24, 1937. Dungill Papers, Box 1, Folder: “Miscellaneous.”

in a New Negro context. One might expect a program full of the pedagogy of uplift espoused by Carter G. Woodson. But aside from the opening spiritual, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” the Dungill Family performed their more vaudevillian material, such as “When the Circus Band Comes to Town,” as well as a skit featuring the numbers “Buckwheat Cakes” (from *Our Gang?*) and “Preacher and the Bear.”⁴⁷ Other performers provided the uplift material, which included the Paul Lawrence Dunbar poem “Preaching,” a Reverend Kingsley’s report on “The Progress of the Negro,” and a viewing of paintings of Abraham Lincoln and a “Negro statesman.”⁴⁸ Thus, while the Dungills could sing classicized formal spirituals recalling the Fisk Jubilee Singers, they could also play the counterpoint to uplift-oriented material and underscore the unabashedly lush life in Jim Crowed black culture, all within the same program.

The Dungill family further blurred the distinctions between minstrelsy and New Negroism by performing songs that subverted the racism of minstrelsy. The subversive song the Dungill family performed the most was “That’s Why Darkies Were Born.” The 1931 pop hit was written by the white songwriting team of Ray Henderson and Lev Brown, and sung frequently by New Negro icon Paul Robeson. The lyrics begin by recounting the Curse of Ham, which supposedly damned blacks to perpetual servitude: “Someone had to pick the cotton / Someone had to pick the corn...that’s why darkies were born.” Each following verse is a successive deconstruction of the racist orthodoxy, ruminating ever more assuredly on the reified irony of great black suffering begetting great, often joyful black music. Finally, the last verse declares in militant righteousness, “Someone had to fight the Devil / Shout about Gabriel’s Horn / Someone had to stoke the train / That would bring God’s children to green pastures / That’s why darkies

⁴⁷ Negro History Week at Shoop School program, February 11, 1938. Dungill Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

⁴⁸ Ibid; article in Shoop School Paper (after the parents’ memoirs). Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

were born.” Thus, beginning with lyrics vaguely recalling the curse of Ham, the song ends with the notion that blacks were uniquely situated, indeed called upon by God, to redeem the nation and usher in the Kingdom of God on earth. Therefore, despite the recurrence of the term “darkies,” the song carries forth the decades-long critical project that could be called, to signify on Houston Baker’s language, the deformation of minstrelsy, or the revision of minstrelsy to subvert white supremacy.⁴⁹ Baker uses the term “the deformation of mastery” to describe the cultural critique of white supremacy carried out by such New Negroes as W.E.B. Du Bois.⁵⁰ The corollary I propose, the deformation of minstrelsy, begins with the subversive performances of Bert Williams (for detailed explication of the subversiveness of Williams, see Louis Chude-Sokei, *The Last Darky*) and the lyrics of Paul Lawrence Dunbar, was carried on by films such as *The Jazz Singer* (the song “Dirty Hands, Dirty Face” is particularly relevant here) and, in “That’s Why Darkies Were Born,” moves from subversion to outright confrontation in the final verse.⁵¹ Notably, this was a biracial artistic project.

Notably, the Dungill family presented “That’s Why Darkies Were Born” as a solo feature for Yvette Dungill’s soprano voice, and did not feature the children singing.⁵² Considering her minstrel familial roots, the song must have resonated strongly for Yvette. Additionally, Katharine Capshaw Smith points out that even though New Negro parents often had their children perform scripts filled with stereotypical words or situations, the parents were very concerned about their children’s impressionable psyches.⁵³ Parents strove to keep their children

⁴⁹ Houston A. Baker Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Louis Chude-Sokei, *The Last Darky* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁵² Set-list for Shiloh Baptist Church, 4815 Wabash Oct. 18, 1938. Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

⁵³ Katharine Capshaw Smith, *Children’s Literature of the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

from inculcating white supremacy even while they groomed the children for leadership in the antiracist struggle by harnessing an expressive culture in which the distinctions between minstrelsy and militancy were often blurred and highly contested.⁵⁴ Thus, Yvette and Doyle probably did not want their children to sing the lyric “that’s why darkies were born,” whether or not they thought the children comprehended the song’s progressive intent.

The Dungill family often blurred the distinctions between cultural refinement and apolitical entertainment throughout their sets. They frequently performed secular novelty skits in A.M.E. Churches as Dante and His Shadows, for instance.⁵⁵ Within the black church world, some programs exhibited more of a politically-oriented emphasis than others. For example, in a 1938 performance at Shiloh Baptist Church, their program included, in order but not in succession, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” “Go Down, Moses,” “That’s Why Darkies Were Born,” and “The Star Spangled Banner,” depicting a progression from slave consciousness, to emancipation, to the black freedom struggle, and finally, to inclusion in a United States delivered from racial sin.⁵⁶ However, nestled in the midst of this weighty telos was a performance of “Shortnin’ Bread,” reportedly the favorite song of five-year-old Charles, as well as “Whistle While You Work.”⁵⁷ Other performances juxtaposed plantation songs with more political songs, such as an appearance at a West Chicago Church in which they sang “1, 2, 3, 4 Dixie” and Doyle’s composition “We Shall Be Free.”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ See set-lists for A.M.E. Churches, esp. one sponsored by a Rev. Collins L. Browder. Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

⁵⁶ Set-list for Shiloh Baptist Church, 4825 Wabash, Oct. 18, 1938. Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Set-list for July 16, 1937, West Chicago, IL. 1030 Orleans, Rev. Jones. Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

III. The Dungills and the Politics of the Black Family

While skits including numbers such as “Buckwheat Cakes” indicate that the Dungills performed racialist scenes, songs such as Doyle’s composition “That’s My Doggie Scotty (A Child’s Song),” written about the Dungills’ dog, lacked racial content.⁵⁹ “That’s My Doggie Scotty” features such a-racial lyrics as “Every nice little doggie has a master / every nice little doggie is fine / nice little doggies have cute little names / Scotty is the name of mine.”⁶⁰ On one hand, this piece is an ode not just to the Dungills’s own dog, but to child and their dog Americana, reflecting the prevalent idea that, despite the racial soul-craft of some black children’s literature, it was also important for the literature to emphasize the universality of childhood experiences.⁶¹ However, while their performance of Mother Goose rhymes and the aforementioned “Whistle While You Work” may have served this purpose, it seems the Dungills did not perform “That’s My Doggie Scotty” publicly; the song does not appear on any of their set-lists, or their lists of prewar repertoire. Thus, like the name Dante and His Shadows, the contrast between the public performance of plantation melodies and the private life of this song—one of the few with a score preserved in the Dungill family archive—indicates the separation between the racialized/politicized on-stage performance and the underlying commonalities shared by black and white families behind the scenes, behind the Veil.⁶²

Charles, Yvette and Doyle’s youngest son and the “baby director” of the band, most embodied the complexities at the intersection of the politics of New Negro music and New

⁵⁹ Doyle memoir, p. 53.

⁶⁰ Doyle Dungill, sheet music for “That’s My Doggie Scotty.” Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

⁶¹ Katharine Capshaw Smith, *Children’s Literature of the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 208.

⁶² Du Bois formulates the notion of a Veil of racist and racialist distortion blocking blacks and whites from recognition of their common humanity in *The Souls of Black Folk*.

Negro childhood. Charles began “directing” their music in 1934, at the age of eighteen months.⁶³ This was a major selling point of the band, as much of their promotional literature remarked on the baby director of the “youngest orchestra in the world.”⁶⁴ On one hand, the publicity image of the baby Charles standing on Doyle’s piano, dressed in a suit, serious look on his face, arm wielding the baton in a dramatic maestro’s pose, is the perfect embodiment of the New Negro grooming of children to lead the movement.⁶⁵ Some Chicagoans picked up on this outlook; a flyer for a Cookie and His Gang performance at the South Side dancehall the Apex Café says “Prof. Cook in Charge.”⁶⁶ On the other hand, the marketing conveys the notion that the image of a black child attaining maestro status in the esteemed arts was comically absurd, an echo of the quixotically uppity airs of the Zip Coon minstrel character.

The *Chicago Tribune*’s portrayal of Charles in its 1939 feature on the Dungill Family underscores this point. The *Tribune* renders Charles’ response to the question why he likes to play music as “‘Ah guess, ma’m,’ he said, ‘ah jes’ loves it,’” twisting what was certainly Standard English into plantation dialect and implying that Charles was blissfully unable to comprehend his supposedly innate affinity for music.⁶⁷ Because blackness was often conflated with being childlike, the Dungill children were highly susceptible to stereotyping by the white press.

Despite the stereotypical depiction of Charles, the article is a glowing and affectionate portrayal of the Dungills as a family unit run by impressive parents. The level of cohesion

⁶³ “Dreams of Four Piece Band, But Gets Six Pieces,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 27, 1939.

⁶⁴ Dante and His Shadows flyer. Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

⁶⁵ Cite image; Katharine Capshaw Smith, *Children’s Literature of the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

⁶⁶ Flyer for “The Cocktail Hour” at the New Apex Café (undated). Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

disputes the widespread notion that black families were in disarray, caught in a tangle of pathology. The article notes warmly that “Papa and Mama Dungill were prouder than anybody” when “the orchestra that was born to them” played at the Union Park music festival.⁶⁸ In the profile, Yvette comes off as articulate and witty, stating, “Cookie exchanged his milk bottle for a baton.”⁶⁹ Doyle is portrayed as both a working-class provider for his family—particularly laudable in an era of heightened working-class consciousness in the U.S.⁷⁰—and a devoted teacher of his children: “(Doyle) teaches his children music in the evenings. By day he is a molder in a harvesting company foundry.”⁷¹

The article also strives to distance the family from the environments that were thought to breed black dysfunction. It identifies the family with Lutheran and Baptist Churches as opposed to the more racialized storefront, A.M.E. or Community Churches.⁷² Additionally, the article’s description of the Dungills’ move from a “west side flat,” in which their music “annoy(ed) the neighbors,” to “a home way down south near the city limits” that “they are paying for,” to which “crowds have collected on the sidewalks to clap hands while they practice,” implies that moving from the congested slum to the more suburban Morgan Park area allowed their music to breathe and blossom in a warm environment.⁷³

Similarly, the black Midwest, particularly black Chicago, embraced the Dungills as role models, as paragons of what a black family could accomplish (cite). The Shoop School Paper

⁶⁸ “Dreams of Four Piece Band, But Gets Six Pieces,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 27, 1939.

⁶⁹ Ibid. This might have been an aspect of her personality; in her memoirs, she recalls that when the Dungills first got to New York in 1935, “we went to a hotel, and they wanted \$4.00 per room. I told her, we didn’t want to buy the hotel.” Yvette, “Mom’s Life in the Twenties and Thirties,” p. 6. Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

⁷⁰ See Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1996).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

declared the Dungills were “an inspiration to many of the families in the vicinity.”⁷⁴ Thus while influential forces such as the Chicago School of sociology argued that black life was rife with sexual dysfunction, nasty, brutish, and short, both the *Chicago Tribune* and many black Chicagoans argued that through their traditional family values, the Dungill family showed blacks and whites that there was a ‘cultured,’ but still *working-class* example to the contrary.⁷⁵

Following America’s entry into World War II, the Dungill Family stopped touring, as the two oldest sons, Alexander and Gerald, were drafted into the Army. However, it was perhaps during the war that the family engaged in its most practical uplift activity: forming the Dungill School of Music inside the new Ida B. Wells housing project. The purpose of the school was “to teach those (children) who did not already know the rudiments of good music.”⁷⁶ The family’s emphasis on “good” music here indicates that the Dungills were trying to expose the children of the projects, who were presumably only accustomed to “lowbrow” music, to classicized music as well as music theory. The classes were open to any children from the housing project who wanted to join.⁷⁷ Doyle and Yvette taught two classes, one for ages roughly four through thirteen and another for ages roughly eleven to seventeen.⁷⁸ When the music school children put on performances in the project, Doyle and Yvette would use “the instrumental talents of the Dungill children to augment the singing and playing of the other children.”⁷⁹ Doyle and Yvette’s incorporation of their own children into this musical uplift initiative underscores the depth of their solidarity with and commitment to the families of the housing project.

⁷⁴ Mary Jane Peeler, “That Musical Family, ‘The Dungills,’” Shoop School Paper, 1937. Dungill Papers Box 3, Archive II, Binder 2

⁷⁵ E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in Chicago*, and *The Negro Family in the United States*; Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*.

⁷⁶ “Brief Autobiography of Doyle Dungill,” p. 56. Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 57.

However, as with most New Negro projects, there appears to have been a degree of paternalism involved. The music school's 1946 performance of "Snow White and Seven Dwarves" was heavily about Doyle and Yvette. Not only did Doyle and Yvette teach the students music generally, but Doyle wrote the score for the musical and Yvette made all the costumes for what from the photograph of the cast appears to be about thirty children.⁸⁰ The Dungills named the group performing the play "The Wee Wisdom Club," thereby connecting musical education with the quest for knowledge in general. Doyle says that the play was originally to be given "only for the parents of the children," which appears to be different from the other performances put on in the project.⁸¹ This indicated that they were trying to teach the parents something as well as the children: either to expose them to "good" music, or instill them with pride in their children, or teach them how to commit to their children. But since, on the night of the performance, the auditorium was "packed," Doyle remarks in his memoir that it was a "most surprising indication by others of the respect for educational needs of children."⁸² Thus the Dungills did not believe that the project denizens, and perhaps Chicagoans more widely, were as committed to child instruction as they were.

IV. Rethinking Race and Culture in War-Torn Europe

In part this was due perhaps to the development of Alexander and Gerald during the war. Alexander's and Gerald's experience at war in Europe also may have stimulated a reassessment of race. They bore witness to the destruction of Europe, up until then the acknowledged cockpit

⁸⁰ Photograph of the cast of "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves," May 10th, 1946. Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

⁸¹ "Brief Autobiography of Doyle Dungill," p. 57. Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 58.

of world civilization. Their experiences cultivated a strong sense of superiority to many white Westerners as well as non-white non-Westerners. Alexander remarked that in “North Africa the people have mud houses in those little towns and the Arabs steal everything.”⁸³ Alexander remarked that even though much of their information was most likely propaganda of dubious accuracy, he did “know” that “the Chinese are queer person(s) especially when they haven’t become Westernized.”⁸⁴

This attitude towards nonwhites, and the non-Western, could extend to Westerners. He noted that for many Italians, “their fathers used horses and carts and they are using horses and carts and their children will use horses and carts in spite of the urgings of prominent individuals residing in the various province(’)s capitals.”⁸⁵ Similarly, writing apparently of Italy and Germany, Gerald mused that “There are many stories behind these people, stories of hatred and strife and Nationality differences. These countries are back many, many years, in fact as far as progress is concerned most of them are like the stories you read of peasants of rural districts in the old lands in story books.”⁸⁶ In noting the nationality differences, Gerald indicates that the failure of the young German and Italian nation-states to taper over centuries of internecine strife gave the lie to the essentialist, racialist nationalism of the Imperialist and Fascist/Nazi epochs. He thereby deconstructs the cohesiveness of white people(s) and white culture(s). Furthermore, both Alexander and Gerald seem to have decoupled Western-ness from race, at least to a degree. For they thought most white people were backward as many non-whites were. After seeing the

⁸³ Alexander Dungill to Yvette Dungill, undated (likely before he moved from North Africa to Italy, so early-mid 1943?). Dungill Family Papers, Box 4, Archives II: The Early Years, Volume III.

⁸⁴ Alexander Dungill to Yvette Dungill, postmarked October 19, 1944. Dungill Family Papers, Box 4, Archives II: The Early Years, Volume III.

⁸⁵ Alexander Dungill to Yvette Dungill, postmarked February 19, 1945. Dungill Family Papers, Box 4, Archives II: The Early Years, Volume III.

⁸⁶ Gerald Dungill to Yvette Dungill, February 8, 1945. Dungill Family Papers, Box 4, Archives II: The Early Years, Volume III.

destruction of the European war firsthand—including Gerald’s searing witness to Dachau following the death camp’s liberation—they could not believe in Europe’s racial, moral, or, in a certain sense, its musical superiority.⁸⁷

Perhaps the most remarkable statement made by the brothers was Alexander’s observation that “these foreign people (are) a funny people taking everything so nonchalantly and smiling and singing—I guess it is because of their backwardness towards civilization.”⁸⁸ One could imagine a white audience thinking the same thing during the Dungills’ prewar performances of plantation songs, and the *Chicago Tribune*’s depiction of Alexander’s younger brother, Charles, certainly draws from that mindset as applied to black people, especially black children.

As they rethought race and culture, Gerald and Alexander demonstrated considerable growth in their ambitions for the family band during their tour abroad. Alexander seemed to grow closer to his instrument, feeling connected to his family through the music: “Now I am a long way from home but home seems close as I brought the trombone a great many miles wandering in the ocean and over here to Italy.”⁸⁹ Additionally, he wrote that he was “praying that all of us will be together again that is why I play the trombone and drive the other boys crazy.”⁹⁰ In addition to holding on to the trombone to connect with his family, Alexander was able to compare the family’s music to that of Europe. After attending a performance of Puccini’s *Turandot* in Italy towards the end of the European war, Alexander remarked that “it was pretty

⁸⁷ Gerald Dungill to Yvette Dungill, June 29, 1945. Dungill Family Papers, Box 4, Archives II: The Early Years, Volume III.

⁸⁸ Alexander Dungill to Yvette Dungill, February 19, 1945. Dungill Family Papers, Box 4, Archives II: The Early Years, Volume III.

⁸⁹ Alexander Dungill to Yvette Dungill, (no date; summer 1944? check). Dungill Family Papers, Box 4, Archives II: The Early Years, Volume III.

⁹⁰ Alexander Dungill to Yvette Dungill, May 16, 1944. Dungill Family Papers, Box 4, Archives II: The Early Years, Volume III.

good. But when I look at the effect it has upon the crowds I see that our concerts were very effective and when we get together again we will strive for a better effect which I am sure that all of us together can perfect.”⁹¹ Similarly, his younger brother Gerald remarked that he finally saw “‘The Great Ziegfield,’ which was inspiring to any artist. The stag(sic) settings and scenery was(sic) tangible for our future Concerts.”⁹² Thus both Gerald and Alexander measured the Dungill family’s performance against the operatic canon in the cradle of Italian opera in order to improve the family band. Remarking on his experiences, Alexander wrote the family back home that “I think with the experience of all of us combined we will make a great combination which will startle the world.”⁹³

Gerald was even more ambitiously planning out the careers of the band after his and Alexander’s return from their tour of duty. Writing the family, he declared, “I really want to have something when we start out again,” perhaps an acknowledgement that much of the family band’s prewar work (walked the line between) novelty and minstrelsy.⁹⁴ No longer a child in a novelty act on the West Side of Chicago, but a soldier at war in Western Europe, Gerald declared “you see I am a man now and want large concerts..but want to offer the best to concert goers...if only I were there to show you my plan...”⁹⁵ Gerald went ahead and sketched out two pages of diagrams of the band’s layout at venues, including lighting effects and set lists for performances.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Alexander Dungill to Yvette Dungill, May 3, 1945. Dungill Family Papers, Box 4, Archives II: The Early Years, Volume III.

⁹² Gerald Dungill to Yvette Dungill, December 18, 1944. Dungill Family Papers, Box 4, Archives II: The Early Years, Volume III.

⁹³ Alexander Dungill to Yvette Dungill, July 27, 1945. Dungill Family Papers, Box 4, Archives II: The Early Years, Volume III.

⁹⁴ Gerald Dungill to Yvette Dungill, February 8, 1945. Dungill Family Papers, Box 4, Archives II: The Early Years, Volume III.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Gerald's determination here seems a reflection of the dreams of his father. Despite his childhood immersed in the Great Depression and his coming of age in a Jim Crowed Army, despite suffering from a back injury that would require medical work for the rest of his life caused when in December 1944 his jeep hit a landmine, Gerald seems to have believed that his father's life had been far harder than his.⁹⁷ After suffering a variety of labor injuries in his peripatetic quest for decent work as a young man, Doyle had been working full time as a molder for twenty years while practicing and performing with his children at night.⁹⁸ By the time Alexander and Gerald went off to war he and Yvette were running the after school music youth program at the Ida B. Wells Housing Project Community Center.⁹⁹ Gerald was immensely proud of his parents' school, and mentioned it often to his family at home and to soldiers and civilians in Europe. Writing to his mother, Gerald said that "You see I am thinking ten years ahead...Our concerts will build our Instrumental School...Tell Dad not to worry..His sons will bring him a new life."¹⁰⁰

Following Alexander and Gerald's return to the U.S., the Dungill Family band that emerged after World War II was considerably different from the band of the New Deal era. They retained some novelties, with titles such as "Donkey Serenade," but they wholly abandoned the numbers containing echoes of the plantation school aesthetic after the war. Additionally, by the mid-to-late forties they appeared as "The Dungill Family Orchestra of Chicago" or "The Dungill Family Band," and rarely as "Dante and His Shadows" or "Cookie and His Gang"; their last

⁹⁷ Gerald Dungill, "Background and History of Corporal Gerald O. Dungill's Injury to His Spine." Army Serial Number 36798217, December 1944. Dungill Family Papers Box 6, Folder to Michael Flug.

⁹⁸ "Music! Music! Music! This Family Makes it!" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 1950. Dungill Family Papers, Box 1: "Miscellaneous Folder: Scrapbook [Photocopies]."

⁹⁹ Dungill School of Music membership card. Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

¹⁰⁰ Gerald Dungill to Yvette Dungill, February 8, 1945. Dungill Family Papers, Box 4, Archives III: The Early Years, Volume III.

performance as Dante and His Shadows was in 1947.¹⁰¹ The Dungills also put greater emphasis on religion, procuring an hour long Sunday morning radio program called the Christian Fellowship Hour on a local Chicago radio station, which lasted for two years.¹⁰²

For a while in the mid-forties the Dungill family primarily performed American music, such as their spirituals, and added Tin Pan Alley standards such as Irving Berlin's "God Bless America." They also added Kern and Hammerstein's "Ole Man River" and Cole Porter's "Night and Day," one of their few romantic songs, performed as a trombone feature for Alexander. Philip Furia points out that in "Night and Day," Cole Porter's lyrics, such as the "'beat, beat, beat of the tom-tom' ... are often fitted to his most brooding chromatic melodies."¹⁰³ Alexander's trombone solo silences this racialist, primitivist language—as well as Porter's highly urbane, secular, and sexual lyrics—and instead sounds only the 'brooding chromatic melodies.'¹⁰⁴ Alexander's trombone solo thus revises the song to fit into the Dungill family's focus on religion, and perhaps at this time a sentimental, a-racial patriotism.¹⁰⁵

At this point, the Dungills' aesthetic would seem to echo the staid hope for integrationism among the new postwar black middle class that, according to Arnold Rampersad, so rankled Langston Hughes at mid-century; or Ralph Ellison's belief in the compatibility of the American vernacular and the European classical music, as well as in the inescapable racial hybridity of

¹⁰¹ Altgeld Nursery School Performance Flyer, 1946. Dungill Family Papers, Box 1: "Miscellaneous Folder: Scrapbook [Photocopies]."

¹⁰² "Brief Autobiography of Doyle Dungill," p. 58. Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

¹⁰³ In Philip Furia's *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 155.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ For an in-depth analysis of how black instrumentalists could silence Tin Pan Alley lyrics that potentially buttressed racial hierarchy in their reinterpretations, see Ingrid Monson's treatment of John Coltrane's take on "My Favorite Things," in Ingrid Monson, "Doubleness and Jazz Improvisation: Irony, Parody, and Ethnomusicology," *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 20, No. 2 (Winter, 1994), pp. 283-313.

African American music.¹⁰⁶ However, the Dungills diverge from these notions. The Dungills still did not perform popular music or jazz, with the exception of pseudo/neospirituals such as “Old Man River,” patriotic anthems such as “God Bless America,” or classicized Tin Pan Alley such as “Night and Day” for (classical) trombone. Additionally, the Dungills’ evasion of jazz is echoed by their aversion to, or at least lack of interest in, harnessing recording technology, a critical element of Ellison’s modernism.¹⁰⁷ Finally, after this brief period of Americanization during the era of American nuclear hegemony, the Dungills embraced a transnational, multiethnic identity that stressed musical and hereditary connections abroad, often with nations that had embraced or were embracing socialism (Russia, India, and Egypt).¹⁰⁸

V. The Transnational Turn and the Remaking of Ethnic Identity

In 1950, the Dungill Family began to advertise itself as a family with international roots. The second sentence of this primary flyer during this period read, “They have a rich background of Egyptian, Indian, American Indian, African and French ancestry, and all this mixture of blood has been set afire...The Oriental and Occidental, the primitive and cultural meet here on common ground.”¹⁰⁹ Further down on the page, under a section labeled “Descendant of an Egyptian Queen,” the flyer imparts this fantastic story:

In the veins of Doyle Dungill flows the blood of an Egyptian queen. During the days of slavery, this young queen and her retinue were taken to America on the promise she would be a queen with a vast estate there. When this young queen, whose hair was almost white, they say, discovered it was a trick and a lie, she escaped to Florida and

¹⁰⁶ Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes Volume II: 1941-67 I Dream A World*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 199; Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972).

¹⁰⁷ For a discussion of the technological elements of Ellison’s modernism, see Alexander G. Weheliye, “‘I Am I Be’: The Subject of Sonic Afro-modernity,” *boundary 2*, Vol. 30, No. 2, Ralph Ellison: The Next Fifty Years (Summer, 2003), pp. 97-114.

¹⁰⁸ Dungill Family Redpath Bureau main flyer, c.1951-53.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

married a Seminole Indian. The queen was his father's grandmother. His mother, too, was part Indian.¹¹⁰

Finally, the final section imparts that Yvette's father "was of French and Delaware Indian extraction. Her mother was a Cherokee Indian, whose grandmother came from India."¹¹¹

Yvette was probably the major influence on their internationalism within the family, at least at this stage. Her memoir reveals a passion for the idyllic, the mythical, and the supernatural. Aside from the aforementioned, and unlikely, multiethnic neighborhood surroundings, the mythology of Jesse James, who Yvette claims was treated by her chiropodist father, found its way into the family lore of even blacks in St. Joseph, Missouri.¹¹² Yvette speaks often of the novelty acts, stunts and characters of early twentieth century Midwest festivals; they might have remained especially vivid if they saw her father after they injured themselves during their routines.¹¹³ Finally, she spends an inordinate amount of time delighting in a discussion of her investigation into whether or not her and Doyle's first house was haunted, as their neighbor had claimed.¹¹⁴

For a family especially with a matriarch whose most cherished childhood memories often centered on spectacle, novelty, (something) and myth, interwar black Chicago could have been a carnival of Egyptocentric impressions. According to the *Pittsburgh Courier*, Yvette was also a beauty culturist, and Aida figured prominently in Chicago beauty advertising.¹¹⁵ Under the

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Yvette memoir. For instance, Coleman Hawkins, a St. Joseph native born ten years after Yvette, would tell the tale of how his grandmother had sheltered Jesse James. While a radical neo-Confederate partisan, James also supported universal public school education in Missouri, so he must have been a complex figure for Missouri's blacks. John Chilton, *The Song of the Hawk: The Life and Recordings of Coleman Hawkins*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), p. 3-4

¹¹³ Yvette memoir, p. 13. Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

¹¹⁴ Yvette, Ibid., p. 9.

¹¹⁵ Music! Music! Music This Family Makes It, *Pittsburgh Courier*, 1950.

guidance of Claude Barnett, the Kashmir Chemical Company's "Nile Queen" models and Egyptian and Middle Eastern settings of advertisements wrested beauty culture away from Malone and Madame CJ Walker's emphasis on women's entrepreneurship—perhaps yet another wrinkle in the complex relationship between feminism and transnational/Afrodiasporic humanism.¹¹⁶ At the same time, this development stressed the notion that beauty culture held African origins, thus women and femininity yet again become the (oft-objectified) connection between the diaspora.¹¹⁷ At the 1936 commencement at Poro College, Malone also suggested the graduating women wear caps similar to those of Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, who had been struggling to withstand Italy's invasion for the past year.¹¹⁸ While these actions symbolized women's role in catalyzing Afrodiasporic connections, they also acquiesced to male supremacy in various ways. Frederick H. H. Robb's *Wonder Books* were another node of intersection of, and site of struggle between, feminism and Egyptocentrism in black Chicago: local artist Charles Dawson adorned with "Egyptocentric motifs" pages that contained essays on African, Abyssinian, and Egyptian antiquity as well as essays by black women on modern African American feminist or protofeminist praxis, which worked to undercut the patriarchal forces in the books.¹¹⁹ Robb also set up a giant Sphinx for Chicago's American Negro Exposition in the summer of 1940.¹²⁰ The Dungill daughters' passion for Afrocentric art, which they would not demonstrate publicly until their own visual art pieces of the nineteen seventies, indicates that the

¹¹⁶ Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, The Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 81.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹¹⁹ Adam Green, "The Rising Tide of Youth: Chicago's Wonder Books and the 'New' Black Middle Class," in *The Middling Sorts: Explorations in the History of the American Middle Class* (eds. Burton J. Bledstein and Robert D. Johnston), 250-251.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

art of Charles Dawson in Chicago, and possibly other figures such as Harlem's Aaron Douglas, was also an influence.

The Dungill Family archive contains a copy of a 1941 article about the Rainbow Orchestra, a traveling family of musicians headed by a Russian Orthodox evangelical priest. That they saved this article for the archive, perhaps the only article in the archive saved that is not about the Dungills (or adjacent to an article about the Dungills), and that it had been preserved for so many decades, indicates that the article was of special importance to the family. Perhaps it contains the seeds of the Dungills' multiethnic transnationalism. The Rainbow Orchestra featured ten sons and daughters to the Dungills' seven.¹²¹ The father and figurehead was a Russian Evangelical pastor and missionary "wanderer" in exile.¹²² Similarly, Doyle and his father had wandered from church to church when Doyle was young, and Doyle himself had wandered around the Midwest from job to job in the 1910s and, with Yvette, the early 1920s.¹²³ The idea of exile could also have registered with the Dungills' thinking about their ancestors exiled during the slave trade, which the publicity piece references, albeit in Egyptocentric fashion.¹²⁴ Evangelicalism figures prominently in the Dungills' later African pieces. It also could lend insight into why Gerald was drawn to study Russian when stationed in Italy; he was thousands of miles from the Eastern Front, and other languages Gerald did not know, such as Italian, have more classical vocal repertory.¹²⁵ But Gerald was so drawn to the culture that he added a Russian aria to his repertoire.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Rita Fitzpatrick, "Orchestra of 13 (____?) Family Talks Five Languages," undated, unknown paper; probably from 1940-41. I have seen no other information on them.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Who's Who of Michigan: John A. Dungill; "Autobiography of Doyle Dungill" (unpublished).

¹²⁴ Dungill Family Redpath Bureau Profile, 1951-53.

¹²⁵ Gerald Dungill to Yvette Dungill (and family), June 29, 1945. Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

¹²⁶ Programs listing Gerald's Russian aria

The article also trumpeted the Russian Orchestra's transnationality and ethnic diversity. The family included American, English, Latvian and German children, and some of the children spoke Swedish. Thus it drew from the citizenry of Allied, Axis, Soviet, and neutral nations. But by making sure to point out that the German child sided with the Allies against the Axis, the article indicates that neither blood nor cultural context determines a person's beliefs.

It is unclear if the Dungill Family ever encountered the Russian Orchestra. However, their travels throughout the Chicago area stimulated considerable interracial contact. They did perform for white audiences, although it seems with far less frequency than for black audiences, and in the prewar period, disproportionately in the "invisible" capacity of "Dante and His Shadows" or "Cookie and His Gang." However, in 1940 the Dungills were the most prominent black participants in a Union Park art festival involving "children of Mexican, Italian, and Slavic descent" drawn from six Chicago public elementary schools.¹²⁷

Tracing the Dungills' political disposition toward the Cold War is difficult. During this era the Dungill Family played two works by Russian composers, Rachmaninoff (Prelude in C minor) and Rimsky-Korsakov. Rachmaninoff became a modern, but this early work is Romantic, indebted to Tchaikovsky. Additionally, Rachmaninoff fled Russia after the 1917 Russian Revolution and was deemed an "enemy of the people" by the Soviet government, which also denounced his music. Rimsky-Korsakov was one of the nationalist Victorian-era Mighty Five composers, but the piece they selected is "Song of India." "Song of India" is the name big band leader Tommy Dorsey gave his 1938 version of Rimsky-Korsakov's "Song of the Indian Guest," from the opera *Sadko*. The Dungills probably heard Dorsey's version, as it was a big hit in the swing era. While Dorsey may have exposed them to the song originally—perhaps that is why

¹²⁷ "Young Artists Exhibit Work in Park Show," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Jan. 14, 1940.

they refer to it as “Song of India” instead of by its original name—Doyle and Yvette seem to have never wanted the family to perform jazz. While they most likely did not perform the swing version, the Dorsey version begins with drumming that tropes the exotic. Based on their other music it is likely Charles might have played drums in a similar manner on this piece. Perhaps Gerald, who learned Russian, sang the tenor role, but it is also possible that they performed Rimsky-Korsakov’s instrumental version of the song. This is especially likely because the program does not indicate Gerald was the soloist, as it usually would.

Dvorak’s “Going Home,” based on the melody of the second movement of his Symphony No. 9 (*From the New World*), is the other major international classical piece the Dungill Family performed during this period. By this time, “Going Home” seems to have been adopted by black as well as white vocalists as a pseudo-spiritual; in fact, its European classicism and evocation of the deep solemnity of the oppressed American Negro make it a quintessential “neospiritual,” in Zora Neale Hurston’s language.¹²⁸ But the songs are most interesting in relation to the Dungills because they are both examples of nationalist composers—the Czech nationalist Dvorak and the Russian nationalist Rimsky-Korsakov—troping the music of other peoples and cultures. Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Sadko* is explicitly based upon Russian folksongs and folk melodies, while musicologists maintain that Dvorak’s *New World Symphony* is as thoroughly Czech as his acknowledged nationalist pieces, such as the Slavonic Dances. Grouped together, the pieces make an interesting statement about the compatibility of nationalist essentialism and transnational pluralism.

Taking into account Gerald and Alexander’s decoupling of white/European ‘race’ from Western culture, it appears that Romanticist music served as a deracinated, de-raced conduit

¹²⁸ Zora Neale Hurston, “Spirituals and Neo-spirituals.”

through which the Dungills could construct a variety of non-white identities, thereby reversing the logic of blackface minstrelsy, and continuing the deformation of minstrelsy the family first embarked on nearly two decades earlier.¹²⁹ Keeping in mind the Dungill family's aversion to jazz, the Dungills also reverse the logic of early twentieth century European primitivism: they appropriate an anachronistic, idealized European Romanticism in order to rescue progressive black culture from the (supposed) decadence of black popular music.¹³⁰

Yet by emphasizing their multinational/multiethnic roots in their program literature, the Dungills also essentialize their music along ethnoracial lines: they invent cultural memory, such as when the Dungills, supposedly with Indian blood, play Rimsky-Korsakov's music of the Indian guest from *Sadko*. Additionally, if the logic is that they can play music from all over the world because they such multinational heritage, perhaps others cannot play all of this music if they do not have this heritage.

The Dungills developed and maintained this transnationalist pluralism precisely when McCarthyite fervor was hounding it out of American classical music. Aaron Copland delivered a defining statement of what could perhaps be termed Popular Front musical internationalism at the World Peace Conference in 1949. He stated that artists held faith in "how powerful an agent art can be in giving all humanity a sense of togetherness...our lawmakers have so little conception of the way in which the work of our composers...might be used in order to draw

¹²⁹ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Jeffrey C. Melnick, *A Right to Sing the Blues: African Americans, Jews, and American Popular Song* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

¹³⁰ For a discussion of the use of Africanist primitivism by the early 1900s anticolonial French left, see Patricia Leighton, "The White Peril and L'Arte negre: Picasso, Primitivism, and Anticolonialism," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 72, No. 4 (Dec., 1990), pp. 609-630.

closer bonds between our own people and those of other nations.”¹³¹ In this context, the Dungill’s internationalism generally, and performance of Russian songs in Russian specifically, could be read as affirming the ability of music to transcend the Iron Curtain.

There was an affinity between the Dungills’ experimenting simultaneously with cultural nationalism and transnational pluralism, and Robeson’s transnational work in the 1930s and 1940s. In this period Robeson became fascinated by Chinese and Korean music, and expressed the view that black Americans were essentially “Asiatic,” rather than Western (or West African?), in spiritual nature.¹³² In 1949, he praised the triumph of Maoism and began adding Chinese songs to his concert repertory.¹³³ All the while, he remained a friend and fixture of the Popular Front left, even though he departed from the anti-essentialist, liberal universalist proselytizing of Copland and Leonard Bernstein to some degree. Copland scholar Richard Kostelanetz argues that Copland’s 1949 World Peace speech was the last great statement of the internationalist Cultural Front before it was silenced by McCarthyism and the mid-century centrist consensus in the liberal political establishment.¹³⁴ Indeed, leftist classical musicians such as Copland and Leonard Bernstein were harassed by the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) throughout the early fifties; Bernstein found himself exiled from much of the classical establishment between 1951 and 1956, and Robeson had his passport confiscated, in addition to being loudly condemned by the NAACP.¹³⁵ Considering the fear, particularly of

¹³¹ Aaron Copland, “Effect of the Cold War on the Artist in the U.S.,” in Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *Aaron Copland: A Reader, Selected Writings, 1923-1972*, Routledge: New York and London, 2004, p. 129-130.

¹³² Greg Robinson, “Internationalism and Justice: Paul Robeson, Asia, and Asian Americans,” in *AfroAsian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics* (ed. Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen), New York and London: New York University Press, 2006, p. 264.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 268.

¹³⁴ Richard Kostelanetz, *Aaron Copland: A Reader, Selected Writings, 1923-1972*, Routledge: New York and London, 2004, p. 128 (editor’s note).

¹³⁵ Barry Seldes, *Leonard Bernstein: The Political Life of an American Musician*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009; Azza Salama Layton, *International Policies and Civil Rights Politics of the United States, 1941-1960*.

black and Jewish artists, of attack by the government, in a period when arguably the two most famous black Americans, Robeson and Du Bois, were Soviet sympathizers attacked by the government, the Dungills' embrace of Russian music perhaps appears to be a brave political stance.¹³⁶

However, the historical focus of the Dungill Family's repertory at this time separates it from both the disintegrating internationalist Popular Front left and the cultural Cold Warriors in the Soviet Union and the United States. In the classical music world, universalists and Cold Warriors alike were interested in twentieth century modern music, not in the Romanticism of the previous century. Exemplifying this, Copland's speech stressed newness; he stated that "if a brilliant new composing talent emerges from Tadjikistan we all want to hear what his music is like. If a bright new composing star arises out of the Kentucky Mountain area we think the Russian people should know what his music is like."¹³⁷ But he does not mention earlier Russian music, and argues that in 1917 Americans "had very little music that was worth exportation" anyway.¹³⁸ This attitude prepared Copland well for the McCarthyist period: the dominant classical music orthodoxy in the West would be to support challenging modernist techniques, such as serialism and atonality, intrepid styles which in theory could only be cultivated under the cacophonous freedom of democratic liberalism. While the Soviets could certainly claim a more distinguished classical heritage than the Americans could, they were primarily interested in contemporary socialist realism. Socialist realist composers were expected to combine the rich Russian classical tradition with nationalist bombast and the idyllic folk essence of the agrarian

¹³⁶ Azza Salama Layton, *International Politics and Civil Rights Policies of the United States, 1941-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 67.

¹³⁷ Aaron Copland, "Effect of the Cold War on the Artist in the U.S.," in Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *Aaron Copland: A Reader, Selected Writings, 1923-1972*, Routledge: New York and London, 2004, p. 131.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

peasantry that or which Stalinism had collectivized into the modern proletariat.¹³⁹ Each ideology, the pro-Western, the pro-Soviet, and the left/liberal internationalist, stipulated that focus on the classical canon was anachronistic, and perhaps too heavily influenced by the Germans, Tsarist Russia, bourgeois Romanticism, or the European ethnic nationalisms that had caused two great wars in the past 40 years. In this sense, the Dungill's performance of the nationalist Victorian composers is perhaps a testament to musical Cold War nonalignment.

VI. The Dungill Family and the Civil Rights Movement

There could also be a connection between the Dungills's enlistment in the liberal civil rights struggle and their anachronistic appropriation of nineteenth century music tied to bourgeois individualist Romanticism. Yet the music also carried on a long tradition of African Americans appropriating the European nationalist tradition, particularly in music, literature and philosophy.¹⁴⁰ In combining these imperatives in search of an ethno-nationalism made safe for cultural pluralism, the Dungills' juxtaposition of European Romanticism and Negro spirituals echoes Du Bois' use of Romantic poetry as well as the "Sorrow Songs" to introduce the essays in *The Souls of Black Folk*.¹⁴¹ For example, Emogene Watkins of the Memphis newspaper the *Tri-State Defender* reported that the Dungill Family played a song called "Creation," about the origins of "world and man," and infused it with elements of Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*

¹³⁹ See Danielle Fosler-Lussier, *Music Divided: Bartok's Legacy in Cold War Culture*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007; and *The Journal of Musicology* Vol. 26, No. 1-2 (Winter-Spring 2009).

¹⁴⁰ Ernest Allen, Jr. "On the Reading of Riddles: Rethinking Du Boisian 'Double Consciousness,'" in Lewis Gordon, ed., *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*. Routledge: New York and London, 1997. Maurice Peress, *Dvorak to Duke Ellington: A Conductor Explores American Music and Its African American Roots* (Oxford University Press, 2004). Finally, I would argue that there are strong affinities between Richard Wright's *Black Boy* and James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist As A Young Man*.

¹⁴¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam, 1989).

and Norwegian composer Christian Sinding's solo piano piece "Rite of Spring."¹⁴² "Creation" was most likely the Dungills' musical setting of the opening poem-sermon in James Weldon Johnson's collection *God's Trombones*, "The Creation," which black elementary schoolchildren performed throughout the country in the 1950s; God's declarations "I'll make me a world" and "I'll make me a man" are probably the poem's most resonant lines.¹⁴³ By combining this with the *Unfinished Symphony* and the "Rustle of Spring," the Dungill Family made a case for artistic racial and cultural egalitarianism: not only have both black America and white Europe produced great art, but, as the emphasis on growth and development in "The Creation" and "Rustle of Spring" (and, more debatably, depending on which parts they used, the pastoral sonorities of the second movement of the *Unfinished Symphony*) indicate, the traditions become especially fecund when blended together.

The Dungills could have admired aspects of Russian political culture as well as artistic culture. In addition to the Soviets and eldest Dungill, being allies against the Third Reich, the Dungills attitude towards capitalism appears to have been largely negative. The Dungills' attitude towards bourgeois liberalism strongly echoes Du Bois's in *The Souls of Black Folk*: they were clearly steeped in bourgeois values, clearly lovers of the Enlightenment, but ambivalent to the utility of capitalism, wary of its implicit individualism, and disgusted by its corruptive vices.¹⁴⁴ Doyle greatly appreciated Deering Works for keeping him employed throughout the Depression, but that contrasted greatly with the arduous and ephemeral manual labor stints he

¹⁴² Emogene A. Watkins, unnamed article, *Tri-State Defender*, Saturday November 13, 1954. The Dungill Family Papers, Box 4, Binder 1, Archives II: The Early Years.

¹⁴³ James Weldon Johnson, "The Creation," in the Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, eds., *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, Second Edition (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), p. 800, 802.

¹⁴⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam, 1989).

held before.¹⁴⁵ Additionally, when he and Yvette moved to Gary, Indiana shortly after their wedding, they were swindled into a bad deal on their house, a common occurrence for blacks during the Great Migration.¹⁴⁶ Finally, in the midst of the Depression, with at the time six children to feed, Yvette and Doyle refused an offer to perform at “50 night spots” in New York, believing that the children were too young.¹⁴⁷ Doyle’s memoir, in a concluding section apparently written by other family members, states:

Doyle’s ‘dream’ really came true. Out of curiosity, someone might ask or question the family’s inability to reach what is often called ‘big time fame and fortune... There is one logical answer, the family thinks. Fame and fortune are fleeting, and soon forgotten but contributions to those spiritually hungry, if accepted by them, are priceless.¹⁴⁸

Gerald’s letters indicate that any profits they generated from concert touring should be invested in the music school his parents set up in the Ida B. Wells Housing Project Community Center, and does not seem to even consider trying to build the family’s own wealth.¹⁴⁹ Finally, they seemed uninterested in recording, and only recorded two albums during their long performing career, both of their later African music.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, none of the styles they performed, from minstrel to classical, thrived in the recording industry, and they avoided most that did, such as swing and rhythm and blues.¹⁵¹ Many of their activities, such as the Ida B. Wells project music

¹⁴⁵ “Brief Autobiography of Doyle Dungill,” p. 59. Dungill Family Papers Box 3, Archives II.

¹⁴⁶ “Brief Autobiography of Doyle Dungill,” p. 39. Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II; James Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

¹⁴⁷ Yvette Dungill, “Mom’s Life in the Twenties and Thirties” memoir (unpublished), p. 7. Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

¹⁴⁸ “Brief Autobiography of Doyle Dungill,” p.60, 61. Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

¹⁴⁹ Gerald Dungill to Yvette Dungill, February 8, 1945. Dungill Family Papers, Box 4, Archives II: The Early Years.

¹⁵⁰ They might have been influenced by Chicago Local 208, which praised them on a few occasions and declared that people should “insist on live music” on its letterheads. Also they may have conflated recorded music with jazz to some degree.

¹⁵¹ Although, by the late sixties and early seventies they started performing pop rock hits such as Bacharach and David’s “What the World Needs Now Is Love” and Carole King’s “You’ve Got A Friend,” which became Charles’ new favorite song.

school and the Christian Fellowship Hour, were done for free, and with no interest in recording, do not seem to have been part of a long term capitalistic strategy.¹⁵²

Civil rights advocates could use the image of the Dungill family as an ideal American family to advance a civil rights agenda. In December 1953, the *Pittsburgh Courier* featured a large photograph of the Dungill Family. In the photo, Doyle sits at the kitchen table reading an issue of the Courier. In the flap of Doyle's paper visible to the reader, the headline proudly states, "Marshall tells Supreme Court: It's Your Duty to Wipe Out School Segregation."¹⁵³ Yvette, wearing an apron and standing behind Doyle, and the children gathered around the table, smile proudly at the newspaper as Doyle reads with cool satisfaction. The photograph implies that the civil rights movement was not Communist subversion, but was commensurate with standard American 1950s gender, family, and household conventions.

While it performed mostly rather highbrow music, albeit sometimes with a nontraditional, brass-heavy lineup, the Dungill Family also bore musical witness to the nascent populist wing of the mainstream civil rights movement, the wing that stressed nonviolent direct action and interracial contact "on the ground" over legal activism in the courtroom. In 1953 the Dungill Family performed at a concert for Ralph Abernathy Sr. and Martin Luther King; it is not clear from the letter which Martin Luther King, but most likely King Jr., as he and Abernathy were close friends, and both had entered the ministry in the past year.¹⁵⁴

VII. The Dungill Family and the Intersection of Womanism/Feminism and Internationalism

¹⁵² "Brief Autobiography of Doyle Dungill," 57, 58. Dungill Family Papers, Box 3, Archives II.

¹⁵³ *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 1953. Dungill Family Papers, Box 1: "Miscellaneous Folder: Scrapbook [photocopies]"

¹⁵⁴ Note on concert for Ralph Abernathy and Martin Luther King, 1953. Dungill Family Papers, Box 4.

Especially as the Dungill daughters grew, the Dungill family became a group that challenged conventional gender hierarchy. Western Cold Warriors mined jazz and classical music for signs of liberal democratic particularity and America's growing racial pluralism.¹⁵⁵ If this was the case, then perhaps the Dungills' performance implied gender equality. After all, at most performances, there were more men and women performing; this would have been especially noticeable when Gerald or Alexander missed shows for medical reasons, which happened somewhat frequently.¹⁵⁶ But as the daughters grew older and honed their playing skills in the mid-forties, by the time they got back onstage they must have been very competent instrumentalists. Yvette, the matriarch and contralto of the family, also played saxophone (probably alto or tenor); Harriette played soprano saxophone, trumpet, and violin; Elaine played cornet, trombone and violin; Gloria played bass tuba and bass violin; and Melody played tambourine, marimba, drums, and vibes (each daughter except Melody also sang).¹⁵⁷ Aside from Charles, the men only played one instrument each: Doyle played piano, Alexander played trombone, and Gerald played the trumpet, and Charles played marimba and drums.¹⁵⁸ Thus especially during the course of particularly eclectic performances, the women would be seen picking up a variety of instruments, while the men stuck to one instrument. One on hand, the men's relative stillness compared to the women could be read as a sign of male authority. On the other hand, the women's multi-instrumental talents would indicate intelligence, discipline, poise, creativity, and versatility, a clear riposte to the women-as-sedentary-housewives meme of the

¹⁵⁵ See Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties*; and *The Journal of Musicology* Vol. 26, No. 1-2 (Winter-Spring 2009).

¹⁵⁶ See list of postwar performances. Dungill Family Papers, Box 4, Archives IV.

¹⁵⁷ "Biographical Sketch of the Dungill Family." Dungill Family Papers, Box 1: Folder: "Biographical Sketches."

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

mid-twentieth century.¹⁵⁹ Additionally, situations in which, Charles, Gerald or Alexander were solo vocalists would invert the common relationship between female vocalist and male backing band.¹⁶⁰

The Dungill Family's most ostensibly womanist/feminist¹⁶¹ performance was at the 1950 "Women's Day" at First Deliverance Baptist Church in Chicago. The day-long event was organized entirely by black women, and everyone named in the program is a woman, including the "deaconettes."¹⁶² While this particular Women's Day seems to have evaded press coverage, the better-documented Women's Days from this period only mention women being in the congregations.¹⁶³ Thus not only were the Dungill men the only men performing, they may have been the only men in the church. The Dungills performed "Bless This House," one of their signatures.¹⁶⁴ In sacred contexts, "Bless This House" refers both to the church and to the Dungills as a family. In many contexts, the song could be read as affirming traditional, patriarchal mid-twentieth century family values. However, in the context of Women's Day, it asserts that one can have a stable familial home even if the men and women occupy the same status.

¹⁵⁹ See Betty Friedan, *The Feminist Mystique* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2001) and Nicolaides and Wiese, eds., *The Suburb Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

¹⁶⁰ For a discussion of women singers with men backing bands, see Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Bessie Smith, Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Vintage, 1999).

¹⁶¹ My understanding of womanism, and its relationship to feminism, derives from Layli Phillips, ed., *The Womanist Reader* (New York: Routledge 2006). I will frequently employ the term 'womanism/feminism' to indicate that the Dungills and Women's Day probably fused both.

¹⁶² Women's Day program, February 12, 1950. Dungill Family Papers, Box 1: "Miscellaneous Folder: Scrapbook [Photocopies]."

¹⁶³ For example, see "Women's Day Program at New Light Baptist," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 18, 1950. Wallace D. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁶⁴ Women's Day program, February 12, 1950. Dungill Family Papers, Box 1: "Miscellaneous Folder: Scrapbook [Photocopies]."

The Dungills probably sympathized with the particular religious emphases of this Women's Day. The principal Biblical touchstones in the service were an opening prayer, written by black women, infused with the values of the social gospel, and the story of Judas' opposition to Mary Magdalene's anointment of Jesus' feet.¹⁶⁵ As told in John 12:1-8, the version used for the Women's Day Call to Worship, the story juxtaposes the pious devotion of Mary and Martha to Jesus with the combativeness and duplicity of Judas. Here Judas interestingly parallels the mostly well-meaning but belligerent and often ethically dubious Cold War masculinism dominant in the U.S. political establishment by 1950, masculinism that marginalized women cultural workers.¹⁶⁶

The Dungill Family also performed "Ave Maria," most likely as an aria for Yvette, since she performed it as such elsewhere.¹⁶⁷ This would resonate especially strongly because of her role as the matriarch of the Dungill Family. The emphasis on black women's spirituality at these events indicates their womanist aspects, while the contemporary struggles of black women to be fully-ordained ministers and to legitimate a theological space in black Christianity in general perhaps indicate their feminism.¹⁶⁸ Because of the focus on women at this event, it could be argued that the Dungills essentially performed here as a predominantly women's group.

In general, their performances were probably a metaphor for gender equality through music. Although Gerald implied that the most important musical legacy of the group extended

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ For more on Cold War masculinism, and its marginalization of women cultural workers, see Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Musicians Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

¹⁶⁷ Women's Day program, February 12, 1950. Dungill Family Papers, Box 1: "Miscellaneous Folder: Scrapbook [Photocopies]."

¹⁶⁸ Wallace D. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). For more on womanism, and the contested contrast between womanism and feminism, see *The Womanist Reader*, ed. Layli Phillips.

from father Doyle to oldest sons Alexander and Gerald (and perhaps younger son Charles, but age could have been working in Gerald's war letters as well as gender), the daughters were as involved in the music as the sons, and could play more instruments.¹⁶⁹

Changes in Dungill publicity material may also have reflected a change in the family name. If the Dante in "Dante and His Shadows" referred to Doyle, perhaps it implied that Yvette was one of his shadows, or at least did not prominently figure in the group. Dropping the prewar titles removed masculinism from the Dungills' name, and replaced it with family (which in mid-century parlance probably carried its own hierarchical gendered implications). Additionally, in one saved 1947 program the Dungills hoped that the inspiration sparked by their music "lives long in the hearts of men and women," thus showing that they departed somewhat from the masculinist language that structured such dramatic statements in this era.¹⁷⁰

At the intersection of feminism and multiethnic transnationalism, the Dungills may have been inspired by the International Sweethearts of Rhythm. In the early 1940s, at the end of the Dungills' tenure as "Dante and His Shadows" and during the beginning of Gerald and Alexander's sojourn in the Old World, The Sweethearts of Rhythm captivated the *Chicago Defender*. Numerous articles in the newspaper praised the group's "new, distinctive style in music—a product of a mixture of several nationalities—Mexican, Negro, Chinese, and Indian."

¹⁷¹ The Dungills certainly would have read and heard a lot about them. The International Sweethearts of Rhythm were a fixture in the *Defender* throughout the war years, often receiving

¹⁶⁹ Gerald Dungill to Yvette Dungill, February 18, 1945. Dungill Family Papers, Box 4, Archives II: The Early Years.

¹⁷⁰ "First Church of Deliverance Presents the Dungill Family," 1947. Dungill Family Papers, Box 1: Miscellaneous Folder: Photocopies [Scrapbook]. For a discussion of black feminist interpretations of the masculinist language of black male progressives, see Farah Jasmine Griffin, "Black Feminists and Du Bois: Respectability, Protection, and Beyond," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 568, The Study of African American Problems: W. E. B. Du Bois's Agenda, Then and Now (Mar., 2000), pp. 28-40.

¹⁷¹ "Sweethearts in Rhythm Clicks in South and West," *Chicago Defender*, January 20, 1940.

multiple features per month. They were often measured against other “all-girl” bands, but were frequently mentioned in the same breath as Ellington, Armstrong, and Basie. So “the glorified girls of the brown races” incessantly trumpeted by the *Defender* could have been inspiration for the Dungill Family International Concert Company as well.¹⁷² Sherrie Tucker writes that the International Sweethearts of Rhythm served in part “as an advertising gimmick for black audiences appreciative of representations of global blackness that burst beyond subordinated and segregated minority status in the United States.”¹⁷³ Three addenda to Tucker’s formulation are necessary in the Dungills’ case, however. One, the international roots appealed to, and were marketed to, white audiences as well. Two, internationalism was much more than a gimmick for the Dungills: it was central to their repertory and ideology.

Three, I would argue that there is a connection here between Afro-humanist internationalism and feminism. While the International Sweethearts of Rhythm were respected for their musical accomplishments, coverage remarked on their physical appearance almost as much as their music, seemingly more so in headlines and captions. The Dungills, on the other hand, were only called an attractive family. Considering their concern that their children be dressed and presented respectfully, and their reluctance to perform jazz, the more salacious coverage of the International Sweethearts of Rhythm must have disturbed Yvette and Doyle. The Dungills’ eschewing the vaudeville for the classical also imbued the family in an aura of respectability.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² “Sweethearts in Rhythm Clicks in South and West,” *Chicago Defender*, January 20, 1940.

¹⁷³ Sherrie Tucker, “Nobody’s Sweethearts: Race, Jazz, and the Darlings of Rhythm,” in *American Music*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Autumn 1998), pp. 255-288.

¹⁷⁴ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Harvard University Press, 1993), 188.

It is possible that the Dungills were attempting to present the black family as a site where non-whites could embrace transgressive politics and racial identities through music without having to challenge traditional conceptions of morality in ways often deemed primitive, pathological, and self-destructive. In this way, the Dungill family was an alternative to non-white zoot suiters and modern jazz musicians.¹⁷⁵ At the same time, they developed a way in which a kind of ethnicity-based nationalism rooted in conservative values of personal and familial responsibility, without reinforcing conservative gender norms within the group (even if the press sometimes portrayed them as doing so). In this way, they presented an alternative to patriarchal nationalist organizations such as the Nation of Islam.

This relationship appears to mirror their connection to womanism. On one hand, the Dungills certainly did not embrace the sensual-sexual components of Alice Walker's womanism, or an oppositional "erotics of power," to paraphrase Audre Lorde's formulation.¹⁷⁶ The Dungills must have been aware that many of the black women preachers in Chicago were either widely suspected of being homosexual, or conceived of as essentially masculine.¹⁷⁷ Thus, the Dungill women presented themselves as women whose musicality (including facility with the drums, bass, and bass tuba) and religiosity easily coexisted with their (heterosexual) femininity—Yvette as a dignified matriarch, Harriet, Gloria, Elaine, and Melody as 'pure' young women. However, unlike some black womanisms clearly critical of Alice Walker's womanism, they did not foreground race loyalty over concern with women's equality and women's progressive

¹⁷⁵ See Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance During World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); and Eric Lott, "Double-V, Double -Time: Bebop's Politics of Style," *Callaloo*, No. 36 (Summer, 1988), pp. 597-605.

¹⁷⁶ See Alice Walker, "Alice Walker's Womanism," in Layli Phillips ed., *The Womanist Reader*; and "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" in Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Crossing Press, 1984).

¹⁷⁷ Wallace D. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

mobilizations (such as Women's Day).¹⁷⁸ When the family performed at Women's Day, it reconciled familial solidarity with womanist/feminist collectivity.

Additionally, the Dungill family explored the intersection of feminism and interracialism. In 1953 the Dungill Family performed on the final broadcast of a Dominican College radio series called "Musical Giants Past and Present," an appearance sponsored by the college's "Inter-racial Club."¹⁷⁹ It is unclear which Dominican College they performed at (perhaps it was in Ohio, although a Blauvelt, NY college opened the previous year), but they were colleges for Catholic women. Thus, this performance perhaps was another indication of the intersectionality of feminism and anti-racism (and religion, as with the Women's Day performance in a Baptist context three years earlier). Perhaps it also indicates the degree to which the Dungill Family was interpreted as a predominantly women's group in certain women-centered performance contexts (although, as with the Women's Day performance, this would partly depend on which Dungills were featured in the songs they played, and the transcript does not indicate which Dungill spoke).

Despite its stance in many ways bucking Cold War polarization, arguably in ways that got many black and Jewish artists into trouble, it seems that as in the prewar era, the Dungills' various transgressions did not threaten the mid-century conservative establishment. For blacks and whites alike they remained, quaintly yet profoundly, the Negro family that could. The press interpreted their status as a happy *all-American* family to enlist the family's wholesome image in the Cold War and the civil rights movement. Noting the Dungill Family's combination of

¹⁷⁸ See Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, "Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's Africana Womanism" in Layli Phillips, ed., *The Womanist Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

¹⁷⁹ Dominican College radio broadcast transcript, June 3, 1953. Dungill Family Papers Box 1, Folder: "Miscellaneous [Scrapbook]"

“mutual interests, economic security, cultural appreciation and social efficiency,” in a 1953 profile that never mentions their race, D.L. Everett of the *Robstown Record* stated, “it seems to us that the key to the ultimate fate of our social order and perhaps that of the Western World lies in the way the family unit is handled.”¹⁸⁰

Thus despite the ways their musical performance seem to have upset, or attempt to transcend, Cold War binaries and hierarchies to some extent, many observers interpreted the Dungills as utterly conventional. Thus even in the culturally conservative era especially dominant between 1950 and 1956, Cold Warriors and moderate civil rights advocates conscripted the Dungill Family into their respective arsenals of democracy (they enlisted themselves?).¹⁸¹

Even so, the possibility that many participant-observers, “musickers” in Christopher Small’s terminology,¹⁸² in the Dungill Family’s various audiences who saw their performances and imagined stultifying 1950s racial, ethnic, cultural and gender boxes and hierarchies overcome should not be discarded even if their views have did not have the discursive voice of

¹⁸⁰ D.L. Everett, “From My Study Window,” *The Robstown Record*, 1953. Dungill Family Papers, Box 1: Miscellaneous Folder: Scrapbook [photocopies].

¹⁸¹ See Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Musicians Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). Whereas Dizzy Gillespie and Duke Ellington spoke the languages of Cold Warriors and race men, evidence suggests the Dungills did not think of themselves in either light. Therefore it is likely that there was far more distance between the Dungills’ conception of themselves and the conception of them of the various interest groups that sought to deploy their image, then between Gillespie and Ellington’s ideas and those of the State Department or the civil rights movement.

¹⁸² Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performance and Listening* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1998). Small explores the ways in which listeners participate in the activity of music—in other words, they “music” just as instrumentalists or singers “music.” In formulating this, Small draws from ideas about the experience of music from cultures, including Afro-diasporic cultures, in which listeners are acknowledged participants in the creative and performing processes. This work will be important in further explorations of the implications of the Dungill family performing classical music in front of audiences of blacks.

the journalists who, like Archibald Motley painting Chicago nightlife, may have documented these cultures somewhat from the outside.¹⁸³

Intriguingly, after requesting that the Dungills play “American music,” the Dominican College radio host asked the Dungill Family if they had any of Stephen Foster’s music in their repertoire.¹⁸⁴ By 1953 the Dungills had not played plantation songs for several years, possibly not since Alexander and Gerald went off to war in 1942. However, regardless of the genre the family played, plantation songs to spirituals to classical music, the group continuously resonated with progressive communities, from prewar New Negroes to womanist black Protestants to white Catholic civil rights liberals. Thus the one reception constant—the Dungills as a successful black/American family—resonated as strongly with progressives as with the mainstream, further complicated the Dungills’ politics of family.

¹⁸³ See Amy M. Mooney, “Representing Race: Disjunctures in the Work of Archibald J. Motley, Jr. *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2, African Americans in Art: Selections from the Art Institute of Chicago (1999), pp. 162-179+262-265.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Chapter Four

“He’s Been My Mother”: The Mothering of Redemption in Black Chicago Gospel Music

Everyone told me a different story about how the slaves began to forget their past...In these stories, which circulated throughout West Africa, the particulars varied, but all of them ended the same—the slave loses mother.”

-Saidiya Hartman¹

*“He’s been my mother, been my father too
It’s no limit to what my Lord can do.”*
-Sam Cooke²

“Sometimes I feel like a motherless child / A long ways from home,” grieves an iconic Negro spiritual, seemingly epitomizing the traumatic experience of black families under slavery.³ The spiritual evinced African American Christianity’s revision of the biblical invocation of “fatherless” to emphasize the maternal.⁴ Attuned to this revision, W.E.B. Du Bois and other early twentieth century New Negro⁵ intellectuals heard in the spirituals’ “cry of the ‘motherless’” a plea to the prophets.⁶ They posited that Moses and the Hebrew prophets were ideal models for

¹ Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 155.

² The Soul Stirrers, “Wonderful,” *Sam Cooke with the Soul Stirrers*.

³ James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson, *The Books of American Negro Spirituals* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969 [1925, 1926]), Vol. 2, 30.

⁴ Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, “‘Mother to the Motherless, Father to the Fatherless’: Power, Gender, and Community in an Afrocentric biblical tradition,” *Semeia*, no. 47 (1989), 57-85: 57.

⁵ In this chapter, I employ the capacious term “New Negro” to designate prominent African Americans in roughly the first two generations born or reared after slavery, and active between the late nineteenth century and the mid-1930s, who thought that their political, economic, cultural, and/or spiritual strivings could lead the black race to a glorious future. While the literature is extensive, particularly with regard to the Harlem Renaissance, see Thomas C. Holt, *Children of Fire: History of African Americans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 204; Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black,” *Representations* No.24, Special Issue: America Reconstructed, 1840-1940 (Autumn, 1988), 129-155; Alain Locke, ed., *The New Negro* (New York: Touchstone, 1997 [1925]); Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Davarian L. Baldwin and Minkah Makalani, eds., *Escape from New York: The New Negro Renaissance Beyond Harlem* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); and William J. Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left: African-American Writing and Communism Between the Wars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

⁶ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Terri Hume Oliver (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999 [1903]), 160.

black leadership because they bore witness to the oppression of the “fatherless” and the “widow” despite being raised in relatively privileged circumstances.⁷ Correspondingly, black leaders should be reared in exceptional middle-class nuclear families, but should identify with the masses of the race undergoing familial and social trauma as their migration to the city thrust them into the crucible of modernization.⁸ Uplifting the Negro spirituals by imbuing them with the aesthetics and techniques of Western classical music would sonically portray and culturally legitimate the process of empathetic prophets steadily guiding the “motherless” black masses on the long journey from the slave past to a future of freedom.⁹

⁷ For the judgment of the fatherless and widow in the Books of Moses, see Exodus 22:22-24 and Deuteronomy 10:18, 14:29, 16:11-14, 24:17-21, 26:12-19, and 27:19; for the Prophetic Books, see for example Isaiah 1:17 and 1:23; Jeremiah 7:6 and 22:3; Lamentations 5:3; Ezekiel 22:7; Zechariah 7:10; and Malachi 3:5. (All biblical quotations in this chapter will be from the King James Bible.) For advocacy on behalf of the “helpless” and “those who are too weak to plead their own cause” as “the calling of the prophet” and central to the prophetic conception of justice, see Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper, 2001 [1962]), 261. For the notion that the Old Testament prophets’ forsaking their privilege to identify with the suffering masses is central to their credibility as models for the black prophetic tradition, see David L. Chappelle, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 47; Obery M. Hendricks, Jr., *The Politics of Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 30-31; and Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

⁸ This formulation of the sociology of migration is derived from E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932). In general, studies of black prophetic politics agree that prophecy is an elite vocation. Cornel West argues that black prophetic thought must “remove itself from the uncritical elements of mainstream Afro-American life”: see West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002 [1982]), 24. West largely associates his prophetic pragmatism with the erudition of degreed intellectuals and prodigious autodidacts: see especially Cornel West and Christa Buschendorf, *Black Prophetic Fire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014). Similarly, George Shulman states that in all major iterations of prophecy, “the office of prophecy is a public vocation mediating between a community and powerful realities it does not understand or control”: see George Shulman, *American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 6. Stephen Marshall defines prophets as a “distinguished group of inspired social critics”: see Stephen H. Marshall, *The City on the Hill from Below: The Crisis of Black Prophetic Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 18. Christopher Hobson also focuses on elite black religious intellectuals: see Christopher Z. Hobson, *The Mount of Vision: African American Prophetic Tradition, 1800-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁹ For prophetic empathy with the black masses, see Gooding-Williams, *In a Shade of Blue*. For the spirituals and racial uplift, see Paul Allen Anderson, *Deep River: Music and Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001); Samuel A. Floyd, ed., *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance: A Collection of Essays* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1993); Jon Michael Spencer, *The New Negroes and Their Music: The Success of the Harlem Renaissance* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997); and Lawrence Shrenbeck, *Racial Uplift and American Music: 1878-1943* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2012). For racial uplift more generally see Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). For W.E.B. Du Bois’

Du Bois's castigation of "the 'gospel' hymns" emerging after Reconstruction as "debasements" of the spirituals paved the way for several generations of scholars to argue that gospel music was the antithesis of this project because it epitomized the tendency of many black people to forget the history of slavery, to avert their minds from the persistence of worldly oppression, and thus ultimately to abandon the fight against racial domination.¹⁰ Recently, studies tend to argue on the contrary that the rise of gospel, which black Chicago led artistically, commercially, and organizationally, helped facilitate modernization in the Great Migration era. These studies argue that in gospel, personal struggles replaced the political implications of the spirituals; allusions to current events and recent technological developments eclipsed the spirituals' contemplation of the Bible; holy-dancing feet trampled staid New Negro thought; and consumption in the marketplace overtook composition in importance.¹¹

formulation of the Negro spirituals as an attempt to refute Hegel's notion of Africans as a people outside of history and therefore incapable of progressing to modern self-consciousness, see Anderson, *Deep River*, 44-45. For the relation of the refutation of Hegel to modernism in black Chicago, see Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-55* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 3. For this refutation as central to "Afro-modernity" more generally, see Michael Hanchard, "Afro-modernity: Temporality, Politics, and the African Diaspora," *Public Culture* 11, No. 1 (1999), 245-268; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); and Michelle M. Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004).

¹⁰ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 190; Obery M. Hendricks, Jr., *The Universe Bends Toward Justice: Radical Reflections on the Bible, Church, and the Body Politic* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 28; Joseph R. Washington, Jr., *Black Religion: The Negro and Christianity in the United States* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 51-52; Jon Michael Spencer, "Christ against Culture: Anti-Culturalism in the Gospel of Gospel," *Protest and Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 201-204; Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 181-186. Importantly, Levine's nuanced approach did not depict this transformation in a negative light.

¹¹ Michael W. Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues: The Music of Thomas Andrew Dorsey in the Urban Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Wallace D. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 104-110; Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*, 155-192; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "Rethinking Black Vernacular Culture: Black Religion and Race Records in the 1920s and 1930s," in Wahneema Lubiano, ed. *The House That Race Built: Black Americans, U.S. Terrain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), 157-177; Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr., *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press and Columbia College, Chicago: Center for Black Music Research, 2003), 52-54; Jerma A. Jackson, *Singing in My Soul: Black Gospel Music in a Secular Age* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 55-68; Clarence E. Hardy III, "'No Mystery God': Black Religions of the Flesh in Pre-war Urban America," *Church History*, Vol. 77, No. 1 (Mar., 2008),

However, by analyzing the spiritual, theological, and intellectual aspects of 1930s Chicago gospel, this chapter argues that gospel's conception of time disrupted the temporality of modernization, and thereby challenged New Negro understandings of the black freedom struggle. Instead of portraying the fight for freedom as a long march from slavery to freedom in the world led by prophets, gospel conceived of the hour of emancipation as a spiritual state of being worth more than all the world. Gospel envisioned black people living and dying in what the Apostle Paul described as the "short" time.¹² Shirley Caesar, who rose to stardom in the early 1960s as a member of the legendary post-World War II Chicago gospel group the Caravans, recalled this temporality as a "now," incommensurate with "talk about slavery":

"We had no time to talk about slavery because whenever you think about the word slavery, you think of way back in the 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 hundreds. You know, we don't have to go back that far. And so the word 'slavery' never came up when I was a little girl. All we can think about is we know where we are now. We know how we're being treated now. And so we reach back in ourselves, and we pull out that love. We pull out I guess how we would like to be treated.

"But we reach down into the inner sanctum of our spirit... And somehow or another it comes out through our singing and through our music. And they call it soul."¹³

This "now" was a time of urban crisis and personal suffering but also, black Christians believed, of imminent redemption.¹⁴ In this time, faith in Jesus could empower those seemingly most in

128-150; Lerone A. Martin, *Preaching on Wax: The Phonograph and the Shaping of Modern African American Religion* (New York and London: NYU Press, 2014).

¹² See 1 Corinthians 7:29: "But this I say, brethren, the time is short..."

¹³ Interview with Shirley Caesar, 2009, p. 17. Apollo Theater Oral History Project, Columbia University Libraries.

¹⁴ Works that have influenced my thinking here on what scholars often call "messianic time" are Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 61-78, 89; Eleanor Kaufman, "The Saturday of Messianic Time (Agamben and Badiou on Apostle Paul)," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 1/2008; Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007); Stephane Moses, *The Angel of History: Rozenweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, trans. Barbara Harshav (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 101-126; Peter Fenves, *The Messianic Reduction: Walter Benjamin and the Shape of Time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994); David Scott, *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 7-10; Jacques Ranciere, *Proletarian Nights: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, trans. John Drury (London and New York: Verso Books, 2012 [1981]); and Dipesh Chakrabarty,

need of prophetic guidance, the “motherless,” to be redeemed by Jesus in the present, without first undergoing a protracted period of moral, cultural, and political cultivation.

Gospel’s “now” was not amnesiac; rather, it reoriented black memory from the New Negro focus on slavery to the long-repressed spiritual experience of the slaves’ abolitionism. Reflecting this reorientation, in the wake of the Philadelphia-based Clara Ward Singers’ seminal 1949 recording of William Herbert Brewster’s “Surely God Is Able,” the African American Protestant notion of Jesus as “a mother for the motherless and a father for the fatherless” became mid-twentieth century gospel’s most ubiquitous lyrical concept.¹⁵ In the lyric, black Protestantism inserted motherhood at the forefront of verses 5-6 of one of the Ur-texts of Afro-diasporic Christianity, Psalm 68: “A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation. God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound in chains” (Psalm 68:5-6).¹⁶ “Motherless” and “fatherless” were interconnected concepts, and often appeared in succession, as if they were equivalent terms. But African Americans overwhelmingly invoked “motherless” first, indicating a difference in their meanings suggested by “Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child”: while “fatherless” signified material dispossession, emotional crisis, broader sociological problems, and perhaps even what Orlando Patterson has influentially deemed “social death,” to feel “motherless” was to experience antiblackness as existential catastrophe, as not-even-nonbeing in a world predicated on being legible to a schema of being.¹⁷

Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007 [2000]).

¹⁵ Gilkes, “Mother to the Motherless.”

¹⁶ As we saw in the previous two chapters, Psalm 68 also contains the prophecy “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God” (Psalm 68:31). It also contains the King James Bible’s only abbreviation of Jehovah as “JAH” (68:4).

¹⁷ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1982); Gilkes, “Mother to the Motherless,” 75-76. Hortense Spillers’ notion that the elision of “motherhood” and “slavery” defined the slaves’ situation as “father-lacking” also suggests the privileging, if you

Mothering was the ultimate redemptive black labor, in that mothering first revealed Jesus to the world in the flesh, bringing into being God's redemption from the world's fallen principalities and powers. This mothering of redemption transformed the temporality and valence of divine violence, from intimations dependent on the interpretation of world events largely beyond the black faithful's influence to a lived "now" of annihilative nothingness. In other words, to a being that was nothing to, unbound by, and threatening for the worldly relations and conceptions of time and place that make being legible in and to the world. The paradoxical conundrum of sustaining a "now" temporality in "an unfriendly world"¹⁸ posed a question that oriented the debate on messianism between Martin Buber and Jacob Taubes: does the institutionalization of *charismata*, of the faith collectivity for whom God alone is sovereign and not the powers of the world, necessarily mutate that collectivity into a mere facsimile, to then calcify into a pillar, of worldly power?¹⁹ For black Chicago Protestantism as in the Hebrew Bible, the gendered valence of music was crucial to this matter. Focusing in particular on Thomas A. Dorsey, a women's quartet drawn from Dorsey collaborator Theodore Frye's gospel chorus at Ebenezer Baptist Church, and the Roberta Martin Singers, which bore the namesake of its director who played piano for that chorus, the chapter will show how gospel's conception of redemption emerged from its emphasis on mothering, revealing the influence of gendered notions of time on how the Bible structured the discourse on the family in black sacred music in the first half of the twentieth century.

will, of "motherless": see Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Culture and Counteremory: The "American" Connection (Summer 1987), pp. 64-81: 79-80.

¹⁸ "Rolling through an Unfriendly World," Negro spiritual collection.

¹⁹ Martin Buber, *Kingship of God*, trans. Richard Scheimann (New York: Humanity Books, 1967); Jacob Taubes, "Martin Buber and the Philosophy of History," in *From Cult to Culture: Fragments Toward a Critique of Historical Reason* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 10-27.

In the early twentieth century, W.E.B. Du Bois' idea that the spirituals' depiction of the sociology of the black family legitimated the so-called Talented Tenth's claim to race leadership was a primary influence on African Americans' support for uplifting the spiritual. In his seminal discussion of the spirituals in *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois argued that these "sorrow songs" voiced the struggles of black families under slavery. For in these songs:

Mother and child are sung, but seldom father...there is little of wooing and wedding...home is unknown. Strange blending of love and helplessness sings through the refrain:

'Yonder's my ole mudder,
Been waggin' at de hill so long;
'Bout time she cross over,
Git home bime-by'

Elsewhere comes the cry of the "motherless" and the "Farewell, farewell, my only child." Love songs are scarce and fall into two categories—the frivolous and the light, and the sad. Of deep successful love there is ominous silence.²⁰

In an earlier chapter of *Souls*, "Of the Passing of the First Born," Du Bois explored his despondency at the May 24, 1899 death of his nineteen-month-old son, Burghardt, in order to convey, and make his own, the black familial pathos contained in the Negro spirituals; indeed, the chapter itself functions as a sorrow song. Du Bois mourned the demise of what should have been the ideal black nuclear family. This tragedy was not only familial, but political, considering the weakness of black families, particularly lower-class families, he depicted in his sociological studies.²¹ Thus, Du Bois "heard in his [son's] baby voice the voice of the Prophet who was to rise within the Veil...The wretched of my race that line the alleys of the nation sit fatherless and

²⁰ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 160.

²¹ For Du Bois' sociological study of the black family in this period, see W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996 [1899]); W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Black North in 1901: A Social Study* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 1-18; and W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Development of a People," *International Journal of Ethics*, Vol.14, No.3 (April 1904): 292-311.

unmothered; but Love sat beside his cradle, and in his ear Wisdom waited to speak.”²² As the term “Prophet” indicates, Du Bois’ use of “fatherless” to evoke black plight after America’s retreat from Reconstruction echoed the Old Testament prophets, who deem the “fatherless,” along with the “widow,” as those most endangered by Israel’s retreat from God’s justice because they lacked the support and protection of strong men.²³

Moses, who codified this prophetic language in the Mosaic Law, was Du Bois’ ideal leader.²⁴ As with Moses, who was raised in Pharaoh’s family, Burghardt’s calling to be a “Prophet” was inextricable from his growing up removed from the familial deficit suffered by the wretches whom he would lead to freedom²⁵—in particular, the wretches’ lack of fathers, of real men.²⁶ The Du Boises, an exceptional black nuclear family led by a sterling father, were poised to deliver black Americans from racism through son Burghardt. However, with his hope shattered by Burghardt’s death, in his grief he sang the wretches’ sorrow song of familial deficit amidst crushing white supremacy. He ended the chapter with a vision of being reunited with his son in heaven: “Sleep then, child,—sleep till I sleep and waken to a baby voice and the ceaseless patter of little feet—above the Veil.”²⁷ This theme was taken directly from the spirituals; Du Bois even introduced “Of the Passing of the First Born” with the notated melody of the spiritual

²² Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 134.

²³ See note 9 above.

²⁴ For Du Bois’ conception of prophets, see Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 21.

²⁵ Political theorist Michael Walzer states that “Martin Buber is faithful to three thousand years of Jewish interpretation when he writes in his *Moses* that the Exodus was ‘the kind of liberation which cannot be brought about by anyone who grew up as a slave.’ Moses is separate from the people in his growing up.” See Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 66.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 44-45: Walzer explores the notion that Moses becomes a rebel leader because “there was no man” among the Hebrew slaves to resist their oppression. Walzer states this is the source of the maxim attributed to Hillel: “Where there is no man, try to be one.” For the biblical context, see Exodus 2:11-12. For “Of the Passing of the First Born” as a meditation on exceptional, intellectual black men as the rightful captains of African American destiny, see Hazel Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 21-24.

²⁷ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 134.

“I Hope My Mother Will Be There.” The lyrics of the beginning of this spiritual’s first verse are “I hope my mother will be there, in that beautiful world on high,” and the beginning of each verse replaces mother with “sister,” “brother,” and so on.²⁸ Du Bois applied this song to his own life.

Citing Du Bois’ own distinguishing between Moses and Bismarck, political philosopher Robert Gooding-Williams states that “More like Moses than Bismarck, Du Bois’s leaders will rule and remember the masses, relying on illustration, sensitivity to suffering, and a sense of shared identity to enter into their lives and uplift them.”²⁹ By summoning the spirituals in remembrance of his son, Du Bois also remembered and identified with the suffering of black folk, thereby fulfilling the criteria of a prophet suited to stewarding the black masses. But whereas Burghardt could have followed in Moses’ footsteps as did Joshua, Moses’ successor who leads the Hebrews into the Promised Land, Du Bois sighed, “I shall die in my bonds”: like Moses, he would guide his people through the Wilderness of Jim Crow but would not live to enter the Canaan of racial equality.³⁰

Du Bois’ emphasis on men shows how the figure of the prophet enabled churchmen to legitimate their leadership of social outreach with biblically-fortified notions of manliness and racial captaincy at a time when church women were gaining in organizational and even

²⁸ Mrs. M.F. Armstrong and Helen W. Ludlow, *Hampton and Its Students*, 218.

²⁹ Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 33.

³⁰ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 158. For Du Bois’ understanding of African Americans as stranded before the Promised Land at the turn of the twentieth century, see Rhondda Robinson Thomas, *Claiming Exodus: A Cultural History of Afro-Atlantic Identity, 1775-1903* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 150-153. See also the conclusion of “Of the Training of Black Men”: “Are you so afraid lest peering from this high Pisgah, between Philistine and Amalekite, we sight the Promised Land?” Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 81. For Du Bois’ “faith in the progress of his race and in children’s eventual inheritance of a world transformed by his and his descendants’ efforts,” see Katharine Capshaw Smith, *Children’s Literature of the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 7.

theological influence.³¹ As demonstrated by the rhetoric of the first and third largest churches in the all black National Baptist Convention, respectively, Olivet Baptist Church and Pilgrim Baptist Church,³² biblical prophetic justice animated black Chicago churches' social outreach imperative as hundreds of thousands of migrants from the South streamed into the city between the World Wars.³³ In his "Pastor's Greetings" remarks on the front page of the *Olivet Baptist Church Herald*, pastor Lacey Kirk Williams adapted black renderings of Psalm 68:5-6 to announced that the church's prophetic outreach manifested God's parental love: "[F]or the motherless and the fatherless who are bereft of their earthly relatives, seeking Him who says 'I will be your mother and your father, and your God'...the church 'OLIVET' is affectionately dedicated and operated."³⁴ Pilgrim Baptist Church professed its commitment to "(b)uilding a haven for the outcast...providing a home for the aged, unguided youth, and the wayfarers," categories corresponding to the Mosaic and Prophetic Books' invocations of the justice due to the "oppressed," "widow," "fatherless," and "stranger."³⁵

³¹ For early twentieth century black church women's organizing, see Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*; Barbara Dianne Savage, *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us: The Politics of Black Religion* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008); and Anthea D. Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). For early twentieth century notions of manliness, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in America, 1880-1917* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

³² Olivet, located at 3101 S Parkway, had approximately 9,500 members in the 1930s and was billed as the "largest Protestant church in the world"; Pilgrim, 3301 S. Indiana Ave, had approximately 7,500 members in the 1930s.

³³ For black Chicago churches' social outreach during the Great Migration, see Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 71-93; Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), Ch. 6: "When Chicago was Canaan," 154-179; and Marcia Chatelain, *South Side Girls: Growing Up in the Great Migration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 59-65.

³⁴ L.K. Williams, "Pastor's Greetings," *Olivet Baptist Church Herald*, Vol. 26, No. 15, April 17, 1938. Box 57, Folder 16, SCDP.

³⁵ "God's Example of Love Is Giving" and "Pilgrim.....What Now?" in J.C. Austin, *Pilgrim Baptist Church Achievement Celebration*, 1939. Charles L. Blockson Afro-American History Collection, Temple University. See also Deuteronomy 14:28-29 and Malachi 3:5.

In this era, at different times Olivet and Pilgrim also employed as their choir director Edward Boatner, who specialized in uplifting the spirituals.³⁶ In the forward to Boatner's 1927 collection of spirituals with Willa A. Townshend, *Spirituals Triumphant Old and New*, he and Townshend explained that earlier arrangements tended to "get away from the harmony and characteristic way in which the songs were originally sung, and therefore much of their real import is lost. To the end that the 'old-time' way of singing these songs may be preserved, is this edition brought forth."³⁷ In the mode of a Du Boisian prophetic leader, Boatner attempted to preserve the spiritual—and thereby remember the people—while guiding the spiritual on a triumphant march to cultural parity with European classical music.

The pastor of another elite black Chicago church, Samuel Martin of St. Edmund's Episcopal Church (5831 S. Indiana Avenue), demonstrated how the local influence of the Chicago School of Sociology contributed to churches' reprisal of Du Bois' fusion of biblical concepts with academic social science. In his 1935 thesis for his Master of Sacred Theology degree from Chicago's Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, Martin stated that pastors must combat "social disorganization," which he defined, quoting from W.I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's Chicago School of Sociology classic *The Polish Peasant*, as "a decrease of the influence of existing rules of behavior upon individual members of the group" which may range from a single case to a "general decay of all the institutions of the group."³⁸ Basing much of the thesis off of cases from Stuart Albert Queen and Dilbert Martin Mann's 1925 study *Social*

³⁶ Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*, 162.

³⁷ Edward T. Boatner and Willa A. Townshend, eds., *Spirituals Triumphant Old and New* (Nashville: Sunday School Publishing Board, National Baptist Convention, 1927).

³⁸ Samuel J. Martin, "Case Studies in Pastoral Care," Thesis for Master of Sacred Theology, Seabury-Western Theological Seminary of Chicago, 1935, p. 20. SJMP.

Pathology, Martin addressed many examples of social disorganization, including “illegitimacy,” “difficult children,” widows, parental desertion, and children raised without parental care.³⁹

Martin contended that “Prophets have much to say about the social problems which form the very sum and substance of social science.”⁴⁰ For his principle example, he stated that the Hebrew prophet “Samuel, last of the judges and first of the prophets, stands in a most intimate relationship with God and man” in large part because he was “set apart for the service of God even before his birth” by his exceptionally devout and loving, married parents, Hannah and Elkanah (see 1 Samuel 1-2).⁴¹ Martin echoed Du Bois’s preference for Moses over Bismarck by praising Samuel for the speech he gives against monarchical leadership when the people of Israel ask for a king (1 Samuel 8:11-18).⁴² After his discussion of Samuel, Martin described specific examples set by several of the other Hebrew prophets in the order of their biblical appearance. Ultimately, Martin maintained that the task of the modern pastor was to apply both biblical prophetic social science and contemporary academic social science to the interpretation and administration of “God’s program” of justice for the masses, particularly those most vulnerable to social disorganization.⁴³ He aligned with Martin Buber’s argument that Hebrew prophetic notions of justice, righteousness, and lovingkindness were not reciprocal: God has lovingkindness for Israel, and Israel should for all people, particularly the most disadvantaged.⁴⁴ Thus, in an Amos verse often uttered by black prophetic speech, justice and righteousness roll *down* (Amos 5:24).

³⁹ Ibid, 107, 97, 31, 66, 79.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 187.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, 188.

⁴³ Ibid, 187-190.

⁴⁴ Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1960), 114.

Buber argued that prophetic social justice for the oppressed and underprivileged was “not on the basis of the task of bettering the living conditions of society,” but rather to close the “social distance” among the Hebrews because God “does not want to rule a crowd, but a community.”⁴⁵ As Buber had earlier noted, God forged the community in “the common experience of the liberation and the exodus,” which “establishes the bond of association.”⁴⁶ Thus, prophetic social justice was founded upon the Exodus from slavery to freedom, and served the purpose of perpetuating the freedom under God of the community forged in the Exodus. Per Buber’s interpretation, without an Exodus from slavery to freedom, without God having established sovereignty in a kingdom, prophetic justice could be reduced to mere social science.

Thus, as a prophetic necessity, Samuel Martin’s prophetic outlook aligned him with black Chicago’s embrace of the Du Boisian project of developing the pathos of the Negro spirituals via the aesthetics and techniques of European classical music in order to manifest the rise of black cultural greatness along the journey from slavery to freedom. In 1935, Martin and a 40-voice choir sang the requiem mass for the funeral service at St. Edmund’s held for actor Richard B. Harrison, who had recently starred as the “anthropomorphic black God,” De Lawd, in the hit Broadway and movie versions of white dramatist Marc Connelly’s play on black religion in the rural South, *The Green Pastures*.⁴⁷ In his life, Harrison was an exemplar of black progress since slavery, a son of runaway slaves whose portrait graced the cover of *Time Magazine* the week before his death.⁴⁸ In the drama, hailed as “beautiful” by Du Bois, De Lawd learns to be a merciful leader—a judge or prophet rather than a king, a Moses rather than a Bismarck—as he

⁴⁵ Buber, *The Prophetic Faith*, 55.

⁴⁶ Buber, *Kingship of God*, 26.

⁴⁷ Curtis J. Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 206.

⁴⁸ See the cover of *Time: The Weekly Magazine*, March 4, 1935.

guides the black masses through the narrative sweep of the Bible, a journey interspersed with the Hall Johnson Choir's intermittent performances of spirituals.⁴⁹ Although as was typical of black Episcopal churches, St. Edmund's did not perform spirituals or other signifiers of the rural black religious tradition that emerged from slavery, a report of the funeral remarked that "from the choir loft came the sound of Negro voices paraphrasing the same sentiment [of Psalm 23, which had just been recited] in the language of De Lawd's' own heaven: 'Lawd, I don't feel no ways tired,'" the title of one of the spirituals featured in the drama.⁵⁰ Thus, St. Edmund's service conveyed African Americans' harnessing of the sorrow songs to portray the march from slavery to freedom.

The Harrison funeral evinced black Chicagoans' augmentation of Du Bois' theory of the sorrow songs with another vision of the long development of the black freedom struggle: his rival Booker T. Washington's teleological conception of black history.⁵¹ Whereas the overthrow of Reconstruction and the ascendancy of Jim Crow were foundational to Du Bois' thought, Washington supported Emancipation Day commemorations that emphasized the slave experience on one hand, and black progress after Emancipation on the other, while de-emphasizing the drama of emancipation and the impact of the fall of Reconstruction.⁵²

Illuminating the resonance of this Bookerite repression of the tumult of emancipation in black

⁴⁹ Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion*, 207, 213.

⁵⁰ Edward Reticker, "20,000 See Him Go to 'Green Pastures,'" March 1935 [n.p.]; Robert J. Casey, "Diverse Creeds and Races 'Make Way fo' De Lawd' at Rites for Negro Actor," March 1935 [n.p]. SJMP, Box 2, Folder 8. Casey paraphrased Psalm 23 as "...lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters...Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil: for Thou are with me..."

⁵¹ For the observation that historicism does not necessarily assume teleology, but rather assumes that development requires the lapse of "a certain amount of time" but can take a winding road, see Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 23. For the affinities in the New Negroisms of Washington and Du Bois, see Holt, *Children of Fire*, 234-235.

⁵² W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 92, 76; David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 332-333.

consciousness, Alabama farmer Ned Cobb recalled that his grandparents' generation, the Emancipation generation, "wasn't satisfied with they freedom. They felt like motherless children—they wasn't satisfied but they had to live under the impression that they were. Had to act in a way just as though everything was all right."⁵³ Cobb's statement suggests that the "cry of the 'motherless'" Du Bois heard in the spirituals he witnessed being performed in the un-reconstructing South adapted the pathos of the enslaved to the anguish of needing to repress the disappointment of emancipation, or risk furious white reprisal.⁵⁴

Fittingly, the spirituals formed the core of the most prominent exhibition of black Chicago's fusion of Du Bois' thought with Bookerite conceptions of black history: *O, Sing a New Song*, the pageant of African American history and culture organized in large part by the black newspaper the *Chicago Defender* and performed at Soldier Field in August 1934 as part of the Century of Progress World Fair. Pageant director of music Noble Sissle and his associate Onah Spencer accurately predicted that *O, Sing a New Song* would be deemed a success because it focused on the development of Negro spirituals from their roots in African music before the slave trade to their flourishing as art songs since emancipation.⁵⁵ As Sissle and Onah Spencer proudly noted, *O, Sing A New Song's* narrative progressed from Africa to the ordeal of slavery,

⁵³ Theodore Rosengarten, *All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000 [1974]), 8. My thinking on the relationship between the spirituals and Bookerite repression is influenced by the discussion of novels' repressing the oppressive truth of a real world "contradiction" in order to maintain their literary structure and aesthetic wholeness in Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 42-49; and the discussion of aesthetic unity promoting a mystifying image of political reconciliation in Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Malden, MA, Oxford, UK, and Victoria, Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), 9.

⁵⁴ For an interpretation of the black experience of Jim Crow as rooted in this predicament, see Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Knopf, 1998), especially xv-xvi.

⁵⁵ Marian M. Ohman, "African and African-American Musicians Seeking Progress at A Century of Progress," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* (1998-), Vol. 102, No. 3/4 (Fall-Winter 2009), pp. 368-401: 385-386, 392. See also Christopher Robert Reed, "A Reinterpretation of Black Strategies for Change at the Chicago World's Fair, 1933-1934," *Chicago Historical Journal*, Vol. 81, No. 1 (Spring 1988), pp. 2-21.

“then Lincoln and emancipation; Booker Washington and Tuskegee; hope coming to fruition; the long immature capacities of a jungle people ripening in art and music...”⁵⁶ Robert Abbott, publisher of the *Chicago Defender* and longtime advocate of musical uplift, adopted Du Bois’ statement that the spirituals were the “articulate message of the slave to the world” to echo this Bookerite sentiment on progress: “Let the story of this struggling Race as told in O, SING A NEW SONG continue to inspire you and all of us to higher and nobler deeds. This is our message to the world.”⁵⁷

While the pageant’s title derived from biblical calls to “sing unto the Lord a new song,”⁵⁸ most of the musicians were New Negro veterans who performed music long used for uplifting the race. Chicago stalwarts the James A. Mundy Singers and J. Wesley Jones’ Metropolitan Community Church Choir performed the role of the historic post-Emancipation Fisk Jubilee Singers, the Fisk University troop that had so inspired alumnus W.E.B. Du Bois with its classicized rendering of the spirituals. Richard B. Harrison of recent *Green Pastures* fame played the role of Narrator; Abbie Mitchell, who would perform at Harrison’s funeral at St. Edmund’s the following winter, sang in the pageant and served on its musical advisory committee; and Lacey Kirk Williams of Olivet served on the general advisory committee.⁵⁹

Despite the religious performance and rhetoric, the pageant was essentially secularist. The repression of the Reconstruction era evinced how A Century of Progress replaced the use value of black sacred music within sacred spaces with a cultural exchange value: representation

⁵⁶ National Auditions Annual, *A Century of Progress Souvenir Edition of Afro-American Pageant, Inc.* August 25, 1934, 7. R.R. Donnelly Papers, Box 431, Folder 3, Special Collections Research Center, Regenstein Library, University of Chicago.

⁵⁷ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 187. National Auditions Annual, “A Century of Progress Souvenir Edition of Afro-American Pageant, Inc.,” 12.

⁵⁸ Psalm 98:1 and 149:1; Isaiah 42:10.

⁵⁹ Cites.

in a public place.⁶⁰ This cultural representation in turn substituted for the human emancipation that the new birth of freedom had promised but not realized.⁶¹ Yet the Pageant also attempted to realign a rapidly growing black Chicago from the perpetually disappointing Party of Lincoln to the Democrats. In the aftermath of Anton Cermak's leadership and riding the electoral crest of the New Deal, the Chicago Democrats were in the process of building the party machine that would loom over local politics in the meat of the century. The Democrats undertook measures to coax win over blacks, the last major "ethnic" group in Chicago remaining in the Republican electoral fold after the 1932 election.⁶² While no Republican endorsements of the pageant appeared in the pageant booklet, the booklet featured many endorsements from leading local and state Democrat officials and candidates, and the local party praised the pageant's being of "universal interest."⁶³ A surreal spectacle hailed the marriage of party and race: with an Edenic African landscape covering the Soldier Field basin, President Franklin D. Roosevelt pressed a button in the White House that told stadium operatives to ring a bell, officially commencing the proceedings.⁶⁴ The *Chicago Defender* envisioned "the highest executive in the nation smiling benevolently as he opened the pageant...everyone wanted to know that the President was interested in O Sing a New Song."⁶⁵ Less than twenty years since the previous Democratic President, the segregationist Woodrow Wilson, deemed the KKK hagiography *Birth of a Nation*

⁶⁰ Jacob Taubes, "Culture and Ideology," in *From Cult to Culture*, 248-267: 252; Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Harper Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1978), 146-162.

⁶¹ Taubes, "Culture and Ideology," 250.

⁶² William J. Grimshaw, *Bitter Fruit: Black Politics and the Chicago Machine 1931-1991* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 57; 49; John M. Allswang, "The Chicago Negro Voter and the Democratic Consensus: A Case Study, 1918-1936," *Journal of the Chicago State Historical Society* (1908-1984), Vol. 60, No. 2 (Summer, 1967), p. 145-175.

⁶³ National Auditions Annual, "A Century of Progress," 6.

⁶⁴ Dewey R. Jones, "'O Sing A New Song' is Triumph of Race," *Chicago Defender*, Sept. 1, 1934. Roosevelt repeat the gesture at the start of the 1940 American Negro Exposition in Chicago. See Adam Green, *Selling the Race*, 28.

⁶⁵ Jones, "'O Sing A New Song' is Triumph of Race."

“history written in lightning,” this could only be seen as a stunning victory for black cultural politics. *O, Sing A New Song* was cultural, not just in the Marxian sense nodded to above but in the religious sense, meaning of the world, of the principalities and powers and all that bound a fallen humanity to them.⁶⁶ In this sense, the pageant signaled the black leadership class’s assent to the rapprochement between “Christ and culture” ascendant in liberal and neo-orthodox Protestantism providing religious justification for the New Deal order—or, perhaps more accurately, social justification for religion.⁶⁷

Yet in the redlined shadows of Soldier Field, another sacred genre was rising to prominence in the mainline Afro-Protestant denominations after decades of ill repute. Black gospel stemmed from the largest Pentecostal denomination in the U.S., the black Church of God in Christ (COGIC). At the dawn of Jim Crow, when many mainline black ministers advocated leaving slave culture behind and assimilating middle class white sacred music, ministers such as COGIC founder Charles Mason strove to replenish the demonstrative worshipping of the ‘old time religion’ by anchoring it in the practices of the First Century Christians.⁶⁸ Mason and other COGIC preachers believed that the mainline black denominations neglected spiritual wellbeing by focusing too much on educational, social, and political uplift.⁶⁹ Published three years before “Of the Passing of the First Born,” Mason’s early gospel composition “I’m Happy with Jesus Alone” (1900) preempted Du Bois’ portrait of the “wretched” “fatherless and un-mothered” blacks who “line the alleys” in its fourth verse, which Chicago’s Helen Robinson Youth Choir would make central to their 1972 recording:

⁶⁶ John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (1972).

⁶⁷ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).

⁶⁸ Jackson, *Singing in My Soul*, 16.

⁶⁹ Calvin White, Jr., *The Rise to Respectability: Race, Religion, and the Church of God in Christ* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2012), 23.

Should father and mother forsake me below,
My bed upon earth be a stone,
I'll cling to my savior who loves me, I know,
I'm happy with Jesus alone.⁷⁰

This verse notwithstanding, early twentieth century gospel composers tended not to evoke black adaptations of Psalm 68:5-6. In the 1920s, COGIC musicians principally spread the good news of a heavenly relief from worldly oppression.⁷¹ The most influential of these musicians was Texas missionary Arizona Dranes, whose vaudeville-tinged singing, stride piano playing rooted in ragtime and barrelhouse, and call-and-response with exuberant background singers on her sessions for Chicago's Okeh Records produced what are often thought of as the first modern gospel recordings.⁷² With its Pentecostal evangelicalism, foregrounding of the spiritual leadership of poor women with little formal education, and liberal employment of ragtime, jazz, and blues instrumentation, 1920s gospel incurred the derision of mainline black denominations, when not ignored altogether.⁷³

By the late 1920s, artists such as Thomas A. Dorsey, a Chicago-based blues musician born in Villa Rica, Georgia in 1899 who had directed Ma Rainey's band but was increasingly drawn to gospel, anchored this Pentecostal strain more solidly in the blues. Dorsey also found inspiration in the urbane gospel style of Philadelphia African Methodist Episcopal preacher Charles Tindley, composer of such hymnal staples as "I'll Overcome Someday," the source of "We Shall Overcome." In the autumn of 1931, Alabama migrant Rev. James Howard Lorenzo Smith, pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church (4501 S. Vincennes), the third largest and most

⁷⁰ Horace Clarence Boyer, *The Golden Age of Gospel* (First Illinois, 2000), 22. Notably, the Helen Robinson Youth Choir reversed the order of "father" and "mother."

⁷¹ Cite examples: Dranes, Jessie Mae Hill etc.

⁷² For Arizona Dranes, see Timothy Dodge, *The School of Arizona Dranes: Gospel Music Pioneer* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2013).

⁷³ Jackson, *Singing in My Soul*.

prominent Baptist church in Bronzeville after Olivet and Pilgrim, decided that he wanted his church to feature the music of the “forefathers down in the Southland” rather than solely the classical fare produced by Ebenezer’s music director, Edward Boatner protégé Mabel Sanford Lewis.⁷⁴ So Smith hired gospel singer Theodore Frye to form a group, and Frye brought Dorsey in to help him and accompany the group on piano.⁷⁵ While mild compared to later gospel pyrotechnics, the 100-member Ebenezer Gospel Chorus’s combination of downhome fervor coached up by Frye and vaudeville bravura supplied by Dorsey, along with its handclapping and individual members’ interjections of “Hallelujah” and “Amen,” caused a sensation mainline black Chicago Protestantism had never experienced before.⁷⁶ By the summer of 1933, Chicago’s nascent Gospel Chorus Union, which began with a few local choruses, had grown to thirty-five hundred members spread across twenty-four states.⁷⁷

The gospel revolution underway in black Chicago was intimately connected to devastations in Thomas Dorsey’s personal life. Due to the success of compositions such as the lascivious “It’s Tight Like That,” one of the biggest blues hits of the late 1920s, Dorsey at first epitomized the optimistic, entrepreneurial black modernism of “Chicago’s New Negroes” migrating from the South.⁷⁸ But in 1932, within a year of forming the Ebenezer Gospel Chorus with Frye, his 24-year-old wife Nettie died in childbirth on August 26, followed by their newborn son Thomas, Jr. later that night.⁷⁹ Dorsey, who was in St. Louis working on a revival at the time, rushed back to Chicago after receiving the news in a telegram.⁸⁰ After viewing his wife

⁷⁴ Robert M. Marovich, *A City Called Heaven: Chicago and the Birth of Gospel Music* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 89-90.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁷⁸ Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes*.

⁷⁹ Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues*, 217-218.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

and child in their shared coffin at Pilgrim Baptist Church sent his grief to its apotheosis, Dorsey went to Poro beauty college, sat down at a piano he liked to play, and began composing what would become “Take My Hand, Precious Lord” from the structure of “Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone,” one of the most popular English congregational hymns in African American Protestantism.⁸¹

As several studies have documented, the popularity of “Precious Lord” helped make black Chicago the focal point of the nationwide institutionalization of the once-disreputable gospel music in churches, choruses, and the music industry.⁸² Yet most important was its revision of Du Bois’s conceptualization of black sacred music’s response to death. The death of Du Bois’ son, Burghardt, pushed the holy beyond the horizon of Du Bois’ lifespan, leaving him to fatalistically mull Moses’ barring from the Promised Land. Conversely, Thomas Jr.’s and Nettie’s deaths propelled Dorsey to beckon Jesus to come to him at the time of loss:

Precious Lord, take my hand,
Lead me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak I am worn;
Through the storm, through the night,
Lead me on to the light,
Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me home.

Whereas Burghardt’s death only underscored for Du Bois the frayed familial roots of the sorrow songs, “Precious Lord” stimulated the proliferation of gospel music—music celebrating the “good news” of Jesus’ coming. “Precious Lord” quickly became a staple of African American funerals, particularly when it was the deceased’s favorite song.⁸³ This was most famously the

⁸¹ Ibid., 220-243.

⁸² Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues*; Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes*, 177-186; Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 104-110; Jackson, *Singing in My Soul*, 55-68; Ramsey, *Race Music*, 52-54; Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 181-186.

⁸³ For prominent 1930s funerals in which “Precious Lord” was sung, see “Mrs. Agnes Belin Passes; Funeral Held Wednesday,” *Chicago Defender*, February 20, 1937; “Indianapolis Fireman Is Killed in Wreck,” *Atlanta Daily World*,

case at Martin Luther King, Jr.'s funeral, at which it was sung by Chicago gospel icon Mahalia Jackson, who was integral in popularizing the song in the 1930s.

“Precious Lord” also evoked the specter of Jim Crow in the North. Two weeks after the tragedy, the *Chicago Defender* stated that Dorsey suggested he would charge physicians who had been treating his wife at the University of Illinois Research Clinic with malpractice.⁸⁴ In the same article, the paper noted that it “learned the Illinois Research Clinic announced it would no longer accept Race patients from the South Side,” implying that medical racism might have played a role in Nettie Dorsey and Thomas, Jr.’s deaths.⁸⁵ Whether any charges were filed is unclear, and it seems the Clinic did not adopt Jim Crow policy; the following year, it apparently treated black patients, and added a black physician to its staff (perhaps fallout from the controversy?).⁸⁶ Still, at the very least, rumors of racist malpractice would have imbued “Precious Lord” with additional oppositional resonance.

Later in 1932, Dorsey accepted pastor Junius Caesar Austin’s invitation to relocate to Pilgrim, where he had already been training a gospel chorus in the Ebenezer style for several months. As one of the leading black Baptist churches in the nation and the only rival to Olivet’s local preeminence, Pilgrim provided an ideal base of operations for Dorsey. One early manifestation of this was the exposure Dorsey gained through Pilgrim’s increased influence on the *Chicago Defender*’s music coverage. In the early 1930s, when the *Defender* emphasized classical music and concert spirituals, the paper’s coverage of Dorsey was not hostile, but tended

February 20, 1939; Ella G. Berry, “Former Elk Leader, Dies: 5,000 Attend Rites for Ella G. Berry,” *Chicago Defender*, September 16, 1939. These shed light on how quickly prominent black Americans embraced gospel.

⁸⁴ “Charges Malpractice in Death of Wife and Baby,” *Chicago Defender*, Sep. 10, 1932, p.3.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ “Dr. Wilburn Gets a Post on U. of I. Staff,” *Chicago Defender*, Oct. 7, 1933, p.12.

to be spare and dispassionate.⁸⁷ But late in 1934, rumors spread that *Defender* publisher Robert Abbott was upset with the results of the *O, Sing a New Song* pageant; he ultimately sacked its principle proponent at the paper, lawyer N.K. McGill.⁸⁸ The following year, when Pilgrim assistant minister R.C. Keller became religious editor of the *Chicago Defender*, the paper began enthusiastically promoting gospel events and sought to explain the music's distinct resonance, infiltrating the critical territory formerly dominated by the classical musicians in *O, Sing a New Song*.

Echoing Ebenezer pastor J.H.L. Smith's reasons for hiring Frye to start a chorus, in July 1935 Keller argued in the *Defender* that Dorsey's music preserved the "songs of the fathers"—as Edward Boatner attempted to do. He added, however, that "monuments over graves of departed heroes cannot equal the tangible abiding merit in appreciative hearts for the solace, in times of sorrow, and courage in moments of despair...brought in these songs written by Dorsey."⁸⁹ Boatner's music evinced the New Negro emphasis on the monumental.⁹⁰ It was built from the foundation of the spirituals and raised to the summit of European classical form, reflecting the Race's ascent from slavery to modernity. Classicized spirituals were to serve as monuments to the heroically suffering slaves, as towering and permanent as the *lieder* of Schubert or the arias of Verdi. By contrast, Keller advanced, Dorsey's music brought the spirit of the suffering fathers to bear on moments of acute pain. Keller's remarks suggest that Dorsey quickly eclipsed

⁸⁷ "Gospel Choruses Plan Gala Songfest Aug. 29," *Chicago Defender*, Aug. 19, 1933, p. A1; "Thomas Dorsey is Back from a Tour," *Chicago Defender*, May 28, 1932, p. 5; "Dayton, Ohio," *Chicago Defender*, Jan. 14, 1933, p. 17; "Louisiana State," *Chicago Defender*, Dec. 16, 1933, p. 19; "Gospel Singers Ready for Confab: Annual Session Will Be in St. Louis July 25 to 28," *Chicago Defender*, July 21, 1934, p. 13.

⁸⁸ "'O Sing A New Song' His Downfall?" *Atlanta Daily World*, Sep 16, 1934.

⁸⁹ "Chicago Gospel Choruses Honor Founders in Lavish Anniversary Celebration," *Chicago Defender*, July 6, 1935, p. 22.

⁹⁰ See Mabel O. Wilson, *Negro Building: Black Americans in the World of Fairs and Museums* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2012); for the post-Emancipation roots of "monument culture," see Gene Andrew Jarrett, *Representing the Race: A New Political History of African American Literature* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2011), 63.

Boatner, who resigned within a year of Dorsey's arrival in disgust that "something that's jazzy" was being brought into the church.⁹¹ But Keller's invocation of "fathers" reflected his identification of gospel as something most appropriate for a specific time of exceptional crisis, not an inauguration of a new temporality. It thus revealed that he missed gospel's epochal contribution: a shift from sorrow songs ideology's emphasis on eventually wrenching freedom from the pathos of slavery, to an emphasis on being free.

As Keller's comments indicate, 1930s gospel's construction of freedom complicates the questions of respectability that dominate recent scholarly discussions of interwar black sacred music. Pilgrim congregant Mabel Smith-Hamilton's 1935 discussion of the church's conventional choir and its Dorsey-directed gospel chorus in a speech delivered to the National Baptist Sunday School and Baptist Young People's Union Congress, and soon published in the *Negro Journal of Religion*, attests to respectability's complicated role in the negotiation of these two temporalities of freedom. In her address, Smith-Hamilton praised the church's classical musicians and their "Directress."⁹² Then, without mentioning anyone by name, she criticized Dorsey and his supporters for promulgating "warped editions of Spirituals" while "camouflaging them under the name 'Gospel Songs.' They even go so far as to claim that these were the songs our forefathers sang," she added, alluding to the pro-Dorsey rhetoric of R.C. Keller and others.⁹³ Dorsey himself was even becoming known as the "Father of Gospel Music" by making respectable a genre previously viewed as the theologically illegitimate spawn of uncultivated, cultish Pentecostal women. Warning against the preponderance of "young girls and boys singing and patting their feet, and rocking their bodies to songs whose words are meaningless to them,

⁹¹ Boatner quoted in Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues*, 198.

⁹² Mabel Smith-Hamilton, "Necessary Qualifications of Music Leaders in Religious Worship," *Negro Journal of Religion*, Vol. 1, No. 6, July 1935, pp. 5, 11, Schomburg.

⁹³ Ibid.

but whose only appeal is the ‘catchy music,’” Smith-Hamilton implored that “the leader of music in religious worship must help wage the battle against such ‘trash.’”⁹⁴ She aimed her critique not only at Dorsey and Keller, but also at those like Boatner who agreed with her but could not stomach the fight.

Smith-Hamilton’s navigation of the gender politics of the black Baptist Church was cautiously intrepid. A lay woman, she nevertheless stated her support for a woman’s religious leadership qualities over those of her church’s exclusively male clergy, and did so in public and in print, if not in the pulpit. This perhaps represented advances in women’s empowerment in the Baptist church since the beginning of the twentieth century, when women would attempt to exert influence over the appointment of different male ministerial candidates by assessing their theological and intellectual sophistication, but without suggesting that a woman would be superior.⁹⁵ Her remarks exemplified the mission of the Baptist Young Peoples’ Union, which its president, Pilgrim member and University of Chicago Law School graduate J.C. Oliver, described as both holding ministers accountable to their congregations and training church members so that ministers “cannot take advantage of their ignorance.”⁹⁶ Yet she avoided referring to either the Directress or Dorsey and his supporters by name, suggesting the political, and potentially metaphysical peril for a woman to take such a stance publicly. This pointed to gospel’s capacity to reproduce patriarchy even as it legitimized sacred space for women’s expressive culture.⁹⁷ Congruently, Smith-Hamilton advocated on behalf of the Directress, but did

⁹⁴ Ibid, 5. For more examples of black writers’ critique of dancing and shouting in church services, see Savage, *Your Spirits Walk beside Us*, 27-31.

⁹⁵ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 71.

⁹⁶ Interview with Mr. J.C. Oliver by E. Yarborough, July 5, 1938, SCDP, Box 57, Folder 15, p.1-2.

⁹⁷ Here I am inspired by two recent complications of the tendency to interpret gospel and women’s blues through the lens of women’s empowering struggle against patriarchy: Erin D. Chapman, *Prove It On Me: New Negroes, Sex, and Popular Culture in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Judith S. Casselberry, “‘Blessed Assurance’: Belief and Power among Apostolic African American Women,” Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2008.

so in order to make the women congregants' expressions of faith conform to what she considered proper.⁹⁸

However, the divergence of Mabel Smith-Hamilton's and Thomas Dorsey's interpretations of Psalm 150 indicates that debates over respectability were rooted in how differing traditions of gendered biblical interpretation shaped conflicting understandings of redemption. Smith-Hamilton, oriented by the march from slavery to freedom, emphasized cultivating the uncultivated to be worthy of freedom before it came and capable of sustaining it after its arrival. Psalm 150:3-6 states, "Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals. Let every thing that hath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord." In her essay, Smith-Hamilton recapitulated these verses nearly word for word. But she excised—repressed?—Psalm 150's mention of "timbrel and dance," which references Exodus 15:20, the prelude to the Song of Miriam. The Song of Miriam is a verse at the end of, and subsumed under, the 21-verse Song of Moses (Exodus 15:1-21), which recounts the defeat of Pharaoh's army. Exodus 15:20-21 states, "And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

Smith-Hamilton concluded her recapitulation of Psalm 150 by stating, "Surely nothing serves better to put individuals in the spirit of worship than appropriate songs."⁹⁹ For her, as with Pilgrim's former music director Edward Boatner, worship music had to be appropriately monumental: classical songs or spirituals, cemented into the acceptable tradition by the passage

⁹⁸ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 71 and 185-229.

⁹⁹ Smith-Hamilton, "Necessary Qualifications of Music Leaders in Religious Worship."

of time, employing expert musicians in order to be worthy of praising the Lord. But she perceived the syncopated “rag-time” music accompanying dance in the present day churches as rupturing the tradition of the “pure music” of the enslaved “forefathers.”¹⁰⁰ Her concern with time evoked what theologian Walter Brueggemann argues is the prophet Jeremiah’s fundamental worry in Jeremiah 8: in ignoring his warnings of doom and seemingly forsaking the critical prophetic consciousness of Moses and the enslaved Hebrews, the Jewish kingdom of Judah does not know “God’s time,” “does not know what time it is.”¹⁰¹ For Smith-Hamilton, God’s time, Sunday morning, was not ragtime—the time of celebrative dancing—but rather the time of music capable of uplifting the cultural traditions of the enslaved forefathers. Thus by leading the effort to conserve and uplift the culture of the race, black women could distance themselves from biblical women’s musical celebrations of freedom deemed “imprudent” and “ill-timed.”¹⁰² Smith-Hamilton’s interpretation aligns with how the establishment of the cultic order, particularly in Solomon’s temple, relegated God’s divine rule to the temple, and replaced the ebullient singing of the women during Israel’s early victories—singing that privileged God’s sovereignty rather than the scruples of the human monarchy—with the expert music of the male priestly order.

In contrast, aligning with the early celebratory women’s music before the establishment of the Israelite monarchy, Dorsey indicated that the spirituality of abolitionism was what needed to be sustained, not attempts to fit it into a schema of marching from slavery to freedom, which,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 48, 50.

¹⁰² See the depiction of Israelite women’s “singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tabrets, with joy, with instruments, and with music” (1 Samuel 18:6) in Handel’s oratorio *Saul* (1738): After Saul becomes enraged by the women singing that Saul killed thousands of Philistines and David killed ten thousands, Saul’s son Jonathan declares, “Imprudent women! Your ill-timed comparisons I fear have injured him whom you meant to honor.” See Georg Frideric Handel, *Saul*, libretto by Charles Jennens. Gabriele Consort & Players conducted by Paul McCreesh. Archiv Produktion B0000SWNHU, 2004), Act 1. 20: Symphony—Act 1.27: Recitative: Imprudent Women!

due to the enduring lack of freedom, had to suppress that spirit. In his 1938 address to the Annual Convention of Gospel Choruses, Dorsey introduced his own recapitulation of Psalm 150, which included “timbrel and dance,” by telling the convention, “If you want to shout, shout; if you want to holla, holla; if you want to cry, cry; if you want to dance, dance; praise the Lord in your own way and not the way of another.”¹⁰³ Dorsey’s invocation of “dance” and other related exclamations of faith highlighted Psalm 150’s reference to the Song of Miriam, thereby anchoring the dancing and tambourine playing that accompanied gospel singing in churches to women’s celebration of God’s victory in the Exodus.¹⁰⁴ His return to this theme in his concluding remarks made the brief song the dominant depiction of the Exodus, suggesting women’s centrality, as women evangelists had been to the proliferation of gospel over the previous decade-plus. When an Ebenezer minister credited Frye with helping “young men and women enthusiastically sing the songs of Zion and devote their talent to the services of the church,”¹⁰⁵ he linked Frye’s work to this ecstatic interpretation of Old Testament singing.

Dorsey’s statement also resonated with the prominent spiritual “There is a Balm in Gilead,” a messianic revision of Jeremiah 8:22 (“Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician here? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?”). This spiritual includes the lyric “if you cannot sing like angels, if you cannot pray like Paul, you can tell the love of Jesus, and say He died for all”; the first clause is often rendered as “if you cannot preach like Peter.”¹⁰⁶ The lyrics indicate that Jesus, whose blood is the balm in Gilead, is

¹⁰³ Thomas A. Dorsey, President’s Annual Address to the Convention of Gospel Choruses, Dayton, Ohio, August 6, 1938. SCDP, Box 57, Folder 10.

¹⁰⁴ For the Song of Miriam as a celebration of the “enactment of freedom in dance” against the politics of sexual respectability, see Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 18; see also the discussion of “black women’s enfleshing of freedom” in M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 22. For similar biblical evocations of women dancing and playing timbrels, see Judges 11:34, 1 Samuel 18:6, and Psalm 68:26.

¹⁰⁵ “Chicago Gospel Choruses Honor Founder In Lavish Anniversary Celebration.”

¹⁰⁶ Cite.

receptive to the faith expressions of those who lack the prowess of great singers, or the stature and clerical acumen of prominent apostles such as Peter and the Roman citizen Paul. These faithful would include the vast majority of black Christian women, who were barred from the clergy in most black churches. Further reflecting this, to join the Ebenezer and Pilgrim gospel choruses, one had to be a member of the respective church and abide by “the tenets of Christianity,” but did not have to have any prior musical training, or try out,¹⁰⁷ laying the groundwork for a postwar gospel political theory. Additionally, future gospel songs from Chicago would incorporate the above lyric, or echo its womanist undercurrent.¹⁰⁸ In gospel, not being able to pray often signified parental deficit: you were unable to pray because your parents did not teach you how, because they were dead, incapacitated, absent for whatever reason, and/or living in sin.¹⁰⁹ Thus, Dorsey’s support of shouting, dancing, tambourine playing, and other such expressions of faith gendered as feminine manifested how gospel’s gendered concept of time revised Jeremiah’s prophetic critique.

Dorsey’s approach to gospel performance was likely central to why Pilgrim pastor J.C. Austin wanted to bring him on. While Austin had in the 1920s been a proponent of musical uplift, by the end of the decade he seemed to doubt its trajectory. Speaking in 1930, two years before Dorsey moved to Pilgrim, Austin lamented that because educated Christians increasingly preferred ministers capable of handling money matters and acquiring impressive edifices rather than leading spirited worship, they “do not get happy and shout when the spirit touches them now because they have more intelligence and can control their emotions.”¹¹⁰ Austin stated that

¹⁰⁷ Marovich, *A City Called Heaven*, 95, 90-91.

¹⁰⁸ The Caravans, “Show Me Some Sign,” *The Best of the Caravans*; Mahalia Jackson, “No Matter How You Pray,” *Nuggets of Golden Age Gospel, 1946-1959*, etc; see also Spirit of Memphis, “The Day Is Passed and Gone”

¹⁰⁹ Cite Goldblock Gospel Singers, “Blessed and Brought Up by the Lord,”; Heilbut on Bessie Griffin in *The Gospel Sound*; Gay Sisters, “That’s What I Like About Jesus”; Washington Phillips, “I Had a Good Father and Mother”

¹¹⁰ “Austin Says Gospel is Second to the Raising of Funds,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 13, 1930: 2.

such people's "spiritual being is dead."¹¹¹ He urged church members, "don't be satisfied to sit back and fold your hands. Get out and get the life of church and of Christianity into your being. That will put Christ above the world."¹¹² Austin was renowned for his adept church management, so his real concern here was enabling church solvency to be for Christ's world-surpassing Lordship rather than simply for itself or the interests of the politics of respectability, socially progressive or otherwise. Concomitantly, Dorsey attempted to teach music in a way that maintained the spiritual power of spontaneous expressions of faith while also instilling in chorus members the music skills to raise a noise unto the Lord tunefully as well as joyfully (Psalm 98:4), without being subject to the whims of temporal contingency, such as fluctuations in the level of vocal talent in the chorus. For example, he would teach chorus members from sheet music during rehearsal, but the chorus would sing in service without sheet music, allowing the spirit of the "now" time to swell from a solid foundation.¹¹³

Gospel's connection to ecstatic Israelite singing about how God's early victories over Israel's enemies in the pre-monarchy period evinced God's sovereignty aligned with its status as the war music during the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. Churches that were more resistant to gospel, that sponsored *O, Sing A New Song*, and that became more enmeshed in the Democratic machine's extending its influence into black Chicago, such as Olivet, were also often less likely to support direct African American intervention to defend Ethiopia from Fascist Italy's invasion in 1935—an intervention opposed and eventually barred by FDR's government while U.S. firms became the Italian military's major oil supplier. By contrast, Pilgrim, which did not sponsor *O, Sing A New Song*, led black Chicago church's attempt to organize direct intervention, harnessing

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Kathryn Kemp, *Anointed to Sing the Gospel: The Levitical Legacy of Thomas Andrew Dorsey* (2015).

its religious editorial presence at the *Chicago Defender*. In July 1935, with the conflict already underway and Mussolini's full-scale invasion imminent, the *Defender* reported that, to close out the Dorsey third year anniversary celebration, the more than 600 members of local gospel choruses were joined by the 1,000 "gospel enthusiasts" in the audience as they sang the "stirring 'Sing, Sing, Ethiopia Sing.'" Later that summer, after Pilgrim conceded in its debate with *Defender* publisher Robert Abbott and accepted promulgating the "Bullets, Not Bibles" campaign to send Haile Selassie money for bullets rather than direct intervention as the course to aid Ethiopia, Dorsey led a 200-strong chorus in singing the song again at a mass meeting at Pilgrim, led by the *Defender* brass, on how to pursue the campaign. At this meeting, a formal choir sang a classical piece, "Inflamatus."¹¹⁴ While classical music could demonstrate black progress and mastery of the traditions of European Christendom, gospel was war music for defending African Christianity from Europe. In the program closing out Pilgrim's two-week revival, as the invasion smashed through Ethiopia's forces in November 1935, Sallie Martin and Dorsey were guests artists and former Pilgrim minister V. David Bond reformulated a stalwart of the black sermon repertory, "The Eagle Stirreth Her Nest," to suggest that the war was God's way of exhorting Haile Selassie to develop his country.¹¹⁵ The tensions in such a formulation, and the broader program, showed the difficulty of institutionalizing the "now" time in a hostile antiblack world. Yet if the name "Bullets, Not Bibles" suggested, like the Israelites who clamored to Samuel for a human king, that God's sovereignty was no match for a formidable worldly enemy, in gospel, Pilgrim continued to affirm Christ above the world.

As Dorsey's emphasis on Psalm 150's "timbrels and dances" indicates, perhaps the most important way that "Precious Lord" revised "Of the Passing of the First Born" was its being a

¹¹⁴ "Church Takes Stand for Ethiopia in Sunday Meeting," *Chicago Defender*, August 17, 1935: 18.

¹¹⁵ "12 Join Church in Big Ind. Revival," *Chicago Defender*, November 23, 1935: 18.

requiem for a mother as well as a son. Despite Du Bois' emphasis on remembrance, Burghardt's grieving mother, Nina Du Bois, was all but forgotten, virtually absent from her husband's account of the tragedy, which plumbed the pathos borne of the dashed hopes of select black men.¹¹⁶ Nina's absence framed her husband's interpretation of the birthing of black freedom through the patrilineal aspects of the Old and New Testaments. Israel was commonly portrayed as a nation founded by a line of patriarchs. With regard to the New Testament, rather than referencing Mary, Du Bois in *Souls* alluded to Jesus being preceded by John the Baptist.¹¹⁷ In the penultimate chapters of *Souls* leading up to "Of the Sorrow Songs," he used biblical metaphor to depict Burghardt, along with Episcopalian Bishop Alexander Crummell and prodigal Fisk student John Jones, as ill-fated John the Baptists, "still-born" black males thwarted from realizing their Mosaic, emancipatory potential.¹¹⁸ This thwarting demonstrated blacks' tragic distance from liberation, crystallizing Du Bois' notion that black America must cultivate an elite class of empathetic prophets to lead a long march to freedom.

Dorsey's discussion, in many interviews, of how his despondency over the deaths of both his son and his wife in childbirth inspired the writing of "Precious Lord" shows that the song departed from the concept of "pure" patrilineage and the preoccupation with "forefathers." As a requiem for mother and child, "Precious Lord" bore witness to the matrilineal, and more specifically to the sometimes fatal process of childbearing. Yet its orientation toward mother and son also signified gospel music's emphasis on Christmas, on the gospel—the good news—of Jesus' miraculous birth. The term "Precious" testifies to this correlation. Gospel historian Michael Harris states that Dorsey's agreeing with the suggestion of his collaborator, singer

¹¹⁶ David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Owl Books, 1993), 227.

¹¹⁷ For Du Bois' use of John the Baptist in *Souls*, see Gooding-Williams, *In a Shade of Blue*, 125.

¹¹⁸ Du Bois, SOBF, Afterthought; Gooding-Williams, *In a Shade of Blue*, 127.

Theodore Frye, that he change the title from “Blessed Lord” to “Precious Lord,” demarks one of Dorsey’s principle innovations, a transition from depicting a Jesus “whose holiness he proclaimed to one whose worthiness he cherished.”¹¹⁹ Such a sentiment marked contemporary evocations of the Nativity as well. In 1929 and 1939, the *Baltimore Afro-American* published a Simon of Cyrene story, atypically set at Christmas instead of Good Friday, ending with a poem recalling “Away in a Manger”:

No warm, downy pillow his sweet head pressed
No silken garments his fair form dressed
He lay in a manger this heavenly stranger
The precious Lord Jesus the wonderful child¹²⁰

As Harris’ quote above indicates, gospel’s notion of Jesus as precious, its recovery of the matrilineal, and its foregrounding Christmas led to the construction of Jesus as more a mother’s child than the mighty prophetic figure the spirituals seemed to depict.¹²¹ Epitomizing this sentiment, the most popular Christmas song from the mid-twentieth century gospel repertoire, “Jesus What a Wonderful Child,” which praised Jesus as “so lowly, meek and mild,”¹²² one of innumerable gospel songs rooted in Matthew 11:28-29: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” Prophet-oriented intellectuals have argued that the notion of Jesus as a “meek and mild” mother’s son—as “Mary’s baby” and the “meek and humble lamb,” in two other descriptions common in gospel—renders him politically

¹¹⁹ Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues*, 238.

¹²⁰ “One Place Herod’s Soldiers Did Not Look: A Dialogue.” *Baltimore Afro-American*, December 23, 1939 (reprinted from 1929): 4.

¹²¹ Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 43, 50.

¹²² The original recording is Angelic Gospel Singers, “Glory to the New Born King,” on Various Artists, *Nashboro Nativity: A Christmas Gospel Collection Vol.1*.

innocuous at best and pathological at worst.¹²³ Therefore, it is more emancipatory to conceive of Jesus as a powerful liberator, a “man” worthy of Moses’ prophetic vocation.

These claims seemed corroborated by the dearth of Christmas spirituals. In his aforementioned 1926 discussion of the lack of Christmas-themed spirituals, James Weldon Johnson observed that the spirituals tend to invoke “Massa Jesus” or “King Jesus,” “Jesus as God, as almighty, all-powerful to help.” By contrast, the few Christmas spirituals concerning Jesus’ birth, such as “Mary Had a Baby,” “Rise Up Shepherd and Follow,” “Behold That Star,” and “Go Tell It on the Mountain,” seemed to lack the pathos and political heft of most spirituals. Noting that he did not remember any Christmas spirituals from his youth in Georgia in the 1870s and 1880s, and that they only appear in collections after 1900, Johnson suggested that they might have originated well after Emancipation.¹²⁴ There was no discussion of Christmas in Johnson’s own 1927 collection of poems rendered in the sermonic style of the “old-time Negro preacher,” *God’s Trombones*, which followed most accounts of the spirituals in its orientation toward the Old Testament and Jesus’ crucifixion.¹²⁵ Mulling the lack of Christmas-themed spirituals, the December 28, 1929 edition of the *Baltimore Afro-American* wondered, “Where are our Christmas Carols?”¹²⁶

But as Zora Neale Hurston pointed out later in the New Negro era, the New Negroes’ emphasis on the spirituals as sorrow songs abstracted them from the often ecstatic circular

¹²³ See especially Roberta Martin Singers, “Do You Know Him”; Sallie Martin and Cora Martin, “Do You Know Him”; James Cleveland, “Oh What A Time.” See Obery Hendricks’ critique of the image of the “meek and mild” Jesus in *The Politics of Jesus* (find page).

¹²⁴ James Weldon Johnson, Preface to the Second Book, *The Books of American Negro Spirituals*, (find page).

¹²⁵ James Weldon Johnson, *God’s Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse*, in *Complete Poems* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 2-44:6.

¹²⁶ Llewellyn Wilson, “Concords and Discords: Where are Our Christmas Carols? The Negro Achievement Hour,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Dec. 28, 1929, p.14.

dances (ring shouts) in which they were originally performed.¹²⁷ Slaves did perform spirituals at Christmas.¹²⁸ But Frederick Douglass's autobiographies featured a contrast between, on one hand, his critique of how masters used Christmas to compel slaves to over-celebrate in order to sap their pent up aggression and show them they were unfit for the responsibilities of freedom; and on the other hand, his descriptions of the authentic power of the mournfulness of the spirituals.¹²⁹ Du Bois similarly found the vestiges of these Christmas celebrations he observed in the early twentieth century the antithesis of the cultured dignity he admired in the classicized spirituals.¹³⁰ Douglass's contrast, particularly as reflected in Du Bois' observations, correlated with Alain Locke's introduction to his seminal 1925 anthology *The New Negro*. Locke distinguished the stereotypically passive, Sambo-esque Old Negro from the poised New Negro, whose emergence the flowering of the spirituals as an acknowledged folk music exemplified.¹³¹ Douglass was such an influence on Locke's thought that in the early 1930s Locke worked on a never-finished "Douglass manuscript," explaining to the white Harlem Renaissance patron Charlotte Osgood Mason that "we need manly Negroes above all else, and F.D. did set a standard of manliness."¹³² The affinity between Douglass, Du Bois, and Locke suggests that the New Negroes did not develop a celebratory black Christmas aesthetic because, since black

¹²⁷ Zora Neale Hurston, "Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals," in Nathan Irvin Huggins, ed., *Voices from the Harlem Renaissance* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 344-347. For ring shouts, see Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3-98; Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 245-250.

¹²⁸ Cite.

¹²⁹ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, ed. Ira Dworkin (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), pp.74-75; Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, ed. Brent Hayes Edwards (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2005), 191-194, 83-86.

¹³⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Negro American Family," *W.E.B. Du Bois on Sociology and the Black Community*, eds. Dan S. Green and Edwin D. Driver (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp.199-214: 204.

¹³¹ Alain Locke, "The New Negro," in Locke, ed., *The New Negro*, 3-16:3-5.

¹³² Leonard Harris and Charles Molesworth, *Alain L. Locke: The Biography of a Philosopher* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 268-269.

people were not yet free, such an aesthetic would be untimely and unmanly, just as it had been in slavery.

Thus, as with prophetic outreach, musical and sociological concerns dovetailed. Locke's eagerness to distinguish the assertive New Negro from the docile Old Negro aligned with Douglass and other nineteenth century black intellectuals' fight against the proslavery argument that blacks were childlike and therefore incapable of achieving manhood and womanhood, a contention that endured in the myriad Jim Crow era cultural products associating black children with pathological evil.¹³³ This led to a conflation of oppositionality and might with manliness that reflected the concerns of scholars such as Du Bois and E. Franklin Frazier that women's predominance in church pews undermined patriarchy in the home, imperiling black families' ability to cultivate manhood and womanhood in their children.¹³⁴ This conflation sustained the veneration of swashbuckling spirituals like "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho." At the same time, it scandalized gospel's often Mary-centric depictions of Christmas joy amid poverty and social struggle as affronts to both the slave past and the future prospects of the black family. Gospel's apparent extension of the interwar notion of white women as smothering, overprotective "moms" who emasculated their sons to black women would only serve to exacerbate the problem already ostensibly caused by overbearing black matriarchs.¹³⁵ Stumping for a Jesus compatible with respectable gender and family conventions as well as New Negro conceptions of race pride, Nannie Burroughs, founder of the Women's Convention of the National Baptist Convention, told

¹³³ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014), 23, 38-39; Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York and London: NYU Press, 2011).

¹³⁴ Savage, *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us*.

¹³⁵ Ruth Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White: Race and Sex in American Liberalism, 1930-1965* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2000), 3; Robin D.G. Kelley, "'We Are Not What We Seem': The Politics and Pleasures of Community," *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 35-53:37.

an audience in 1932 that the Jesus she “liked” was no “molly-coddle,” but rather a “He man” who “strutted His cave-man tactics in dealing with the moneychangers in the Temple,” yet also “wore good clothes, and was a gentleman who knew how to treat the ladies.”¹³⁶

A 1927 *Baltimore Afro-American* article, “Spirituals Prostituted,” evinced New Negroes’ concern with gospel’s portrayal of the Holy Family at Christmas. In language echoing Du Bois’ critique of gospel in *Souls*, the author, R.A. Adams, scoffed at a choir’s performance of the Christmas spiritual “Wasn’t It a Mighty Day,” “where they describe Jesus Christ as a baby getting his feet muddy, in the stable; in the flippy, irreverent repetition of ‘O, Lord’ and ‘Jesus Christ,’ and the careless use of heaven...we are selling our spiritual birthright for a taste of poor, tasteless, unnutritious material pottage.”¹³⁷ Adams found this performance “poor” due to its evocation of the Holy Family’s squalor and social disorganization in Bethlehem. Jesus “getting his feet muddy, in the stable” revealed the inability of Joseph to provide adequately for Mary and the newborn son, and evoked neglectful or haphazard parenting. Mary must give birth in a stable because there was no room in Bethlehem’s inn, showing how urban overcrowding pushes poor transients lacking sturdy patriarchs into the stables, or, in Du Bois’ modern terminology, the alleys. With its suggestions of Joseph’s impotency as a father, the performance seemed to taunt with Sojourner Truth, “Whar did your Christ come from? From God and a woman. Man had nothing to do with him.”¹³⁸

Adams concluded by metaphorically equating gospel to the anonymous biracial protagonist of James Weldon Johnson’s novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912/1927). At the end of the novel, the protagonist ruefully analogizes his choice to abandon

¹³⁶ “Jesus Was No Molly-Coddle, Nannie Burroughs Tells Forum,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 16, 1932, p.1.

¹³⁷ R.A. Adams, “Spirituals Prostituted,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 17, 1927, p.16.

¹³⁸ Nell Irvin Painter, ed., *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 92.

the project of musically uplifting the spirituals and live as “an ordinary successful white man who has made a little money” to the Genesis story of Esau selling his birthright as the patriarch of the nation of Israel to his brother Jacob for pottage—an abandonment of fatherly responsibility.¹³⁹ Thus, the use of “prostituted” in Adams’ title conjured the Old Testament prophets’ use of tropes of the “whoredom” of the “daughters of Zion” to symbolize Israel’s forsaking the patriarchs’ covenant with God.¹⁴⁰ The title thereby sounded the alarm that gospel performances of spirituals posed as much a threat to the spirituals’ moral authority as did jazz and the blues, the sirens of the gale of prostitution eroding the God-fearing Negro home.¹⁴¹ To further delegitimize the performance, Adams’ critique necessitated avoiding reference to the Gospel of Luke’s *Magnificat*, the hymn of the poor that Mary sings to celebrate her divine pregnancy. This hymn contextualizes her rejoicing at God’s blessing her in her “low estate” (Luke 1:48) within the tradition of Hebrew women signing songs of liberation, in particular the Song of Hannah, which celebrates Samuel’s birth, and the Song of Miriam (“Mary” is a variant of “Miriam”).

To announce the birth of Jesus without evoking the troubling sociological implications of the Nativity, black sacred musicians dedicated to racial uplift could focus on Advent, the season

¹³⁹ James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, Second Edition, eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 803-883:883.

¹⁴⁰ For examples from the Hebrew prophets, see Isaiah 3:16-4:4; Jeremiah 2:20, 4:30-31; Ezekiel 16; Hosea 1:2. For analysis see Carleen R. Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets: A Dialogic Theology of the Book of Lamentations* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007); and Mark J. Boda, Carol J. Dempsey, and LeAnn Snow Fisher, eds., *Daughter Zion: Her Portrait, Her Response* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012).

¹⁴¹ For the threat posed to the spirituals by jazz and the blues, see William G. Nunn, “Has the Negro Church Been Weighed In the Balance and Found Wanting?” *Pittsburgh Courier*, Oct. 2, 1926, p.9. For jazz and the blues as signifiers of prostitution in Chicago, see William Howland Kenney, *Chicago Jazz: A Cultural History, 1904-1930* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 22-24; and Chad Heap, *Slumming: Racial and Sexual Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2010). For the early twentieth century discourse on prostitution in black Chicago, see Kevin Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York and Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 1997).

preceding Christmas in the Christian calendar. In 1925, Paramount Records issued J. Wesley Jones' Metropolitan Community Choristers' first and only recording, the Advent hymn setting of Psalms 24:7 "Lift Up Your Heads, O Ye Gates," which proclaims the coming of the "King of glory," "the Lord strong and mighty."¹⁴² The Choristers' moving from Advent to the mighty King Jesus while avoiding the Nativity anticipated the narrative arc of *O, Sing a New Song*. The pageant, in which the Choristers would play the Fisk Jubilee Singers, jumped directly from "Lincoln and emancipation" to "Booker T. Washington and Tuskegee" in order to evade reckoning with the tumultuousness and impermanence of what Abraham Lincoln called the "new birth of freedom" in the Civil War.¹⁴³

But rather than representing social disorganization, gospel's recasting Jesus the adult regent as an infant pauper signified Jesus' natal solidarity with the families of what Du Bois described as the "wretched of my race." This solidarity undermined associations of the Nativity with the scion of the privileged nuclear family. In a 1938 edition of the *Negro Journal of Religion*, with his pastor J.C. Austin now serving as a contributing editor, Thomas Dorsey depicted the Nativity as the joyous occasion for the first gospel song before reminding readers that "While the child rejoices in the palace, another child is crying in the cabin or hut. While the king feasts and makes merry in the castle the poor and destitute are hungry in the streets."¹⁴⁴

The emphasis on the Nativity increased focus on the relationship between birth and death, contributing to a shortened sense of time. In his discussion of Christmas, Dorsey, likely with his six-years-deceased wife and son among those in mind, asked readers to "not forget those that

¹⁴² Prof. J. Wesley Jones and the Metropolitan Community Choristers, "Lift Up Your Heads" (Paramount 12274), 1925.

¹⁴³ Abraham Lincoln, "The Gettysburg Address," in Michael P. Johnson, ed., *Abraham Lincoln, Slavery, and the Civil War: Selected Writings and Speeches* (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's 2011 [2001]), 161.

¹⁴⁴ Thomas A. Dorsey, "A Christmas Message," *Negro Journal of Religion*, Vol. 4, No. 11, December 1938, p. 14. Schomburg

walked and talked with us last Christmas; they may be gone this Christmas... It may not just be a mother, it may be a father, a sister, a brother, a loved one or a friend.”¹⁴⁵ Collapsing the images of the birth of Jesus and the death of loved ones in a manner similar to his friend and fellow Georgian Rev. J.M. Gates’ popular recorded sermon “Death May Be Your Santa Claus,” Dorsey expanded the seemingly individualistic faith commitment of “Precious Lord” into a social teaching: “If these are gone on, let us remember there is still some one here whom we can make happy by spreading a little cheer here and there.”¹⁴⁶ So, he concludes in verse, “Throw away your sorrows / Be happy while you may / We need not wish for tomorrow / The Christ is here today.”¹⁴⁷

Analyzing Dorsey’s use of “today” in the context of one of his most famous compositions, the previous year’s “Peace in the Valley,” reveals the multileveled theological shift at work here. In the Bible, after the Hebrews escape from Egypt, sojourn in the Wilderness for forty years, and approach the Promised Land populated by other peoples, God promises the defeat of “those nations before thee by little and little: thou mayest not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase upon thee” (Deuteronomy 7:22). Thus, the threat of the beasts compels God and the Hebrews to adopt a gradualist approach to entering the Promised Land that echoed the gradualism of the Hebrews’ forty year cultivation for nationhood in the Wilderness. Relatedly, since slavery, African Americans had identified with Jesus’ indication in the Gospels that his disciples should, like him, be even more dispossessed than animals, perhaps reflecting their particular blend of the Old and New Testaments.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Dorsey, “A Christmas Message.”

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ For antebellum blacks’ identification with Matthew 8:18-22 and Luke 9:57-62, see Kale J to Lewis Tappan, in Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony*, 30; Henry Bibb to Albert G. Sibley, in Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony*, 52-

However, in “Peace in the Valley,” Dorsey transformed this identification with Jesus’ dispossession into a clarion of redemption. Drawing from a favored Bible chapter in Afro-Christian messianism, he filtered Isaiah 11:6 through the visions of beasts in the Books of Daniel and Revelations to convey the revolutionary implications of the lowly Christ-as-child:

Well, the bear will be gentle, and the wolf will be tame
And the lion shall lay down by the lamb
And the beasts from the wild shall be led by a Child
And I’ll be changed, changed from this creature that I am.¹⁴⁹

Instead of such lack compelling an assessment of the might of the people of God against that of animal predators or rival nations, the lowliness of the messianic child overturned conventional notions of might—suggesting how different was the divine kingship from the ways of the world. Dorsey recalled that he wrote the song as Hitler became aggressive in the 1930s to suggest an alternate path to the direction of the world at that time (one wonder what influence the West’s allowing and profiting from Italy’s conquest of Ethiopia might have had on this line of thinking).¹⁵⁰ The child thereby dispensed with the need for prophetic gradualism and offered redemption “today,” on “the day of his coming” (Malachi 3:2). Like Mary’s *Magnificat*, Dorsey’s song adapted passages from the Old Testament. Indeed, “Wasn’t It A Might Day” hinted at Jesus’ pacifying the wild beasts, since in the stable, “the beasts, they keep-a him warm.”¹⁵¹ Dorsey’s pastor J.C. Austin echoed Dorsey by using Jesus’ Parable of the Talents to proclaim lowliness as an ideal organizing principle for Pilgrim, a faith community that included

54:53; Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 352; and “Hard Trials,” in *Religious Folk-Songs of the Negro*, ed. R. Nathaniel Dett (Hampton, VA: Hampton Institute Press, 1927), 222.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas A. Dorsey, “There’ll Be Peace in the Valley for Me,” 1937. “Beasts” is often replaced with “host.” Here Dorsey formulates what historian of slavery David Brion Davis describes as a “Christian messianism that confidently awaited a total transformation of human nature, the restoration of Adamic innocence and Edenic peace.” See Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation*, 90.

¹⁵⁰ Kemp, *Anointed to Sing the Gospel*.

¹⁵¹ Mary Lord, *An American Christmas: Shaker Tunes, Spirituals, Shape-Note Hymns, and Folk Songs Arranged for Guitar by Mary Lord* (Pacific, MO: Mel Bay Publications, 2003), 85.

worshippers from a range of social strata: “Where shall we find a test of faithfulness that shall fit us—a test that will be applicable to high and low, rich and poor, great and small? Jesus gives us the answer, ‘He that is faithful in a very little is faithful in much...’”¹⁵² Thus, per Martin Buber’s conception of the reason for prophetic social justice, Pilgrim’s prophetic outreach would have to be rethought along gospel lines.

Soon after Dorsey left Ebenezer for Pilgrim late in 1932, a performance of the Ebenezer Gospel Chorus, now solely directed by Theodore Frye, demonstrated how gospel redeployed the spirituals tradition to manifest the socio-spiritual significance of Christmas.¹⁵³ At Ebenezer’s Christmas 1932 service, Frye directed a quartet of four women from the Chorus in a nine and a half minute performance of the spiritual “My Lord’s Done Been Here, and Blessed My Soul and Gone.”¹⁵⁴ The refrain of this spiritual portrays the entire span of Jesus’ time on earth in one line; thus, the performance considers Jesus’ birth, death, resurrection, and ascension in relation to Christmas. The performance thereby countered James Weldon Johnson’s assertion that the Christianity taught by slaveowners “destroyed in the minds of the slaves any idea of connection between the birth of Christ and his life and death,” a belief that further legitimated the New Negroes’ devaluation of Christmas in their recovery of black tradition.¹⁵⁵ But it resonated with the recollection of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, white colonel of a colored Union regiment in the Civil War, that among his troops, the spiritual “Lord, Remember Me,” a rumination on the

¹⁵² J.C. Austin, “Faithfulness has its Reward,” *Pilgrim Baptist Church Achievement Celebration*, 1939. Charles L. Blockson Afro-American History Collection, Temple University Libraries. See also Luke 16:10 and Matthew 25.

¹⁵³ Horace Clarence Boyer, *How Sweet the Sound: The Golden Age of Gospel* (Washington, D.C.: Elliott and Clark Publishing, 1995), 64-65.

¹⁵⁴ Editorial, *Reminder*, January 1, 1933. Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church Archives [Box 3, Folder 38], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

¹⁵⁵ James Weldon Johnson, Preface to the Second Edition, *The Books of American Negro Spirituals*, 15.

deaths of Jesus, one's father, and oneself, was "a favorite about Christmas time, when meditations on 'de rollin' year' were frequent."¹⁵⁶

Recalling the consciousness of mother and son invoked by Ebenezer's recently-departed chorus co-director in "Precious Lord" a few months earlier, the second of the brief verses of "My Lord's Done Been Here" stated:

When I get up in Heaven
And a my work is done,
Going to sit down by Sister Mary,
And chatter with the darling Son.¹⁵⁷

Unlike the prominent spirituals that described Jesus as a mighty "Massa" or "King" who leads, this relatively obscure spiritual portrayed Jesus as Mary's—not only God the Father's—"darling Son" whom one chats with, foregrounding the many gospel songs that would employ variations of this lyric in the mid-twentieth century.¹⁵⁸ At the same time, in accordance with the summation of Jesus' time on earth suggested by the song's title, it collapsed a "darling" image of Jesus with that of a crucified, risen, and ascended Jesus. Keeping in mind that it was Frye who told Dorsey to change his song title from "Blessed Lord" to "Precious Lord" suggests the relevance of the "darling Son" lyric to Frye's theological vision.

Sung at Christmas, this obscure spiritual moved the celebration of the mother-child bond from an association with 'Old Negroism' to an association with freedom. The song's third verse enabled the Ebenezer quartet to connect the image of Mary and the baby Jesus to a sense of

¹⁵⁶ Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1984 [1869]), 200-201.

¹⁵⁷ Frederick J. Work, ed., *Folk Songs of the American Negro, Number One* (Nashville: Work Bros. and Hart Co., 1907), 60; John Wesley Work, ed. *American Negro Songs: 230 Folk Songs and Spirituals, Religious and Secular* (USA: Dover Press, 1998 [1940]), 132.

¹⁵⁸ For Chicago examples, see the Violinaires, "Joy in the Beulah Land," *Get Right with God: Hot Gospel*; and The Southern Tornadoes, "Another Building," *On the Battlefield...Great Gospel Quartets*; for nationwide, see the Five Blind Boys of Alabama, "Oh Lord, Stand by Me"; CBS Trumpeteers, "Milky White Way," *I Heard the Angels Singing: Electrifying Black Gospel on the Nashboro Label, 1951-1983* (etc)

oppositonality based on the faith of the disadvantaged believers, rather than on the might of their messiah:

You may be a white man,
White as the drifting snow,
If your soul ain't been converted,
To Hell you're sure to go.¹⁵⁹

This performance suggests the importance of studying how spirituals functioned in black sacred spaces. Spirituals with lyrics such as these rarely made it from the songbook page to the secular concert stage, if they were included in Negro folksong collections at all. Music susceptible to being labeled as sardonic, racially antagonistic born again fundamentalism suited neither the liberal Protestantism of many New Negroes, nor the seemingly docile religion portrayed by what rock critic Robert Christgau called the “genteel Hollywood gospel chorus” appearing in films such as *The Green Pastures*, nor the convivial mood of the middle-class piano parlor.¹⁶⁰

At Ebenezer, this verse would have been emotionally connected to the preceding one concerning Mary and the darling Son by the rumor that medical Jim Crow had snuffed out the lives of the former chorus director’s wife and newborn son. The verse itself skewered Euro-Christian theology’s equation of whiteness with pure beauty and blackness with ugly evil. Anticipating Frantz Fanon’s dictum on colonialism’s “epidermalization” of economic hierarchy, “You are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich,”¹⁶¹ another version of

¹⁵⁹ Frederick J. Work, ed., *Folk Songs of the American Negro, Number One*, 60.

¹⁶⁰ Robert Christgau, “Stevie Wonder is a Masterpiece,” *Village Voice*, Nov. 8, 1976 <http://www.robertchristgau.com/xg/rock/wonder-76.php>, accessed 1/25/2015. Here Christgau discusses the chorus of multi-tracked Stevie Wonder vocals that opens “Love’s In Need of Love Today,” the first song on *Songs in the Key of Life*. For the New Negroes’ liberal Protestantism, see Savage, *Your Spirit Walks beside Us*; Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion*, 239; and Jon Michael Spencer, “The Black Church and the Harlem Renaissance,” *African American Review*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Autumn 1996), pp. 453-460.

¹⁶¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 5; for “epidermalization” see Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York, Grove Press, Inc., 1967), 13.

the song published by genteel choir director Hall Johnson replaced the first “white” with “rich,”¹⁶² suggesting a link between theological colorism and white economic power. Espousing the long-held African American belief that white supremacy made for bad Christianity, the spiritual conveyed that in the next world, the racially and economically subordinated believers would triumph over the unconverted souls of their earthly masters.

That said, Ebenezer’s newsletter, the *Reminder*, explained that this spiritual as performed at Christmas instructed believers on how to conduct themselves on earth in the present, for “our great and beloved pastor can take Chicago, if only we were to cooperate and hear God’s call.”¹⁶³ The newsletter thereby used the “darling Son” imagery to fight to claim Chicago for the divine kingship—suggestive of how the proliferation of black religious space would challenge the municipal order—yet in a manner that empowered Ebenezer’s exclusively male ministry. Thus, in a manner similar to how the friction between Smith-Hamilton and Dorsey manifested in their contrasting approaches to the Song of Miriam, and reflecting some of the implications of the increasing tendency to define women as mothers in the 1930s, gospel’s rehabilitation of Mary’s motherhood could reinforce patriarchy in the pulpit, even while undermining prophetic conceptions of manliness-made freedom.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² The third verse of prominent 1930s spiritual arranger and choir director Hall Johnson’s version begins with “You may be a rich man, white as de driftin’ snow.” See Hall Johnson, *The Hall Johnson Collection: Over 50 Classic Favorites for Voice and Piano* (New York: Carl Fischer, LLC, 2003), 105.

¹⁶³ Editorial, *Reminder*.

¹⁶⁴ On the interpretation of women as mothers in the 1930s, see Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White*. My thinking here is informed by Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 79-80; as well as by the ways that notions of motherhood figure in tensions between womanism and feminism in Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, “Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English (1985),” and Cheryl J. Sanders, Katie G. Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, M. Shawn Copeland, bell hooks, and Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, “Roundtable Discussion: Christian Ethics and Theology in Womanist Perspective (1989),” in *The Womanist Reader*, ed. Layli Phillips (New York and London: Routledge, 2006).

Gaining steam, the *Reminder* declared that "The idea of world-wide brotherhood was born into this world with Jesus Christ. His birth brings to the world the true christian civilization thunders against all wrong and break down every stronghold of oppression of human endeavor."¹⁶⁵ Chicago's black Christians were particularly well poised to spread this good news, for "As we all know the criterion of the gospel of Jesus Christ was to pass the news to others. We as Christians and citizens of one of the largest cities in the mid-west can find numerous ways to pass this on to our fellow-man."¹⁶⁶ Despite being ensconced in a redlined Black Belt submerged in the Depression, through the quartet's Christmas performance, Ebenezer Baptist Church harnessed the spirituals to imagine the birth of the "darling Son" as not merely an extension of the new birth of freedom, as *O, Sing A New Song* aspired to be, but rather as a call to the spirit of abolition galvanizing the faithful to action. This was not freedom as transient mobility, as prevailed in the blues, in gospel songs sung by blues artists, and even in the use of the word "gospel" in the spirituals.¹⁶⁷ Chicago gospel was not to leave the city behind as it lit out for new territories. Rather, while staying rooted in Bronzeville and claiming Chicago for Christ, it presented a vision of directly engaging the "stronghold of oppression" with the spirit.

The most renowned group to emerge from Ebenezer's gospel ferment, the Roberta Martin Singers, were central to ushering in the post-World War II "Golden Age of Gospel," and with it, the proliferation of gospel's use of motherhood to reconceive black faith without the pathos of the progressive march from slavery. Born in 1907 in Helena, Arkansas, Roberta Martin migrated to Chicago with her family when she was 10. In the early 1930s, she worked with Thomas

¹⁶⁵ Editorial, *Reminder*.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Leroi Jones, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York, London, Toronto, and Sydney: Harper Perennial, 2002 [1963]), 61; Jon M. Giggie, *After Redemption: Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta, 1875-1915* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 53-57; Johnson and Johnson, *The Books of American Negro Spirituals*, 126, 151.

Dorsey and Theodore Frye as an instructor and pianist for the gospel and junior choruses at Ebenezer Baptist Church; she may have played the accompaniment for the Frye women's quartet that sang "My Lord Done Been Here" at Ebenezer on Christmas 1932 shortly after Dorsey left for Pilgrim. She would perform similar roles at other churches, including Pilgrim and eventually her home church, Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church, her station when she died in 1969. In 1933, she and Frye organized the Martin-Frye Quartette out of some of the boys in Ebenezer's junior choir, all of whom were between ten and fourteen years old: Robert Anderson, Willie Webb, and James Lawrence, as well as two who had just arrived at Ebenezer from Metropolitan Community Church, Norsalus McKissick and Eugene Smith. In 1935 they became the Roberta Martin Singers. Beginning with Bessie Folk in 1939, Martin added women such as Delois Barrett, Myrtle Scott, Myrtle Jackson, Gloria Griffin, and "Little" Lucy Smith, who was Martin's stepdaughter and the granddaughter of Elder Lucy Smith of All Nations Pentecostal Church, another early center for gospel music.¹⁶⁸

Martin was something of a synthesis of Thomas Dorsey and Mabel Smith-Hamilton's "Directress," and therefore, of the debate over institutionalization between Martin Buber and Jacob Taubes. She studied classical piano at Wendell Phillips High School and at Northwestern University, and this background often found its way into the Roberta Martin Singers' music. Circa 1950 recordings such as "Sealed Till the Day of Redemption," "I Know the Lord Will Make A Way," and the Bessie Folk version of their theme song "Only A Look" best demonstrate the distinctive features of the Roberta Martin Singers' legendary sound: the expansive, mixed-gender tonal palette, the lush harmonizing that brushed the boundaries of ensemble singing by allowing each singer to express themselves individually, the slightly behind-the-beat phrasing,

¹⁶⁸ Pearl Williams-Jones, "Roberta Martin: Spirit of an Era," in Reagon, ed., *We'll Understand It Better By and By*, 255.

the saturnine tempos, the lack of a bass voice. This combination raised a sound that, in the words of a former member, “troubled the mind with thought about God,”¹⁶⁹ a sound so desperate for the solace of Jesus’ love it intimated that Jim Crow’s strange veil of pastoral tranquility, eerie, and terror fell across Chicago as well.¹⁷⁰ Yet by overturning the prophetic understanding of the relationship of the pathos of black sacred music to the empirical study of the sociology of the black family, the Roberta Martin Singers, in the Ebenezer tradition, reconstructed the city as a site of redemption rather than despair.

In 1947, the Roberta Martin Singers made their first recording, “Precious Memories,” with Norsalus McKissick singing lead. Their recording drew from the version of the song Roberta Martin, in collaboration with Georgia Jones, wrote and published in 1939. The original “Precious Memories,” published in 1925 by white songwriter J.B.F. Wright, was a cornerstone in the repertory of Southern gospel (i.e., white gospel). The first and second verses of the original went as follows:

Precious memories, unseen angels, Sent from somewhere to my soul
How they linger, ever near me, And the sacred past unfold.
Precious memories, how they linger, How they ever flood my soul
In the stillness of the midnight, Precious, sacred scenes unfold.

Precious father, loving mother
Fly across the lonely years
And old home scenes of my childhood

¹⁶⁹ “Conversations: Roberta Martin Singers Roundtable,” ed. Pearl Williams-Jones and Bernice Johnson Reagon, in Reagon, ed., *We’ll Understand It Better By and By*, 305.

¹⁷⁰ Here I am thinking principally of “Strange Fruit,” particularly the couplet “pastoral scenes of the gallant South / the bulging eyes with the twisted mouth”: see Billie Holiday, “Strange Fruit,” *Lady Day: The Best of Billie Holiday*; for how the juxtaposition of terror and the pastoral underpinned Jim Crow, see Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006); and Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1945* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998). I am thinking of this couplet in relation to Du Bois’ introducing double-consciousness as a “peculiar sensation,” and fugitive slave Hannah Crafts’ anticipation of sorts of Du Bois in her antebellum novelized account of slavery: “It must be strange to live in a world of civilization and, elegance, and refinement, and yet know nothing about either, yet that is the way with multitudes and none more than the slaves.” See Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 3, and Hannah Crafts, *The Bondwoman’s Narrative: A Novel*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York and Boston: Warner Books, 2003), 206-207, respectively.

In fond memory appears.¹⁷¹

The yearning for the “old home scenes of my childhood” echoed the language and sentiment of antebellum Stephen Foster blackface minstrel standards such as “Old Folks at Home,” “My Old Kentucky Home,” and “Oh! Susanna.” It is important to remember that in “Of the Sorrow Songs,” Du Bois indicated that Foster’s compositions “Old Folks at Home” (“Swanee River”) and “Old Black Joe” did not represent the “debasements” of the “Negro ‘minstrel’ songs”—which he equated with “the ‘gospel’ hymns” and “‘coon’ songs”—but rather were a facet of the development of a legitimate, racially pluralist art in America based on Negro themes.¹⁷² Du Bois therefore probably found truth in Foster’s portrayal of transient black men longing for “home,” a theme shared by Du Bois’ writings on the spirituals.¹⁷³

Formulating a theory of the function of Southern nostalgia in his 1932 study *The Negro Family in Chicago*, black University of Chicago-trained sociologist E. Franklin Frazier echoed Du Bois’ musicological focus on movement and urbanization, arguing that the remembrance of the accomplishments of past members of one’s family was integral to blacks’ ability to adjust to life in the Northern metropolis. “[I]n the areas relatively free from family disorganization,” Frazier wrote, “Negro life was full of memories and sometimes bound to the past by old traditions.”¹⁷⁴ But for many struggling migrants, “faded memories of relatives and life in the South were all that remained of a shattered social life,” a condition epitomized by an “unmarried

¹⁷¹ J.B.F. Wright, “Precious Memories,” in Rev. Dr. Delores Carpenter and Rev. Nolan E. Williams, Jr., eds., *African American Heritage Hymnal: 575 Hymns, Spirituals, and Gospel Songs* (Chicago GIA Publications, 2001), 829.

¹⁷² Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ___; Du Bois repeated the claim a decade later: see W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Negro in Literature and Art,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 49, *The Negro’s Progress in Fifty Years* (Sep., 1913), pp. 233-237: 233-234.

¹⁷³ For Stephen Foster’s sentimental depictions of black families, and these depictions capacity to stimulate both antislavery and proslavery sentiment, see Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 187-190.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

mother” who, when asked about her family heritage, replied, ““I ain’t got no history.””¹⁷⁵

Seemingly supporting Frazier’s understanding of the relationship between nostalgia and urban disorganization, in the wake of the Great Migration Stephen Foster’s compositions lingered in the stage repertoires of many vaudevillian black entertainers, often lumped together with spirituals and ragtime-era hits under wistful Old South monikers such as “plantation melodies.”¹⁷⁶ Jazz moderns such as Ethel Waters and Louis Armstrong also partook of this Great Migration apostasy, affectively depicting migrant pathos in Dixie reveries like “I’m Coming Virginia” (1926) and “When It’s Sleepytime Down South” (1931).¹⁷⁷

Contra Du Bois and Frazier, African Americans had been harnessing gospel to critique Stephen Foster-esque sentimentalism since before the Great Migration. In 1909, blacks in Mississippi sang:

The time is comin’ and it won’t be long
you’ll get up some morning and you’ll find me gone.
So treat me right and jolly me along
If you want this nigger to sing the old home song.¹⁷⁸

Many gospel songs, most canonically Birmingham, Alabama gospel legend Dorothy Love Coates’ “Get Away Jordan,” used the first couplet, which derived from the Negro spirituals’ use of “gospel” as an adjective to describe a transport bound for freedom.¹⁷⁹ The 1909 iteration of the lyric threatened migration if singing the “old home song” continued to be a repression of the hardships of Jim Crow, rather than a reflection of actual contentment.

¹⁷⁵ Frazier, *The Negro Family in Chicago*, 223-224.

¹⁷⁶ Cite examples

¹⁷⁷ Charles Hiroshi Garrett argues that for Louis Armstrong, who cut his most revolutionary jazz sides in Chicago in the mid-1920s, the turn to performing explicitly nostalgic ditties such as “When It’s Sleepytime Down South” in the early 1930s signaled his increasing distance from the vanguard developments in black Chicago music, as represented by figures such as Thomas Dorsey: see Garrett, *Struggling to Define A Nation: American Music and the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 114-115.

¹⁷⁸ E.C. Perrow, “Songs and Rhymes of the South,” *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 28, No. 108 (Apr.-Jun., 1915), pp.129-190: 189.

¹⁷⁹ Johnson and Johnson, eds., *The Books of American Negro Spirituals*, 126, 151; Giggie, *After Redemption*, 53-57.

Elaborating this line of gospel thought, Roberta Martin's version of "Precious Memories," published in 1939, the same year as Frazier's expansive follow-up study, *The Negro Family in the United States*, eliminated direct references to "past" and parents in order to exalt the good news of Christ's coming. The Roberta Martin Singers used the chorus and the first verse in their 1947 recording:

Precious memories, how they linger, how they ever flood my soul
In the stillness of the midnight, sacred secrets he'll unfold

Precious memories, how I prize them, as the weary years unfold
Jesus whispers, I'll be with you, what a comfort to my soul¹⁸⁰

The lyrical alterations in Martin's version of the song were relevant to the adoptive role Martin sometimes played for her singers. "She was more or less my mother," Norsalus McKissick, the soloist on the recording, recalling many years later. "My mother died when I was very young, and Miss Martin took me under her wing."¹⁸¹ McKissick was ten when in 1933 Martin first saw him "sitting on a curb, singing 'Stormy Weather'".¹⁸²

...Life is bare, gloom and mis'ry everywhere,
Stormy weather...

All I do is pray the Lord above will let me walk in the sun once more
Can't go on, all I had in life is gone
Stormy weather...¹⁸³

Martin's alteration of the original lyrics of "Precious Memories" did not suggest, say, that McKissick should forget his deceased mother. Rather, it suggested that mining the aesthetic value of longing for her sentimentally would not result in redemptive music, as Du Bois'

¹⁸⁰ Roberta Martin Singers, "Precious Memories," 1947.

¹⁸¹ "Conversations: Roberta Martin Singers Roundtable," ed. Pearl Williams-Jones and Bernice Johnson Reagon, 298.

¹⁸² McKissick quoted in Marovich, *A City Called Heaven*, 110.

¹⁸³ Cite.

appreciation of Stephen Foster and use of the spiritual “I Hope My Mother Will Be There” indicated.

The 1947 recording reinforces this as well by concealing pathos from the listener with its blend of plaintiveness and pleasantness. Martin’s lilting piano introduction begins by gesturing toward the first five notes of the theme of Juventino Rosas’ famous waltz “Over the Waves.” But as she settles into a more typical gospel accompaniment, she withdraws from waltz pleasantries, a withdrawal underscored by the tempo-staggering low note she hits just before the singing begins. The stagger presages the eerie of the ensuing commingling of Martin’s bright accompaniment and the morose drone of the ensemble voices. The combination has an affinity with two other evocations of the unsettling strangeness of the African American predicament: Duke Ellington’s 1930 “Mood Indigo,” and 1996’s “Motherless Child” by Ghostface Killah of the Wu-Tang Clan. But unlike Barney Bigard’s piercing Storyville clarinet solo on “Mood Indigo,” here McKissick’s smoothbore vocal, nestled in between the mock waltz and the morose, delivers two couplets with little drama or melisma, rarely straying far from the compact notated melody. And unlike Ghostface’s dense Staten Island lyricism on “Motherless Child,” which uses the spiritual to frame a tragic tale of inner-city gun violence, the lyrics McKissick sings portray a spiritual state impressionistically, revealing little about the content of the memories.

The opacity of Martin’s approach to family heritage refused the “hypervisibility”¹⁸⁴ of the representations of black longing for linear historical and familial roots so valued by Foster, Du Bois, and Frazier.¹⁸⁵ Martin’s juxtaposition of the opaque “precious memories” flooding the soul

¹⁸⁴ For a critique of this “hypervisibility” see Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 36; see also Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 37.

¹⁸⁵ My use of opacity here differs substantially from Charles Long’s naming the academic Black Theology of James Cone an “opaque” theology; however, my analysis concurs with Long’s statement that “the opaque ones deny the authority of the white world to define their reality, and deny the methodological and philosophical meaning of

in the present, and the “sacred secrets” to be revealed in the future, derived from the two-step process of revelation in the Gospel of John. First, “the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit...(shall) bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have told unto you” (John 14:26). Then, “when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth...and he will show you things to come” (John 16:13).¹⁸⁶ A lyric from the Roberta Martin version unrecorded by her group in 1947, but often featured in subsequent recordings by other acts, further emphasized the Jesus orientation of the song: “in sad hours, when I’m lonely / the truth of Jesus’ love is told.”¹⁸⁷ The most famous version of the song, the slow, smoldering 1972 live duet between Aretha Franklin (whose mother died when Franklin was 10, and who became an “unmarried mother” at 14) and one of her mentors, Roberta Martin protégé and Pilgrim junior chorus alum James Cleveland, used this lyric in place of “Precious memories, how I prize them / as the weary years unfold.”¹⁸⁸

Martin’s opacity stemmed from her portraying the apocalyptic form of memory instead of linear memory. Here “apocalyptic” connotes knowledge of redemption through Jesus disclosed to believers in seemingly obscured and esoteric terms, rather than being proclaimed in literal

transparency as a metaphor for a theory of knowledge.” See Charles H. Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group, Publishers, 1986), 207.

¹⁸⁶ For a juxtaposition of John 14:26 and John 16:12-14 in an analysis of the use of two-step apocalyptic revelation in the Gospel of John, see Catrin H. Williams, “Unveiling Revelation: The Spirit-Paraclete and Apocalyptic Disclosure in the Gospel of John,” in Catrin H. Williams and Christopher Rowland, eds., *John’s Gospel and Intimations of Apocalyptic* (London and New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), pp. 104-128. See also Rudolph Schnackenburg, *Present and Future: Modern Aspects of New Testament Theology* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 130.

¹⁸⁷ Roberta Martin and Georgia Jones, “Precious Memories,” in Carpenter and Williams, eds., *African American Heritage Hymnal*, 828. For black gospel versions with this lyric, see Aretha Franklin with Rev. James Cleveland, “Precious Memories,” *Amazing Grace: The Complete Recordings* (Atlantic R2 75627, 1999 [1972]); Morgan State University Singers (conducted by James Abbingtion), “Precious Memories,” *46 More Hidden Treasures from the African American Heritage Hymnal* (GIA Music B00K7E6PGM, 2005); the Five Blind Boys of Mississippi, “Precious Memories,” 1947-1954; the Southern Tornadoes, “Precious Memories,” *On the Battlefield*.

¹⁸⁸ Aretha Franklin with James Cleveland, “Precious Memories.”

terms by a prophet or gleaned through empirics or commonsense observation.¹⁸⁹ Martin's use of apocalyptic memory shows how gospel's depiction of the revelation of Jesus as redeemer to the oppressed diverged from the epistemology of race leaders who used empirical social science filtered through the biblical prophets to diagnose social disorganization. Additionally, it indicated that one could not lift, or, "with Truth...dwell above the Veil," as Du Bois put it, via the more humanistic methodologies of narrating the sweep of black history, or manifesting racial genius in the arts.¹⁹⁰ But a motherless child could drink in the strangeness and plunge deeper into the opacity, from lingering precious memories into the "dark" mystery of God, who dwelled beyond the "river," beyond rational comprehension.¹⁹¹

In this mystery, memory and mothering found new life above the world, for gospel's turn away from the "old home song" was a turn toward mothers. In "Get Away Jordan," the protagonist crosses the Jordan River to see her Lord and her mother. In Du Bois' harnessing of the spiritual "I Hope My Mother Will Be There," such a crossing happens only at death. However, in gospel, crossing Jordan marked one's conversion to Christ in one's lifetime as well, bringing death and its opaque nothingness, the nothingness in which one finds God, into the realm of being. This is evidenced by contrasting the black congregational hymn "Old Ship of Zion," an enduring staple of Afro-Protestantism probably originating around the turn of the twentieth century, with the ex-slave conversion accounts collected by Fisk University in 1929-

¹⁸⁹ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 245; Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 7.

¹⁹⁰ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 81.

¹⁹¹ Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 286-287; Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 76-82; Nicholas of Cusa, *On the Vision of God*, in *Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. H. Lawrence Bond (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), 6.20, 244. For the prominence of the "river" in black sacred music, see especially its use in the spiritual "Every Time I Feel the Spirit," a usage adapted in many gospel songs.

1930 and published as *God Struck Me Dead*, and then turning to the Roberta Martin Singers' version of "Old Ship of Zion." Here is the hymn:

'Tis the old ship of Zion,
'Tis the old ship of Zion,
'Tis the old ship of Zion,
Get on board, get on board.

It has landed many a thousand,
It has landed many a thousand,
It has landed many a thousand,
Get on board, get on board.
2 Ain't no danger in the water,
3 It was good for my dear mother,
4 It was good for my dear father,
5 It will take us all to heaven,¹⁹²

These lyrics seem to corroborate Du Bois' interpretation of "I Hope My Mother Will Be Here," both in their emphasis on the afterlife and their contextualizing reunification with one's mother in the collective black passage from slavery in Egypt to freedom in Zion.¹⁹³ Perhaps both Du Bois' essay and the hymn were part of a wider effort to enact a black spiritual unity to resist group oppression and point to the race's future deliverance from Jim Crow. However, in their conversion accounts,¹⁹⁴ the ex-slaves, many of whom describe themselves as "motherless" and "fatherless" before converting, use the "Old Ship of Zion"/"Get Away Jordan" motif to render their individual conversion experiences, with no attention to the collective: "I was afraid and said, 'Lord, what have I done?' The voice answered, 'Nothing, follow me.'...We came to Jordan River. ...I drew back from crossing the stream but the Lord said, 'Follow me.' I stepped into the

¹⁹² "Tis the Old Ship of Zion," http://www.hymnary.org/text/tis_the_old_ship_of_zion, accessed 5.9.2015.

¹⁹³ For the collective resonance of the congregational hymn, see Walter F. Pitts, *Old Ship of Zion: The Afro-Baptist Ritual in the African Diaspora* (New York: Oxford, 1993), esp. pp.23-24. For that of the slave spiritual the hymn is derived from, see James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), p. 51.

¹⁹⁴ For fuller analyses of these accounts, see Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 266-271; and Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 108-122.

stream and the water held me up. I looked at my feet and they were dry."¹⁹⁵ "[A] little white man appeared before me as plain as day and said, 'Follow me.'...I crossed Fountain Creek in the spirit and I walked on top of the water."¹⁹⁶ "A little man stood over a little distance from me and he said, 'Follow me.'"¹⁹⁷ "In my vision I saw...(people) walking around as if in pain and sorrow...I looked up and saw a man, un-like any I've seen before. He showed me a little path and said, 'Follow me.'...we walked on and climbed Zion's hill."¹⁹⁸

While there is not adequate space here to show in-depth how these conversion accounts pertain specifically to the experience of emancipation from chattel slavery, it should be noted that the accounts used language that reflected intimate familiarity with the Negro spirituals, but they did not use the spirituals' language to describe the *moment*, the experience, of conversion. Furthermore, aside from one of the most evangelical spirituals, the only songs quoted directly were white hymns. But these jar with the ex-slaves' own narrative voices, as well as with their descriptions of interactions with a transforming, yet nevertheless persisting white supremacy. This indicates that during their long post-emancipation lifetimes, the ex-slaves did not possess a music that synthesized how their conversion experiences related to their experiences as emancipated black people in a stubbornly anti-black world.¹⁹⁹

But in 1949, two years after the "Precious Memories" record, Norsalus McKissick sang the solo on the Roberta Martin Singers' recording of Thomas Dorsey's soon-to-be-published

¹⁹⁵ Fisk University, *God Struck Me Dead*, 87.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 86.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 16.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 24.

¹⁹⁹ Citations.

version of “Old Ship of Zion,” approximating the imagery and sentiment of the conversion accounts more closely than the hymn:

I was lost in sin and sorrow on an isle in life's dark sea
When I saw far in the distance there a ship it seemed to be
Then I saw, oh Lord, the Captain beckon, he cried so loud and free
"My child, I've come to save you, step on board and follow me."

CHORUS: 'Tis the old ship of Zion (3x)
I got on board early one morning, I got on board.

Ain't no danger in the water (3x)
I got on board early one morning, I got on board.²⁰⁰

The Dorsey-Roberta Martin Singers version depicted the shipboard journey to the Promised Land as one perhaps not attainable by the black collective, or even by exceptional individuals distinguished by their education, accomplishment, or moral behavior, but one attainable by those with an intimate relationship with Jesus. But rather than being the product of disengagement with the history of the black freedom struggle as gospel's critics alleged, this version reengaged an aspect of that struggle long suppressed by the New Negro stewards of black tradition: individuals' spiritual experience of the tumultuous transition from slavery to its afterlife.

In the Gospels, Jesus utters “Follow me” several times, usually as he explains that to become a disciple of his, one must immediately give up their worldly possessions, their family relations, or their mourning rituals. In the most comprehensive of these stories, The Rich Young Ruler, which appears in all three Synoptic Gospels, Jesus states in his concluding remarks as rendered in Mark's Gospel that the man who gives up his worldly things “shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life” (Mark 10:30). In the ex-slave

²⁰⁰ Roberta Martin Singers, “Old Ship of Zion.”

conversion accounts, this divine replenishment similarly revealed itself though the familial. One convert who was “awfully lonesome” after her mother died when she was “not more than thirteen or fourteen” spent much time where her mother told her to pray. The Lord told her that she was not “low enough” when she prayed.²⁰¹ After her lying on her belly precipitated her conversion, the Lord said to her, “My little one...weep not, for you are a new child. Abide in me and never fear.”²⁰² After being converted, she realized that “the voice on the inside will never leave me lonely.”²⁰³ A “poor widow woman” was told by Jesus to “Arise and follow me...in due time I will bring all things to you. Remember and cause your heart to sing,” a paraphrase of the same Gospel verse Martin’s “Precious Memories” was based on.²⁰⁴ Another woman, whose husband forced her to break her vow to her dying father to refrain from the sin of dancing so they could be reunited in heaven, heard a voice that said “Nora, you haven’t done what you promised,” which precipitated her conversion in which God told her that he will “drive all fears away.”²⁰⁵

Applying these accounts to the two versions of “Old Ship of Zion” with Jesus’ words in Mark 10:30 in mind suggests that whereas in the congregational hymn, one had to wait for a collectively-imagined journey to the afterlife to see one’s mother in heaven, in the Roberta Martin Singers’ version, a converted individual had the feeling of receiving the gift of a mother for the motherless “now, in this time” (Mark 10:30), before being reunited with the dead mother (or other dead loved one) in heaven. But this also meant living “with persecutions” (Mark 10:30); it meant neither secluding oneself from persecution, nor defeating the persecuting powers

²⁰¹ Fisk University, *God Struck Me Dead*, 47.

²⁰² *Ibid*, 48.

²⁰³ *Ibid*.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 19-20.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 26-27.

once and for all. The experience of conversion approximated Apostle Paul's discussion of the transition from the "spirit of bondage" to the "Spirit of adoption," indicating that the Spirit of adoption was a spirit of emancipation (Romans 8:15), but with a crucial difference: instead of Paul's paradigm of the adoption of male slaves into a household as sons and heirs, here the spirit was paradigmatically about mothering. Thus, the Roberta Martin Singers' "Precious Memories," far from erasing the original's reference to "mother," actually indicated that when "Jesus whispers 'I'll be with you,'" the narrator senses the "comfort" of the spirit of motherhood, heralding a reunion with the mother in heaven. The Roberta Martin Singers were most direct with this connection on the Gloria Griffin-led "Hold the Light," which added "motherless" and "fatherless" to the kind of conversion account depicted in their version of "Old Ship of Zion":

Once I was an outcast in this world of sin
 I had no one turn to, didn't even have peace of mind within
 One day I met the Savior, and he is the light of my soul
 And every since that wonderful day, heaven has been my goal

Everybody ought to hold the light...
 Motherless! Hold it. Fatherless! Hold it...
 Hold it high for Jesus.²⁰⁶

Thus, contra the opening of the paragraph that introduced double-consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folk*, "After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son," in gospel the motherless child was no longer the laggard son of humanity.²⁰⁷ Receiving the spirit of motherhood revealed God, as fifteenth century priest Nicholas of Cusa stated, as "the father of all just as he is of each one"²⁰⁸; of both, as the motherless and fatherless ex-slave Frederick Douglass wrote in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), "the slave-child neglected and the slaveholder's child cared for and petted. The

²⁰⁶ Roberta Martin Singers, "Hold the Light"

²⁰⁷ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 3.

²⁰⁸ Nicholas of Cusa, *On the Vision of God*, 8.27, 247.

spirit of the All Just mercifully holds the balance for the young.”²⁰⁹ Instead of the seventh son only seeing himself “through the revelation of the other world”—i.e., the white world—the motherless child, the wretched of the race in the cotton patch, on the curb or in the alley, could see motherhood in the revelation of Jesus.²¹⁰ Gospel’s depiction of Jesus as mother and father for the “fatherless and un-mothered” set the stage for the complexification of the genre’s tension with the legacy of *The Souls of Black Folk* in the 1950s, as, in the red twilight of Du Bois’ long sojourn in the Wilderness, a new generation of self-described “New Negro” sought to fulfill Burghardt’s Joshuanic promise.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 44.

²¹⁰ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 3.

²¹¹ “Interest in Mississippi, Not on Other Side of Jordan: New Negro Rising in South,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 21, 1956: A1; “Rev. King Hails the ‘New Negro,’” *Chicago Defender*, Dec. 22, 1956: 10.

Chapter Five

The Wretched and the Damned: Gospel Music between Civil Rights and Urban Crisis

“Everything seemed to be swollen, thrusting and shifting and changing, about to burst into music or into flame or revelation.” –James Baldwin¹

I. Introduction

Since Thomas Dorsey’s 1930s heyday, Chicago gospel music had opposed, and been understood as opposing, the New Negro conception of a black progress made possible by the transformative crucible of emancipation. But the genre’s own notion of social politics flourished during the “Golden Age of Gospel,” a period of creative and commercial vitality that paralleled the rise of the civil rights movement from the late 1940s through the early 1960s.² In part due to this parallel, scholars have celebrated the gospel music of the postwar decades for its contributions to the civil rights movement in the South. They have argued that gospel nurtured communal structures of feeling that gave strength to activists, and provided a raw material of folk music to be refined into more intellectual, explicitly political genres expressing the new black assertiveness: soul music, freedom songs, and modern jazz subgenres like hard bop and soul jazz.³

¹ James Baldwin, *Another Country* (New York: Vintage International, 1993 [1962]), 143.

² See esp. Horace Clarence Boyer, *The Golden Age of Gospel* (First Illinois, 2000).

³ Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 54; Charles M. Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1995), 256-263; Joe Street, *The Culture War in the Civil Rights Movement* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 10; Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 198-199; Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *No Coward Soldiers: Black Cultural Politics in Postwar America* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 77; Craig Werner, *A Change is Gonna Come: Music, Race, and the Soul of America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006); Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain’t: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 4.

While this scholarship has illuminated the cultural history of the Southern civil rights struggle, left unaddressed is the fact that much of the gospel industry was based in Northern cities, most importantly Chicago. Thus, little attention has been paid to postwar Northern urban gospel's fundamental local concern: singing a theology that could ballast ghettoized black people's faith in Jesus against the onslaught of what would become known as the urban crisis.⁴ Gospel's consideration of how to bolster urban faith in the civil rights era is best interpreted as an exploration of how the "wretched," i.e., black people faithful in Jesus yet viewed as socially and/or morally deficient by other blacks as well as by whites (and perhaps by themselves), related to the "damned," i.e., black people as a whole subjected to racial oppression and in need of salvation through Jesus.

Wretchedness and damnation were part of the often biblically-inspired vocabulary that postwar black intellectual-activists from Frantz Fanon to James Baldwin, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. to Stokely Carmichael used to render the 1960s as an apocalyptic crisis in which the problem of the color line would either be solved or immolate what was on either side.⁵ Scholarship on gospel often indicates that major Northern gospel artists were apolitical aside from Chicagoans Mahalia Jackson, the Staple Singers, and Rev. Clay Evans, along with Detroit's Rev. C.L. Franklin (father of Aretha).⁶ But many prominent Northern gospel musicians and

⁴ For the rise of the mid-twentieth century urban crisis, see Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); and Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1983]).

⁵ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004); James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage International, 1993 [1963]); Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Testament of Hope," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1991 [1986]), 313-330; Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

⁶ For Northern urban gospel as apolitical and otherworldly, see Jon Michael Spencer, *Protest and Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); Obery M. Hendricks, Jr., *The Universe Bends Toward*

gospel music churches supported and participated in the civil rights movement's assault on the color line. While these musicians and churches have not usually been identified with the movement, they dissented from the critiques of civil rights protest made by Martin Luther King's chief antagonist in the black pastorate, Chicago's powerful Rev. Joseph H. Jackson, the President of the National Baptist Convention, USA.

However, Chicago gospel's interpretation of the relationship between wretchedness and damnation in the postwar apocalyptic ferment differed from that of King and much civil rights movement-oriented religion. Movement religion subscribed to the longstanding black prophetic or progressive Christian notion that freedom required what nineteenth century black radical abolitionist David Walker called a "redemption from abject wretchedness" that would enable black people to "stretch forth our hands to the LORD our GOD."⁷ For Walker, wretchedness was a sign of hermetic damnation—of being in a "mean, low, and abject position" from which black people would not be able to fulfill Psalm 68:31's prophecy that "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God."⁸ In a formulation also equating the spatiality and temporality of wretchedness and damnation, King stated that "America has not yet changed because so many think it need not change, but this is the illusion of the damned. America must change because twenty-three million black citizens will no longer live supinely in a wretched past."⁹ The "mistranslation" of Franz Fanon's *Les Damnés de la Terre* into English as *The*

Justice: Radical Reflections on the Bible, Church, and the Body Politic (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011); Anthony Heilbut, *The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times* (New York: Limelight, 2002 [1971]).

⁷ David Walker, *Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, To the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America*, Written in Boston, State of Massachusetts, September 28, 1829, Third and Last Edition, with Additional Notes, Corrections, &c (Boston: Revised and Published by David Walker, 1830), 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ King, "A Testament of Hope," 328.

Wretched of the Earth was a prominent example of this elision of terms.¹⁰ The elision of “wretched” and “damned” indicated that wretchedness needed to be overcome.

By contrast, Chicago gospel located redemption *in* wretchedness. Gospel did not equate wretchedness with damnation, but rather perceived in it the potential for salvation from damnation. Thus, many Chicago gospel artists held redemption through Jesus to be in tension with the notion of sociocultural, political, economic, and juridical progress that the civil rights movement seemed to entail. That they did so while also supporting the movement, suggests that gospel not only bore witness to the movement’s limitations; it also problematized conventional understandings of the meaning and purpose of the black struggle for worldly freedom itself. Gospel music thus enables a critical reading of civil rights religion’s intellectual framework as rendered by some of its canonical writers, especially Howard Thurman, James Baldwin, and Martin Luther King; by freedom songs and prophetic churches oriented toward the black Social Gospel;¹¹ and as that framework was complemented by soul music, gospel’s more secular, domesticated, and heteronormative progeny.

Moving beyond, or rather beneath, scholarly contrasts of activist vs accommodationist or otherworldly religion, this chapter is comprised of an interconnected set of sections developing a portrait of how Chicago gospel and canonical civil rights religion¹² diverged over conceptions of

¹⁰ For an argument about the implications of the “mistranslation” of Fanon that this chapter draws from but also departs from, see Fred Moten, “Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh),” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 112:4, Fall 2013:737-780: 738; and Miguel Mellino, “The *Langue* of the Damned: Fanon and the Remnants of Europe,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, No.1:79-89:79.

¹¹ For the black Social Gospel, see Gary Dorrien, *The New Abolition: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Black Social Gospel* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015).

¹² I use the phrase “canonical civil rights religion” to note that I do not intend to essentialize civil rights religion; the civil rights movement was a mass grassroots movement, and many of the religious participants probably held religious views differing significantly from the movement’s most prominent religious exponents. Yet such prominent figures and cultural production tend to dominate scholarly discourse on the religion of the civil rights movement, and represent an ideal of prophetic/progressive religion in broader popular imaginaries.

shame, gender and sexual non-normativity, eternity, youth “sit-downs,” incarceration, upward mobility, work, and whether redeeming and fulfilling the Reconstruction Amendments to the U.S. Constitution would enable American law to reflect the justice of God. Ultimately, Chicago gospel music suggested that practicing a faith in Christ that could save souls corresponded with neither a Second Reconstruction nor integration into middle-class American norms, but with a refusal of the terms of labor, law, and love upon which a degraded black citizenship had been forged at emancipation—and was perhaps again on the offer.

In Chicago, the apocalyptic ferment epitomized by the rebellious “long hot summers” of the mid-to-late 1960s developed from the ambiguities of a post-World War II era in which the prospects of black Chicagoans achieving freedom seemed to be at once improving and slipping further away. As the regime of restrictive housing covenants collapsed, black incomes in Chicago soared to the second highest in the U.S. after Detroit, and a freedom movement stirred down South, wisps of opportunity crested the horizon of poverty and segregation.¹³ Black Chicago’s flourishing archipelago of independent gospel recording and publishing companies were a testament to its interrelated strides in consumer capacity, entrepreneurial ambition, musical development, and spiritual resolve.¹⁴ Mahalia Jackson’s 1947 recording of “Move On Up A Little Higher” sold 2 million copies, 50,000 in Chicago alone, signaling gospel’s ability to sing to new postwar possibilities and ushering in the genre’s golden age.¹⁵

¹³ Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-55* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 10-11; for black Chicagoans’ following developments in the South, especially the often overlooked 1950s Mississippi freedom struggle, see 192-195.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 51-91. For postwar Chicago gospel’s commercial and institutional infrastructure, see Robert M. Marovich, *A City Called Heaven: Chicago and the Birth of Gospel Music* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2015); Bernice Johnson Reagon, ed., *We’ll Understand It Better By and By: Pioneering African American Gospel Composers* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992); Boyer, *The Golden Age of Gospel*.

¹⁵ Green, *Selling the Race*, 63.

And yet, the anatomy of that record's portrayal of upward trajectory—its lyrical and melodic repetition tethered to a non-progressive, “non-teleological” piano vamp, the audible effort Jackson summoned to keep mustering new verses—reflected the antinomy of postwar Black Chicago's trajectory.¹⁶ Far from being overcome, discrimination in housing and employment fell back to higher ground. Already subjected to a biased labor market, blacks suffered disproportionately from deindustrialization and the relocation of jobs to racially-exclusive neighborhoods away from the inner city.¹⁷ As hundreds of thousands of low-skilled black migrants poured into an inner city hemorrhaging jobs, segregationist housing policy and practice, buffered by white mob violence, locked them into high-rise housing projects and higher rents for inferior flats.¹⁸ Erstwhile progressive institutions some had hoped would facilitate an interracial political movement that could democratize the city, such as left-leaning labor unions and the Chicago Housing Authority, lost white participation and/or grew hostile to black demands.¹⁹ While civic groups organized to fight this metropolitan massive resistance, white flight enabled black “strivers” to form precariously middle-class satellites of a Black Metropolis bursting at the seams.²⁰ Thus, Black Chicago's territory expanded dramatically as the number of black

¹⁶ Emily J. Lordi, *Black Resonance: Iconic Women Singers and African American Literature* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 90-91; Guthrie Ramsey, *Race Music: Black Culture from Bebop to Hip-Hop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 53.

¹⁷ Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago's Packinghouses* (Urbana and Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 1997), 247-250; Paul L. Street, *Racial Oppression in the Global Metropolis: A Living Black Chicago History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 114-117.

¹⁸ Green, *Selling the Race*, 182-192; Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*; D. Bradford Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster: The Unraveling of Chicago Public Housing* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

¹⁹ Bill V. Mullen, *Popular Fronts: Chicago and African-American Cultural Politics, 1935-46* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 195-196; Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 218-250; Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*; Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*.

²⁰ Jeffrey Helgeson, *Crucibles of Black Empowerment: Chicago's Neighborhood Politics from the New Deal to Harold Washington* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014); Preston H. Smith II, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis: Housing Policy in Black Chicago* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

Chicagoans increased from 277,731 in 1940 to 812,637 in 1960.²¹ But neighborhood-raiding slum clearance and urban renewal zealotry, along with the related outmigration of non-poor families, began to hollow out its old Bronzeville heart, which grew sparser and poorer.²²

The arena of health care perhaps best helps contextualize gospel in the contradictions of black Chicago's experience of the civil rights era, especially if we recall that the deaths of Thomas Dorsey's newborn son and wife in childbirth had inspired his genre-defining 1932 gospel song "Take My Hand, Precious Lord." Between 1955 and 1961, activists made progress in striking down racist policies that had essentially relegated a Black Chicago population nearing 900,000 to two of the Chicago area's 77 hospitals, Cook County Hospital and historically black Provident Hospital.²³ Nevertheless, during Chicago's 1956 polio outbreak, the disease affected 29 to 68 per 100,000 whites depending on age group, but 192 to 750 per 100,000 nonwhites, hitting particularly hard among nonwhite children under 10.²⁴ Overall, black Chicago's infant mortality rate increased 24 percent between 1958 and 1967.²⁵ Surveying the scene, many black Chicagoans found it difficult to shake the notion that despite progress in civil rights and the emergence of a black middle class, their beleaguered yet vibrant city within a city was declining into a slum.²⁶ Thus, gospel musicians pondered: what was the social role of the faithful of those

²¹ Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 17.

²² William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 44-47.

²³ "Cook Country Physician Association's Role in Illinois Hospital Segregation Ban," *Journal of the National Medical Association*, (Vol. 48, No.1), Jan. 1956:68-69; David Barton Smith, "Eliminating Disparities in Treatment and the Struggle to End Segregation," *Commonwealth Fund* pub. no. 775, August 2005: 2; Chicago Urban League, *The Negro in Chicago 1960: A Chicago Urban League Staff Analysis of the Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Negro Population* (Chicago: The Chicago Urban League, 1961), 14; CD article; Street, *Racial Oppression in the Global Metropolis*, 111.

²⁴ Chicago Urban League, *The Negro in Chicago 1960*, 13.

²⁵ Pierre de Vise, *Chicago's Widening Color Gap* (Chicago: Interuniversity Social Research Committee, 1967), 1.

²⁶ For the notion of a transition from an institutional ghetto (with parallel institutions within it) to a physical ghetto (lacking such institutions), see Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of the Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1967); and Wilson, *When Work Disappears*.

whom W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* pitied as “the wretched of my race” who “line the alleys of the nation” and “sit fatherless and un-mothered,” in what could appear to be a dying social world?

II. Faith and Shame

If David Walker announced the rise of a radical abolitionist theology concerned with redeeming blacks from wretchedness, mystical theologian Howard Thurman similarly augured the development of the theology undergirding the religion of the mid-twentieth century civil rights movement. Thurman taught religion at Howard University in the 1930s and 1940s before founding what is often considered the first intentionally multiracial church, the Church of the Fellowship of All People. His trip to India in the mid-1930s, which included a meeting with Gandhi, helped hone his thoughts on how to confront Jim Crow through nonviolence. He became a mentor and confidant of prominent younger black religious activist-intellectuals such as Pauli Murray, James Lawson, and Martin Luther King.²⁷

As gospel music entered its Golden Age, Thurman was at the peak of his reputation as Black America’s preeminent religious intellectual. Thurman, like the larger postwar civil rights movement he laid groundwork for, evinced affinities with gospel music. In his most celebrated book, 1949’s *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Thurman approximated gospel’s emphasis on the “good news” Jesus brought to the oppressed, as well as its focus on the importance of being adopted as God’s children.²⁸ However, juxtaposing the theology of Howard Thurman with the gospel songs

²⁷ Quinton Dixie and Peter Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World: Howard Thurman’s Pilgrimage to India and the Origins of African American Nonviolence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), esp. xi, 160-163, 180-181, 190-194.

²⁸ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996 [1949]), 39.

and biblical interpretation of Chicago's most famous postwar women's gospel group and men's gospel quartet, the Caravans and the Soul Stirrers, respectively, reveals the degree to which the difference between the civil rights movement's and Chicago gospel music's views of the fight for equality was rooted in their opposing approaches to shame.

Howard Thurman developed a theology of overcoming shame that echoed Walker's notion of redemption from wretchedness, while foreshadowing, and helping to influence, the understanding in the civil rights movement that faith in God could give ordinary people the courage to nonviolently stand up to Jim Crow despite the danger of violent reprisal.²⁹ Thurman thought that the "real evil of segregation" was that it "settles upon the individual a status that announces to all and sundry that he is of limited worth as a human being. It rings him round with a circle of shame and humiliation."³⁰ His understanding of shame in some ways anticipated queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who drew in particular from mid-twentieth century psychologist Silvan Tompkins to argue that shame stemmed from a lack of receiving the expected and desired recognition from others.³¹ Thus, while shame has often been thought of as

²⁹ For Walker and the politics of shame, see Tavia Nyong'o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 86-90. For Thurman's influence on the civil rights movement, see Dixie and Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World*; Dennis C. Dickerson, "African American Religious Intellectuals and the Theological Foundations of the Civil Rights Movement," *Church History*, Vol. 74, No. 2 (Jun. 2005), pp. 217-235; and Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *The Decline of African American Theology: From Biblical Faith to Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 44, 123, 158. For religion fortifying the resolve of civil rights activists, see Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 256-263, 272-273; David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 68, 102; Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 84; Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1987), 139.

³⁰ Howard Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 24.

³¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 36.

an antisocial affect, the desire for the mending of a “broken circuit” of recognition meant that shame was always already embedded in sociality and relationality.³²

But Sedgwick and Thurman differed over the valence of this desire. Sedgwick thought that shame itself could facilitate change and transformation, which meant that shame contained endless political potential. For Thurman, shame had to be overcome in order for this potential to be realized. He argued that blacks’ shame was rooted in their fear of the threat of violence that undergirded the Jim Crow system. However, “awareness of being a child of God” enabled one to “not depend upon externals for his significance,” to no longer “look to others for the nod of the head” and “constantly be at the mercy of whatever it is he is courting in his environment.”³³ Delivered from shame by this awareness, the child of God became “immunized against the most radical results of the *threat* of violence. When this happens, relaxation takes the place of the churning fear.”³⁴ Although they differed over the methodology of change, Thurman and Sedgwick both located shame in a trajectory of positive change and transformation.

If Thurman (ideologically if not stylistically) extended David Walker’s model of the black prophet speaking truth to power while preaching uplift for the lowly of his race, Walker’s friend and fellow black abolitionist Maria W. Stewart, purportedly the first American woman to publicly speak to an audience that included both women and men, discussed shame in a manner that proposed an alternative model anticipating post-World War II gospel music: the lowly

³² Ibid, 37-38; Ruth Leys and Marlene Goldman, “Navigating the Genealogies of Trauma, Guilt, and Affect: An Interview with Ruth Leys,” *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No. 2 (Spring 2010), 676-689:670-671.

³³ Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 39; Howard Thurman, *Deep is the Hunger: Meditations for Apostles of Sensitiveness* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), 15.

³⁴ Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 40; see also his germinal statement on “relaxation” as a pacifist method for defeating Jim Crow: Howard Thurman, “Relaxation and Race Conflict,” in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol. 1: My People Need Me, June 1918—March 1936*, ed. Walter Earl Fluker et al (Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 144-152:150.

follower of the Messiah. In an 1833 speech, Stewart defended her right as a woman to preach the gospel by referencing Mary Magdalene and the Samaritan woman at the well, two biblical disciples of Jesus who have often been thought of as sexually immoral.³⁵ After invoking them, Stewart argued that “St. Paul declared that it was a shame for a woman to speak in public, yet our great High Priest and Advocate did not condemn the woman for a more notorious offence than this; neither will he condemn this worthless worm.”³⁶ Rather than conceiving of freedom as change *from* wretchedness, Stewart declared that she would preach the gospel of freedom *in* wretchedness—as a “worthless worm” comparable to women disciples associated with sexual immorality (and other offenses, such as inappropriately talking to and touching Jesus). Furthermore, Stewart’s use of “worm” alluded to how Hebrew Bible texts that Christians have often depicted as messianic portents of Jesus can, in such a Christian messianic reading, portray Jesus as a lowly “worm”—specifically a female crimson or scarlet worm—in contrast with the worldly status conveyed by the term “man.”³⁷ Stewart did not question assumptions of who had worth and who did not. Rather, she problematized the notion that the ascription of manly worth was a prerequisite for preaching the gospel, and that being a worthless worm incurred divine condemnation.

Here Stewart presaged gospel’s focus on the shamed women disciples of Jesus. While Jesus was Thurman’s moral and ethical example, Jesus’s followers were gospel’s example. Whereas Thurman’s masculinist language echoed the Social Gospel’s notion of the Kingdom of God as the Fatherhood of God reflected on earth in the Brotherhood of Man,³⁸ in gospel, women

³⁵ Maria W. Stewart, *Productions of Mrs. Maria Stewart*, in *Spiritual Narratives*, 75.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ See especially Job 25:6 and Psalm 22:6.

³⁸ Anyabwile, *The Decline of African American Theology*, 122-123.

disciples were the main protagonists, and they worshipped a Jesus described in the genre first and foremost as a “mother,” as the previous chapter showed. Yet at the same time, unlike the “mothering of redemption” that characterized interwar gospel music, the movement of biblical women not understood as being mothers or wives to the forefront of the gospel repertory suggested a decentering of gendered reproduction in postwar gospel music.

Integral to the centrality of women disciples to gospel music was genre’s divergence with Thurman over the miraculous. Thurman, Martin Luther King, and other leading prophetic thinkers since the rise of modern biblical interpretation in the late nineteenth century reasoned that much of the Bible was scientifically and mathematically fantastical, and thus could not be taken as literal or inerrant. To them, Jesus was a model for how to oppose Jim Crow because of he was an ethical and moral religious leader of the oppressed par excellence, not because of any supposed miracle working.

By contrast, in gospel music, disciples’ faith in Jesus’ ability to work miracles was integral to their faith in him as Messiah. This faith beyond scientific reason enabled disciples to defy worldly conventions of shame and locate redemption in wretchedness. Thus gospel’s biblical interpretation was based not so much on literalism and inerrancy, as on an intimate identification with the faithfulness of the biblical disciples. James Baldwin wrote in his novel *Just Above My Head* that in gospel music, “when a nigger quotes the Gospel, he is not quoting: he is telling you what happened to him today, and what is certainly going to happen to you tomorrow.”³⁹ Thus, gospel music used the Gospels to sing of the quotidian catastrophes branding black life, the apocalyptic reckoning they portended, and how the faith of women disciples disclosed Jesus’ potential to save believers’ souls in such a reckoning. The genre thereby [upended] the

³⁹ James Baldwin, *Just Above My Head: A Novel* (New York: Dell Publishing, 2000 [1979]), 109.

progressive Protestant concern with reconciling biblical interpretation with modernity in order to make it socio-politically useful.

Epitomizing such intimate identification with the Bible was one of Chicago gospel music's most popular songs, the 1958 gospel recording of the Negro spiritual "Mary Don't You Weep" by the Caravans, the city's preeminent women's gospel group. The song's depiction of the role of the biblical sisters Mary and Martha of Bethany in the miraculous disclosure of Jesus as the Messiah echoed Maria Stewart's argument about shame and women preaching. In the song's second half, the Caravans used a musical evocation of the ring shout, an Afro-Protestant praise dance summoning Jesus to bridge the gap between the living and the dead, in order to portray Mary's weeping and her sister Martha's mourning for their dead brother Lazarus.⁴⁰ The Caravans evoked the circularity and repetition of the ring shout via the interlocking rhythm of Cassietta George, Shirley Caesar, and group leader Albertina Walker singing the refrain "Oh, Mary don't you weep," stabs of organ, Eddie Williams' bluesy block chords on the piano, Walker's wailing evocation of Martha's mourning/moaning, and Inez Andrews' behind-the-beat narration based on the scriptural text, John 11:1-45.⁴¹

Just as Mary anoints Jesus as Messiah in a ritual usually performed by a male priest in the Bible, in "Mary Don't You Weep" the weeping and mourning of the shout summons Jesus and precipitates his raising Lazarus from the dead. The shout thereby combined the traditional men's practice of anointing a king with the traditional women's role of preparing a loved one for burial.⁴² Soloist Inez Andrews' narration of the story in sermonette form also symbolized Mary's

⁴⁰ Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 11, 18, 29. For similar depictions of the ring shout (particularly those emphasizing Jesus), see Miles Davis and Gil Evans, "Prayer (Oh Doctor Jesus)," *Porgy and Bess*, 1958; Go Tell It and that memoir

⁴¹ The Caravans, "Mary Don't You Weep," *The Best of the Caravans* (Savoy Records, 1987).

⁴² On such a combination, see the discussion of Sophocles' *Antigone* in Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 85; and Judith Butler,

transgressive priestly act; since women were barred from the clergy in black Baptist churches, such sermonettes in gospel songs enabled Baptist women such as Andrews to unashamedly preach in public to nationwide congregations.⁴³ Following the traditional Negro spiritual version of the song, the Caravans' version analogized this miracle to the Exodus, when "Pharaoh's army got drowned."

However, a key distinction between the biblical text and the song was that the Caravans do not actually depict Lazarus rising from the dead. This underscored gospel's tendency to attenuate, and sometimes modify, the meaning of the text to emphasize the believers' faith in Jesus as the savior, rather than to emphasize Jesus himself.⁴⁴ Demonstrating this was twenty-year-old Chicago native Sam Cooke's 1950 hit recording debut as the leader of the Soul Stirrers, "Jesus Gave Me Water," which was a 1946 composition by Lucie E. Campbell that became a repertory standard, particularly for men's gospel quartets. In the Bible text the song was based on, John 4:1-30, the Samaritan woman at the well (who Stewart referenced above) thinks that Jesus might be the "Messiah...which is called Christ" (John 4:25), but is never sure; nor does she understand that Christ is not only a worldly redeemer and provider but a savior of the eternal soul.⁴⁵ However, in "Jesus Gave Me Water," Sam Cooke proclaimed, "there ain't no room for doubtin', that she had seen her savior," and that "every time she doubted, she start to think about him," indicating that what doubts she did have were fleeting.

Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death (New York and Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2000), 77-80.

⁴³ For the importance of Mary and Martha to women's empowerment in black churches, see Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 131; and Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "'Go Tell Mary and Martha': the Spirituals, Biblical Options for Women, and Cultural Tensions in the African American Religious Experience," *Social Compass* 43(4), 1996, 563-581.

⁴⁴ This formulation is influenced by Judith Butler's notion that Antigone's mourning for her dead brother "fails to produce heterosexual closure": Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 76.

⁴⁵ Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., *The Gospel of John* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 117-119, 127-131.

The Samaritan woman's faith in Jesus constituted an alternative to Thurman's understanding of shame. As Maria Stewart alluded to, the Samaritan woman has engaged in ostensibly shameful and immoral behavior. She has had five husbands, and the man she is with currently is not her husband. But when Jesus tells her about her marital past and sexual present, the woman begins to think that he might be a prophet because of Jesus' miraculous ability to disclose details about her life.⁴⁶ Here the woman neither overcomes shame nor embraces it; nor is Jesus attempting to shame her. Rather, the relationship between Jesus and the woman operates outside of the shame the woman may or may not have generally felt in society. "Jesus Gave Me Water" underscored the notion that the woman knew Jesus was not only a prophet, but the savior, because "he did her story tell." The song and the story's resonance with Stewart is further indicated by the fact that Jesus should not have been speaking to the woman in the first place, because she was a woman and a Samaritan and he was a Jewish man.⁴⁷

Sam Cooke's classic Soul Stirrers composition "Touch the Hem of His Garment" [5] also used faith in Jesus' miracle working in a way that ran counter to Thurman's notion of shame, particularly Thurman's outlining of the relationship between shame and deception. In *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Thurman argued that deception was one of the worst consequences of the fear and shame of the oppressed. The deception the oppressed employed as a survival strategy degraded their moral sensitivity, which made it virtually impossible for them to develop the "sincerity" needed to harness the "religion of Jesus" (which Thurman distinguished from Christianity) to overturn the logic the oppressors employed to justify their rule.⁴⁸ Women were especially susceptible to employing deception: "a man-dominated social order has forced upon

⁴⁶ Ibid, 127.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 116-117.

⁴⁸ Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 48-63.

women, even down to latest times...this form of deception by which the moral life of women was bound.”⁴⁹

“Touch the Hem of His Garment” was a setting of the Gospel story in which an ailing woman touches Jesus’ garment and is healed.⁵⁰ In the Gospels, the woman suffers from an “issue of blood” lasting “twelve years” (Luke 8:43), a gynecological affliction legally making her unclean to touch, and thus anathema to priests and suitors. Hence, like the Samaritan woman but for very different reasons, she lives outside of women’s normative sexual and societal role. Desperate after having spent all of her money trying to find a cure, the woman employs the deception of the oppressed, sneaks behind Jesus, touches him, and is healed. Jesus then asks, “Who touched me?” At this, “when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, and declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately” (8:47). Here, the woman’s compounding feelings of shame and humiliation—first at how she is scorned because of her condition, then at her touching Jesus, and finally at her sudden realization of her own conspicuousness—cause a “trembling” that becomes a public witness of Jesus’ miraculous healing. Cooke, who brushed lightly over the details of the passage in his lyrics, made this the key moment of the song at the end of the second verse. With moans of “whoa” in his sandpaper tenor that serrated at the edges, Cooke portrayed the woman’s trembling declaration by vocally pirouetting over and under the harmonizing of the rest of the Soul Stirrers.

At first glance at this story, the shame that cascades over the woman seems to align with Sedgwick’s theorizing about the sociopolitical potential of shame’s “dramatized flooding of the

⁴⁹ Ibid, 49.

⁵⁰ Although the exact phrase “Touch the hem of his garment” is only in Matthew’s telling of the story (Matt. 9:20), overall Sam Cooke approximates Luke’s version the closest, so I have based my reading on Luke. The story is also in Mark.

subject,” particularly since when the woman touches Jesus, “immediately her issue of blood stanch[ed]” (Luke 8:44).⁵¹ However, it is unlikely that the healing works toward repairing the breakdown in the social circuit of recognition that caused her shame, and therefore toward transformation and change. Since the long-suffering, impoverished woman is likely unattached to a household and past her culture’s ideal marital and reproductive age, she is healed by faith, but not necessarily for the state, civil society, or family. The Gospels imply this by inserting her story inside the story of Jesus’ reviving the twelve-year old daughter of Jairus, “the ruler of the synagogue” (Luke 8:40-42, 49-56; see also Matthew 9 and Mark 5). The juxtaposition indicates that although Jesus heals them both, the woman with the issue of blood will never recover the daughter’s youth, nor reach anything like the daughter’s social position; she is a witness, and receives a blessing, but remains wretched.⁵²

Sam Cooke underscored this enduring wretchedness, because just as the Caravans did not depict Lazarus rising from the dead in “Mary Don’t You Weep,” Cooke did not depict the woman actually being healed. Furthermore, unlike in Luke’s telling, in which Jesus has the last word by saying to the woman, “thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace,” Cooke’s final lyric is the woman’s own proclamation of faith.⁵³ The song ends with him singing, “If I could just touch the hem of your garment, I know I’ll be made whole.” Thus, the song emphasized the depth of the faith of the wretched by not putting faith on a trajectory toward a change in societal status.

⁵¹ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 38.

⁵² For an interpretation also emphasizing the contrast in status (although less so than I do), see John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 196-202.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 200.

III. Joy Unspeakable

Understanding Chicago gospel music's and canonical civil rights religion's divergent approaches to shame in the Gospels provides theological ground for investigating their differing conceptions of black social life.⁵⁴ This difference became particularly salient in the 1950s, as black leaders grew more concerned about the civil rights implications of black sexuality. Gender and sexual non-normativity were central to both the culture and perception of gospel music.⁵⁵ Since Black Chicago was the institutional vanguard of gospel music, its non-normative sacred social life may have developed relatively quickly. In 1943, Willa Ward found out about her nineteen-year-old future gospel legend sister Clara Ward "liking girls" the night that the two Philadelphians navigated Black Chicago's extensive network of lesbian and gay parties accommodating gospel musicians and other attendees of that year's National Baptist Convention, the largest Afro-Baptist gathering.⁵⁶ In addition to gospel's non-normative sociality, gospel singing was thought of as gender-bending, with its prevalence of men sopranos and women basses, men's falsettos and women's gutbucket howls.

For all its centrality to mid-twentieth century black America, gospel was marked by what Calvin Warren theorizes as the "impossibility" of the "black queer subject": the inability of violence against the "black queer" to register as anti-black violence.⁵⁷ The stigmatization and physical brutalization of gospel musicians within the black community for their perceived association with gender and sexual non-normativity showed that community members were

⁵⁴ For "black social life," see Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness."

⁵⁵ Anthony Heilbut, "The Children and Their Secret Closet," *The Fan Who Knew Too Much: Aretha Franklin, the Rise of the Soap Opera, The Children of the Gospel Church, and Other Meditations* (New York and Toronto: Knopf, 2012), 3-91.

⁵⁶ Willa Ward-Royster, *How I Got Over: Clara Ward and the World-Famous Ward Singers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 68-69.

⁵⁷ Calvin Warren, "Oticide: Afro-pessimism, Queer Theory, and Ethics," 11.

invested in attaining black uplift through reproducing the norms of a society that excluded them. The hostility also implied that the alleged artistic, musical sentimentality and emotionalism of black culture evincing that blacks were, in sociologist Robert E. Park's phrase, "the lady of the races," was actually a queer particularity unreflective of the wider straight black culture's normativity and therefore potential for integration into mainstream American life. Yet those doing the stigmatizing and brutalizing also often subscribed to the belief that the spirituality and soulfulness of black culture depended on these musicians' labor and creativity—a latent sign of the quixotic nature of their investment in normativity. Thus, postwar gospel's black queer impossibility fostered commentaries upon the inability of programs for black progress to overcome the ongoing plight of ghettoization, so far as those programs could not address ghettoization's brutalization of the soul.

Sexual non-normativity has often been connected to how religiosity evinced blacks' maladjustment to urban life. In his influential 1939 study *The Negro Family in the United States*, a sequel to his 1932 book *The Negro Family in Chicago*, black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier—a mentor, former professor, and then Howard University colleague of Howard Thurman—warned that because otherworldly urban Christianity weakened blacks' parenting abilities, those under its spell were producing a younger generation susceptible to homosexuality and radicalism: "On the subways, buses and streetcars one sees men and women with tired black faces staring vacantly into a future lighted only by the hope of a future life, while beside them may sit a girl with her head buried in a book on homosexual love or a boy absorbed in the latest revolutionary pamphlet."⁵⁸ Thus, Christianity threatened to capsize the hope for black assimilation of middle-class domesticity in a perfect storm of city pathologies (religious, sexual, political).

⁵⁸ E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 299.

Disassociating from gospel's queerness by pranking, taunting, or assaulting sacred musicians could serve as a way for some to grope toward heteronormative social identities.⁵⁹ Martin Luther King, Jr.'s sister Christine King Farris recalled that, rejecting their piano lessons as "sissy stuff," a young Martin and his brother A.D. loosened the legs of the piano stool so that it collapsed when the instructor sat on it.⁶⁰ Richard Wright suggested that this could also reject Christian identification more generally: in Wright's 1958 novel *The Long Dream*, the protagonist Fishbelly and his friends beat up a gay male church instrumentalist, Aggie West, after West calls Fishbelly by his given "Christian" name rather than his nickname and asks to play with them.⁶¹ Fishbelly's friend's admonition, "Play the piano you fairy... That's all you fit for!" encapsulates how heteronormative dissociation from gospel's queerness could function as a manifestation of what Elaine Tyler May termed, in reference to the politics of the nuclear family in the Cold War, "domestic containment."⁶² If gospel were distanced from theological or intellectual reflection and contained to the realm of ecstatic musical entertainment, its queerness could be eclipsed by black churches' attempt to comport with the anti-queer imperatives of the Cold War state in order to imbue the rising civil rights struggle in anticommunist respectability.⁶³

Most prominently, Harlem congressman, pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church, and Popular Front leftist-turned-Cold War liberal Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. disparaged the "trend of parading homosexuals" in metropolitan black churches in his 1951 *Ebony* article "Sex

⁵⁹Jesse Jackson quoted in Heilbut, "The Children and Their Secret Closet"; David Ritz, *Divided Soul: The Life of Marvin Gaye*, 15, 18.

⁶⁰ Christine King Ferris, "The Young Martin: From Childhood through College," *Ebony*, January 1986: 56-58: 56.

⁶¹ Richard Wright, *The Long Dream*, 38-39.

⁶² Wright, *The Long Dream*, 38; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

⁶³ Thaddeus Russell, "The Color of Discipline: Civil Rights and Black Sexuality," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 1, March 2008, pp. 101-128; Jane Shannon De Hart, "Containment at Home: Gender, Sexuality, and National Identity in Cold War America," in *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, eds. Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), pp. 124-155.

in the Church.”⁶⁴ The article was part of the Black Chicago-based magazine’s early Cold War attempt to disentangle black music from radical politics and transgressive gender and sexuality. It also foreshadowed Powell’s blackmailing Martin Luther King into expelling Bayard Rustin from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) later in the decade.⁶⁵ But churches relied on such “parading” to draw congregants to services designed to safeguard the future of the heteronormative household thought integral to the proper shepherding of souls. Thus, services could become understood essentially as metaphysical burlesques of the Victorian masters-and-servants relationship. Taken to its theological extreme, such a construal of the sexual politics of worship services could manifest as a Christian variation of what the legendary 1980s rapper Rakim formulated in another religious context as the question, “Am I eternal, or an eternalist”: one’s church work could help set others on the path to eternal glory even while one remained merely an eternalist, a believer in a heavenly afterlife who would nevertheless be condemned to the grave and the flame.⁶⁶

The emergence of a seemingly more heteronormative soul music from gospel’s queer milieu in the 1950s and 1960s paralleled this “Cold War civil rights” project of intra-racial urban reform.⁶⁷ Little Richard, who oscillated between gospel and soul, referenced homosexuality most

⁶⁴ Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., “Sex in the Church,” *Ebony*, November 1951, 27-34.

⁶⁵ Walter White, “The Strange Case of Paul Robeson,” *Ebony*, February 1951, 78, 80-83; Gladys Bentley, “I Am a Woman Again,” *Ebony*, August 1952, 92-98; Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 36-43. For *Ebony*’s coverage of the black family during this period, see Green, *Selling the Race*, 151-152.

⁶⁶ Eric B. & Rakim, “Follow the Leader,” *Follow the Leader*, 1988; see also Talib Kweli and DJ Hi-Tek, “Eternalists,” *Reflection Eternal*, 2000. Like many 1980s-1990s New York-area rappers, Rakim identified with the Nation of Gods and Earths/the Five Percent Nation of Islam. For the particularly tragic consequences of churches’ views of homosexuality during the rise of HIV/AIDS, see Cathy J. Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), esp. 5-6, 279-280, 284-285.

⁶⁷ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

suggestively in his theologically redolent ode to criminalized love, “Oh Why?”⁶⁸ But the 1955 commercially released version of “Tutti Frutti,” arguably the seminal recording inaugurating the second half of twentieth century popular music, removed the original version’s lyrics about sex between men, with the exception of the title.⁶⁹ A teenage Marvin Gay felt haunted by his itinerant preacher father—whose womanizing, wearing of women’s clothing, and blending of Pentecostalism with Orthodox Judaism incurred neighborhood derision—as well as by his own intrigue at, as he stated in an interview, ““seeing myself as a woman.””⁷⁰ But Gay’s shift from gospel to secular singing enabled him to harness the fact that, as a junior high singing partner recalled, ““A lot of the guys thought we were sissies”” but ““our singing attracted the girls,”” to eventually become Motown’s leading man, Marvin Gaye.⁷¹ Songs could gesture to this transition as well. The bridge of Ray Charles’ 1954 “I Got A Woman,” a song that helped define the formula for soul music by setting straight romantic lyrics, a stronger backbeat, and backing horns to the Southern Tones’ “It Must Be Jesus,” ended with the lyric, “Never runnin’ in the streets / And leavin’ me alone / She knows a woman’s place / Is right there now in her home.” Here, by modifying the common gospel refrain that Jesus “never leaves me alone,” musical secularization signaled the reorientation of black neighborhoods toward heteronormativity: black music moves out of the queer church and the queer streets and into the straight, patriarchal home.

But gospel had its own conceptions of the theological and sociopolitical valences of gender and sexual non-normativity that countered those of black leaders pursuing a normative struggle for civil rights in the constricted Cold War environment. Reading James Baldwin’s extensive

⁶⁸ For Little Richard and homosexuality, see Charles White, *The Life and Times of Little Richard: The Authorised Biography* (Omnibus Press, 2003).

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 39, 49, 55.

⁷⁰ Ritz, *Divided Soul*, 15, 18.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 24.

writing on gospel and sexuality in relation to his largely overlooked intimations of a queer theological critique provides the best starting point for this analysis. In Baldwin's 1953 semi-autobiographical first novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Chicago, even more than the novel's locale of Harlem, epitomized the sinful Northern "city of destruction," a phrase Baldwin borrowed from E. Franklin Frazier's adaptation of the St. Augustine's binary of the City of God and the Earthly City to his depictions of the black family in Chicago.⁷² Augustine's binary was based on the notion that in the unholy earthly city, Christians could at best find only "a solace for our wretchedness rather than the joy of blessedness"; it thus indicated that wretchedness and blessedness were irreconcilably opposed.⁷³

Mulling a damned future amidst unholy cities in *Go Tell It On the Mountain*, protagonist John Grimes wonders if he will end up like his preacher stepfather's first son Royal, who "done got hisself killed in Chicago," end up "like all the other niggers," "the despised and rejected, the wretched and spat upon, the earth's offscouring; and he was in their company, and they would swallow up his soul."⁷⁴ And yet, departing from Augustine (and Frazier), here Baldwin hinted that being "wretched" aligned with being Christ-like, as he clasped it to the first clause of Isaiah 53:3, "he was despised and rejected of men," often taken by Christians to be a messianic foretelling of Jesus' suffering. Baldwin's use of Isaiah foretells John's spiritual rebirth at the novel's conclusion, a triumph over death in which the boy's homoerotic desire facilitates the recasting of Harlem as holy rather than pathological.⁷⁵ At the end, John tells his crush Elisha—

⁷² James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1953), 212.

⁷³ Saint Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 19.14, 19.27.

⁷⁴ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 173, 263, 273.

⁷⁵ This reading is influenced by Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 107-108.

notably, a singer—that “no matter what happens to me, where I go, what folks say about me, no matter what anybody says, you remember—please remember—I was saved.”⁷⁶

Baldwin developed this notion further in 1963’s *The Fire Next Time*. He noted that “binding the bodies of the boys in marriage” was often thought of as a way of “saving the boys’ souls for Jesus,” and wresting body and soul from “what the late E. Franklin Frazier called ‘the cities of destruction.’”⁷⁷ Yet despite calling Apostle Paul “mercilessly fanatical and self-righteous” later in the book, here he mined ambiguity in Paul’s Letters in order to deconstruct this position on marriage: “‘It is better,’ said St. Paul—who elsewhere, in a most unusual and stunning exactness, described himself as a ‘wretched man’—‘to marry than to burn.’”⁷⁸ The reference to “‘wretched man’” is from Paul’s Letter to the Romans: “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am!” (Romans 7:22-24) Baldwin indicated that while Paul, unmarried and celibate, states in First Corinthians that the “unmarried and widows” who should marry are those who differ from him in that they “burn” with passion (1 Corinthians 7:8-9), Paul’s deeming himself “wretched” because of his spiritual war with the law of his members shows that he too burns with passion.

Playing with the dual interpretation of “burn” as burning with passion and burning in hellish or apocalyptic fire, Baldwin indicated that the Bible suggests that the wretched not only could be individually saved for Jesus and from hell even though they continue to burn with passion outside of marriage: like Paul, they could also be apostles of a wider redemption within the city of destruction. Thus, here Baldwin overturned Frazier by queering the interpretation of

⁷⁶ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*.

⁷⁷ Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 18, 4.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 44, 18.

the Romans passage offered by Frazier's inspiration, Augustine, who thought it demonstrated the wretched man's need to finally triumph over the law of his member in order to follow the apostle's path.⁷⁹

This reading challenges the dominant scholarly notion that Baldwin was, in effect, a more literary echo of Howard Thurman's straightforward critique of Pauline Christianity and the institutional black church. In fact, as Baldwin moved from liberal literary darling in the early 1950s to an increasingly critical stance on the possibility of American liberalism facilitating black liberation, he altered his views on ____.⁸⁰ While *Go Tell it on the Mountain* emphasized John Grimes' wrestling with sexual guilt, in Baldwin's final novel, 1979's *Just Above My Head*, Baldwin extended his queering of Paul from *The Fire Next Time* to young gospel singer Arthur Montana's thinking through the eternal implications of his romance with fellow quartet member Crunch. The novel's narrator, Arthur's brother Hall, relates Arthur's perspectives as Arthur and Crunch walk toward Crunch's downtown apartment on a street on which every door seemed "doomed, sordid choked payment for choked sins": "If [Arthur] were not with Crunch, he would be terrified of the people on the street...they have entered eternity: eternal damnation must look like this. He wonders if he and Crunch are damned. Perhaps love *is* a sin. But he shakes his head against the thought, and the light changes. They cross the street."⁸¹ As in the discussion of Paul in *The Fire Next Time*, this is not a complete repudiation of the idea of love's sinfulness, but rather a destabilization of it, a querying that illuminates the potentiality that what is deemed wretched is not damned.

⁷⁹ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII. xxi (27).

⁸⁰ For Baldwin's move away from liberalism, see Lawrence P. Jackson, *The Indignant Generation: A Narrative History of African American Writers and Critics, 1934-1960* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 408, 411, 452, 482-484; and Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (), 19-20.

⁸¹ Baldwin, *Just Above My Head*, 256.

This pre-civil rights scene in which queer gospel facilitates the potentiality of refuge from the damnation that otherwise stalked the streets set the stage for the rest of the novel, which argues that for all its heroism and achievements in certain areas, the civil rights movement could do little to amend urban black suffering. Indeed, *Just Above My Head* possessed a tenor, scope, and political disposition comparable to perhaps the period's most lauded African American cultural production, soul's last great statement on its own terms before disco began to dominate black pop: Stevie Wonder's 1976 double-LP-plus-EP *Songs in the Key of Life*.⁸² The increased black aesthetic pungency (i.e., funkiness) of Baldwin's writing echoed Wonder's moving beyond the "one-man band" approach of his earlier 70s masterpieces and using giant orchestras to flesh out his sound; both works' length and range of concerns elicited similar criticisms of overindulgence; and their nostalgia conveyed a troubled sense of the trajectory of black struggle. These features gave both works an apocalyptic urgency, as if everything that the artists *really* needed to express about black life had to be expressed then; Wonder's next album, *Journey Through the Secret Life of Plants*, was apocalyptic both in its post-humanism and its perplexing disclosure of esoteric knowledge, while *Just Above My Head* was Baldwin's last novel. Orbiting elliptically around Arthur, *Just Above My Head* performed a funereal ring shout (complete with "Martha," a Harlem Hospital nurse who "did tend to mourn") for a black uprising fading into urban crisis and conservative retrenchment, a praise break for "bicentennial niggers" with no country, no other country and no other star.⁸³ Baldwin thus suggested gospel music was not so much an escape from church constructs, as it has often been rendered in Baldwin studies, as it

⁸² This is of course not to say that it was the last great seventies soul or funk album, but that later albums tended to be responses to disco in one sense or another.

⁸³ Baldwin, *Just Above My Head*, 96-97, 127; Richard Pryor, *Bicentennial Nigger*, 1976; Baldwin, *Another Country*; Stevie Wonder, "Another Star," *Songs in the Key of Life*, 1976.

was the most redemptive space *within* black Christian theological frameworks and sacred social bodies, however difficult this space was to maintain.⁸⁴

Baldwin's writing thereby helps illuminate the music of his contemporary Alex Bradford. Called "Miss Bradford" and "Pearl" by his gospel peers, Bradford was the genre's most conspicuously queer postwar star.⁸⁵ His "riotous," "rafter-shaking" performance style electrified audiences and congregations and influenced many subsequent artists.⁸⁶ Bradford was born in the interwar music hotbed of Bessemer, Alabama in 1926. At six years old, he defied his Baptist father to join the Holiness Church (in some ways anticipating by a few years James Baldwin's own move from being under the wing of his Baptist preacher stepfather to becoming a teenage Pentecostal preacher).⁸⁷ Migrating from Bessemer as a teenager, Bradford became a follower of Prophet Jones, a "flamboyant" piano-playing minister and the principle target of Rev. Adam Clayton Powell's *Ebony* piece.⁸⁸ Moving to Chicago after World War II, Bradford wrote several enduring classics for the peak Roberta Martin Singers of the late forties and early fifties, including "Sealed Til the Day of Redemption" and "I Know the Lord Will Make A Way." He then formed his own quartet and composed and performed one of Golden Age gospel's biggest hit recordings, the 1954 million seller "Too Close to Heaven."

One of his Roberta Martin Singers classics was "Come On In The Room." In the song, a mother conveys to her child that in the "prayer room," "Jesus is a doctor" whose prescription of

⁸⁴ Clarence E. Hardy, *James Baldwin's God: Sex, Hope, and Crisis in Black Holiness Culture* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003); Douglas Field, *All Those Dangers: The Art and Lives of James Baldwin* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 93; Carol Wayne White, *Black Lives and Sacred Humanity: Toward an African American Religious Naturalism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 99-115.

⁸⁵ Carl Bean with David Ritz, *I Was Born This Way: A Gay Preacher's Journey through Gospel Music, Disco Stardom, and a Ministry in Christ* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2010), 135.

⁸⁶ Dave Marsh, "Prof. Alex Bradford," *All Music Guide to the Blues: The Definitive Guide to the Blues*, eds. Vladimir Bogdanov, Chris Woodstra, Stephen Thomas Erlewine, 65.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

the Bible gives “joy unspeakable” to anyone whose “heart” is “torn and bleeding.” The song evinced Bradford’s capacity for nakedly, viscerally despondent lyrics. The effect of such lyrics was enhanced by the Roberta Martin Singers’ trademark trembling ethereality, generated on their Eugene Smith-led recording of “Come On In The Room” by Roberta Martin’s crystalline alto gliding across Myrtle Scott’s and Myrtle Jackson’s grainier tone colors. The emotional and spiritual gravity of Bradford’s collaboration with the Roberta Martin Singers helped turn commercial gospel away from the vaudevillian whimsy approximated by earlier, Popular Front-oriented groups such as the Golden Gate Quartet.⁸⁹ Together, they conveyed that only Jesus (and not leftist social formations) could save someone in such despondency.

Just as gospel music contended that Jesus was not simply a surrogate mother, it also indicated that Jesus was no ordinary doctor. Gospel invocations of Jesus as a doctor often began a vocational litany—Jesus as doctor and lawyer, teacher and warrior, and so on.⁹⁰ The litany portrayed Jesus as an alternate civil society in a manner appearing to resonate with Du Bois’ influential statement that “the Negro church...reproduced, in microcosm, all the great world from which the Negro is cut off by color-prejudice and social condition.”⁹¹ But “Doctor Jesus” did not simply mimic the function of white doctors. Whereas doctors in the West were deployed in efforts to “correct” sexual “abnormality”—which in the U.S. was associated with blackness—Bradford’s song suggested Jesus could also be a doctor who facilitated holiness through queerness.⁹²

⁸⁹ For the Golden Gate Quartet and the Popular Front, see Chandra J. Johnson, *Willie T – The Untold Story of Willie “Bill” Johnson and His Life Before, During, and After the Golden Gate Quartet* (Chandra J. Johnson, 2012); and Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 2010 [1997]), 353-357.

⁹⁰ For an example of this litany, see the Soul Stirrers, “Jesus Done Just What He Said,” *Jesus Gave Me Water* (Fantasy Records, 2003).

⁹¹ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 142.

⁹² Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France 1974-1975*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2003), 250-251; Siobhan B. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality*

This comes into focus by thinking “Come On in the Room” in relation to his rollicking choir standard “Said I Wasn’t Gonna Tell Nobody but I Couldn’t Keep It to Myself.” [7] Bradford wrote and recorded it in 1960 when he was the choir director for Newark’s Abyssinian Baptist Church, an affiliate of Rev. Adam Clayton Powell’s church in nearby Harlem. As director of the choir, Bradford helped develop the modern gospel choir sound and mentored, among other notable singers, Dionne Warwick and Cissy Houston (Warwick’s aunt and Whitney Houston’s mother). Bradford built “Said I Wasn’t Gonna Tell Nobody” around this lyric:

Said I wasn’t gonna tell nobody but I couldn’t keep it to myself
What the Lord has done for me
You oughta been there when he saved my soul
You oughta been there when he put my name on the roll
When I started walkin’, started talkin’, started singin’, started shoutin’
The Lord is good enough for me⁹³

In the song, "when he saved my soul," i.e., when the singer was (re)born, the singer "started walking, started talking, started singing, started shouting." If Bradford’s ecstatic performing signified queerness as well as devotion, then his queerness hailed the eternal salvation of the soul. He was (re)born in Christ, and started to walk, talk, sing, and shout praises to God. This rebirth was neither a normative investment in “reproductive futurity” (i.e., heterosexual relations geared toward sustaining civil society with and for unborn generations), nor the presentism of

in American Culture (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000). My thinking here is influenced by Rev. James S. Tinney’s autobiographical discussion of how the sheer number of gay church folks and the “certain practical tolerance of certain variant sexual activities (including both hetero- and homosexual acts)” in black Pentecostalism undermined the credibility of the idea that homosexuality was a sin, even if that notion was ostensibly sacrosanct: see James S. Tinney, “Struggles of a Black Pentecostal,” in Michael J. Smith, ed., *Black Men/White Men: A Gay Anthology* (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1983), 167-171: 169-170.

⁹³ Abyssinian Baptist Gospel Choir under the Direction of Professor Alex Bradford, “Said I Wasn’t Gonna Tell Nobody,” *Shakin’ the Rafters*, 1960.

anti-relational queer theory that advocates refusing such futurity, nor the oppositional this-worldly hope of “queer futurity,” but a queering of eschatological eternity.⁹⁴

One of Bradford’s protégés, Baltimore native Carl Bean, made this connection more explicit. Born in 1944 to a young, overworked mother and an absent father, Bean was raised by his godparents.⁹⁵ He remembers that as a child he was “a little feminine creature, a soft boy with a big heart” which was set on another boy.⁹⁶ But soon his life was marked by tragedy: his birth mother died from complications from an abortion, and he was raped by an uncle for several years before turning thirteen.⁹⁷ Such experiences made him feel limits to what civil rights religion could do for his spirit, even though he attended Rev. Marcus Garvey Wood’s civil rights-oriented church as a teenager just as the mass movement was about to explode nationally: “I was one of the kids from that church that was being trained to do sit-ins at lunch counters, be in the marches, integrate the public school system, and what-have-you. Still, my mother’s death, harassment for being different, and my suicide attempt were too much for me to bear. So at 16, I went on a Greyhound bus from Baltimore to New York,” where he formed a gospel group with a few other gay singers in Harlem.⁹⁸ Indeed, scattershot lyrical and biographical evidence suggests that gospel’s skepticism of patriarchal pathways to black freedom was related to the particular ways

⁹⁴ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004); Jose Esteban Munoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009).

⁹⁵ Bean with Ritz, *I Was Born This Way*.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 1; Michelle Lhoq, “Meet the 72-Year-Old Preacher Behind One of the Greatest Gay Club Anthems of All Time,” https://thump.vice.com/en_au/article/meet-the-72-year-old-preacher-behind-one-of-the-greatest-gay-club-anthems-of-all-time. Accessed 10.17.16.

⁹⁷ Bean, *I Was Born This Way*; Lhoq, “Meet the 72-Year-Old Preacher Behind One of the Greatest Gay Club Anthems of All Time”; Heilbut, “The Children and Their Secret Closet.”

⁹⁸ Quoted in Lhoq, “Meet the 72-Year-Old Preacher Behind One of the Greatest Gay Club Anthems of All Time.”

that gospel musicians conceived of their experiences of the sexual threat men could pose to women, girls and boys.⁹⁹

Bean eventually joined Alex Bradford's group as Bradford moved between Chicago and his primary location by the 1960s, Newark; Bean calls Bradford his "musical father."¹⁰⁰ In 1975, Bean released the disco gay liberation anthem "I Was Born This Way" on Motown. As Sam Cooke biographer Daniell Wolff rereads the iconic first lyric of "A Change is Gonna Come" for latent evangelicalism—"He was born by the river in a little tent... that sounds like gospel—born again in some tent-rival baptism"—Bean conceived of the anthem, which was written by a straight woman hairdresser friend of his, as shouting "Yes, Lord, I was born this way!"¹⁰¹ Bean later founded what gospel historian Anthony Heilbut describes as the "first black gay church," Unity Fellowship in Los Angeles.¹⁰²

The music of 1940s R&B and jump blues bandleader Louis Jordan, who lived in Chicago throughout the peak of his career, sheds light on how gospel's queerness could signify the potential for black urban redemption outside of the ebb and flow of black progress. Jordan's work also shows how such redemption worked not only against the grain of seemingly heteronormative R&B, but within R&B, not only on the lower frequencies of gospel radio but at the top of the "secular" black music charts. The son of a father who had performed with legendary black minstrel Bert Williams and a mother who was a Baptist church musician, Louis

⁹⁹ For lyrics, see Roberta Martin Singers, "God Is Still on the Throne" and perhaps "God Specializes," *The Best of the Roberta Martin Singers* (Savoy Records, 1978). Future gospel singers being sexually abused as children is discussed in Bean, *I Was Born this Way*; Ward-Royster, *How I Got Over*; and Heilbut, "The Children and Their Secret Closet." For the sexual danger men could pose to youth gospel singers on the road, see Shirley Caesar, *The Lady, the Melody and the Word: The Inspirational Story of the First Lady of Gospel* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 9, 67-68; and Greg Kot, *I'll Take You There: Mavis Staples, The Staple Singers, and the March Up Freedom's Highway* (New York: Scribner, 2014), 95-96.

¹⁰⁰ Bean with Ritz, *I Was Born This Way*.

¹⁰¹ Daniel Wolff, *You Send Me: The Life and Times of Sam Cooke* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1995), 291; Bean, *I Was Born This Way*, 198.

¹⁰² Heilbut, "The Children and the Secret Closet," 42.

Jordan was probably the dominant black popular musician of the 1940s: his 110 weeks atop Billboard's various black singles charts was the most in the twentieth century, with Stevie Wonder a distant second at 72. He was also a key forerunner of soul music and rock n roll. Scholars have tended to focus on the "hidden transcript" of black labor defiance latent in Jordan's hepcat argot and vignettes of preying white surveillance, or on his entrepreneurial acumen.¹⁰³ Yet his songs indicate that what drove these economic concerns was black men's quest to build households on a foundation of heterosexual black love.

More than predecessors the Mills Brothers and the Ink Spots, or contemporaries Billy Eckstine and Chicago native Nat King Cole, Jordan transcended the romantic transience and "heterosexual conflict" of the blues¹⁰⁴ by creating a black male musical grammar of aspirational love rendered in a black vernacular, rather than in minstrel dialect or show tune cant. 1945's chart-topping "Caldonia Boogie" epitomized this flight from the minstrel and blues trappings of early twentieth century black popular music: as Jordan's acapella shouts of "Caldon-YA?!" leapt into mid-air over an extended break in the boogie-woogie rhythm, romantic love erupted through the kind of exaggerated, high-pitched vocal long used on the minstrel stage to represent blacks' futile attempts at mimicking authentic human expression. The R&B equivalent of how Charlie Parker's contemporaneous "Famous Alto Break" from "A Night in Tunisia" exemplified bebop's opening up new sonic and ideological vistas for jazz, this eruption shattered the minstrel mask famously evoked by Paul Laurence Dunbar, enabling later singers to proudly mash potato on its

¹⁰³ Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm & Blues* (New York: Penguin, 2003 [1988]), 19; George Lipsitz, *A Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 304-305; Green, *Selling the Race*, 68-69.

¹⁰⁴ Green, *Selling the Race*, 78; see also Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 201.

shards.¹⁰⁵ As demonstrated by R&B dynamo (and Rakim's aunt) Ruth Brown via her high-pitched squawking of the last syllable of "Mama" in her 1953 #1 hit "Mama He Treats Your Daughter Mean," such vocal gymnastics also increasingly portrayed romantic conflict in ways that signified empowerment—particularly of black women—rather than clowning, tragedy, sentimentalism, social disorganization, nihilism, pathology, or malevolence.

Jordan's oeuvre was deeply secularist, at least on its surface. In his one explicitly religion-themed recording from his Chicago period, a reviving of the old Bert Williams character "Deacon Jones," Jordan echoed the criticisms of black Chicago's clergy expressed by Gwendolyn Brooks in her 1945 poetry collection *A Street in Bronzeville* and recorded by St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton in their 1945 study *Black Metropolis*.¹⁰⁶ The recalcitrant foil of Jordan's usual male romantic leads, Deacon Jones threatened to cork the spirit of "Caldonia" and sustain minstrelsy's effacing of the black nuclear household by exploiting emotionally vulnerable women in the congregation for sex and money.¹⁰⁷

Deacon Jones complemented an even greater threat to black social fulfillment: the police. As classics such as the #1 hit "Ain't Nobody Here But Us Chickens" demonstrated, Jordan's music suggested that the formal and informal police state was determined to snuff out the potential of postwar black social life, including the postwar black family. On another #1, "Salt Pork, West Virginia"—a slyly militant revision of the antebellum fusion of sentimental depictions of separated black lovers with fantasies of black death in Stephen Foster's minstrel

¹⁰⁵ See for instance the Contours' "Do You Love Me," James Brown's "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" and "Licking Stick—Licking Stick," Tony Williams' percussive gasps in the breaks beginning the second and third verses of the Platters' "Only You," and the work of Little Richard.

¹⁰⁶ Gwendolyn Brooks, "obituary for a living lady," *Blacks* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1987), 34-35. For churches as a "racket," see St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993 [1945]), 419.

¹⁰⁷ Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five, "Deacon Jones."

staple “Oh! Susanna”—Jordan’s protagonist threatened, metaphorically at least, to “murder” a highway patrolman if the officer did not let him drive to Salt Pork so that he can be with his “baby.”¹⁰⁸ Jordan’s last two #1’s, “Saturday Night Fish Fry” and “Blue Light Boogie,” intimated that in the future, black social life might not be able to overcome, and might not be worth enduring, the police power overseeing its stubborn vibrancy.

However, Jordan’s 1949 song “Beans and Cornbread,” his third-to-last chart-topping single, suggested a different understanding of the role of religion in black culture and social life. Jordan biographer John Chilton described the song as a “wild gospel number,” and indeed it was one of several late 1940s and early 1950s R&B hits to employ a faux congregational atmosphere [etc] in a manner that helped pave the way for rock n roll.¹⁰⁹ The song also extended a black tradition of singing sociopolitical commentary through tales of pugilism and personified soul food—a tradition that included “King Joe,” a 1941 black Popular Front tribute to Joe Louis performed by Paul Robeson with the Count Basie Orchestra and written by Jordan’s fellow black Chicago luminary Richard Wright (“Black Eyed Peas ask Cornbread, ‘What makes you so strong?’ / Cornbread say ‘I come from where Joe Louis was born’”). The beginning of “Beans and Cornbread” urbanized an old black folk rhyme about a rooster and a chicken fighting in a pot of gumbo, to depict “Beans” and “Cornbread” fighting on a corner.¹¹⁰

Beans and Cornbread had a fight, Beans knocked Cornbread out of sight
Cornbread said ‘Now that’s alright, meet me on the corner tomorrow night’

In the fight, Beans knocks Cornbread down, but then offers to help Cornbread up, saying “Get up, man, you know that we go hand in hand,” prompting a choral refrain of “Beans and

¹⁰⁸ For “Oh! Susanna,” see Eric Lott, *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 203-204, 189-190.

¹⁰⁹ Chilton

¹¹⁰ Mel Watkins, ed., *African American Humor: The Best Black Comedy from Slavery to Today* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2002), 20.

Cornbread, Beans and Cornbread hand in hand.” Jordan then launched into a sermonette about how Beans and Cornbread should “stick together like” sundry other well-known food pairings [list a couple], complete with call and response from the band-turned-congregation. Thus while police figured prominently in Jordan’s songs as a meddling, oppressive force, when Jordan depicted a corner street fight, he did not mention the police at all, and instead had the fighters themselves stop fighting and go “hand in hand.” Contextualizing “Beans and Cornbread” within his body of work therefore suggests that the police were not the preferred way to resolve street corner violence.

Understanding the queer religious impetus of this implication requires focusing on Jordan’s inspiration for the sermon: Rev. Clarence H. Cobb, pastor of the First Church of Deliverance. Founded by Cobb in 1929, by the mid-1940s First Church of Deliverance was one of the most prominent churches in Black Chicago, and Cobb one of Black Chicago’s most influential residents. While in many respects Pentecostal in practice, as a Spiritualist church, First Church placed increased emphasis on divine healing, religious iconography such as candles and sacred objects, and communication with the spirit world through séances and mediums.¹¹¹ First Church was also a center of gospel music: in 1939 it became the first church to use a Hammond B-3 organ, which became a fixture of gospel music nationally; it housed a renowned gospel choir; and Cobb was a gospel songwriter himself. Cobb’s minister of music, Kenneth Morris, also co-ran one of the preeminent postwar gospel publishing companies, the Martin & Morris Publishing Company, with Chicago gospel pioneer Sallie Martin (no relation to, but early collaborator with, Roberta Martin).¹¹² Cobb, along with much of his staff and choir, was widely

¹¹¹ Wallace D. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 41.

¹¹² For Morris, see Reagon, ed., *We’ll Understand It Better By and By*, 309-342.

thought to be gay, and in the 1930s and 1940s, people would walk from First Church of Deliverance to one of the nearby predominantly gay nightspots after his Sunday night broadcast ended at midnight.¹¹³ Historian Wallace Best states that many young men from the South “drew little distinction between what occurred in First Church of Deliverance and what took place in the local gay clubs.”¹¹⁴ Rumors about Cobb’s sexuality also stemmed from the vacations he took with his male secretary, R. Edward Bolden.¹¹⁵

Louis Jordan adapted the key line of his “Beans and Cornbread” sermonette from Cobb’s signature line in the monologue he used to introduce each of his popular radio broadcast sermons. In the only sermonette lyric that departed from the list of food pairings, Jordan declared, “Beans told Cornbread, ‘It don’t matter what you think about me. But it make a whole lotta difference, what I think about you.’” Over the background of his choir singing First Church’s theme song, “Jesus Is the Light of the World,” Cobb would say some variation of the following in the opening monologue, as rendered by Drake and Cayton: ““You in the taverns tonight; you on the dance floor; you in the poolrooms and policy stations; you on your bed of affliction—Jesus loves you all, and Reverend Cobb is thinking about you, and loves every one of you. It doesn’t matter what you think about me, but it matters a lot what I think about you.””¹¹⁶ As the monologue indicated, Cobb did not demonize the policy racket or alcohol, and his congregation included respectable and disreputable people drawn from all classes. This intimated that he did not see the law as determinative of who should attend his church.

¹¹³ Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 188.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Tristan Cabello, “Queer Bronzeville”

¹¹⁶ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 646.

Cobb invoked this formulation when the Chicago Crime Commission investigated rumors of his homosexuality in 1939.¹¹⁷ The investigation was launched a year after Illinois became the first state to pass a “valid” “criminal sexual psychopath” law to punish the “atrocious sex crimes in Chicago,” and amidst a local racism-tinged wave of anti-sodomy medical journal publications, legislation, and court rulings.¹¹⁸ With many listeners expecting his radio show to be taken off the air, Cobb began his monologue, perhaps sensing that the “Six sleuths” reportedly on his “trail” were lurking in the pews below: “‘I welcome you all—friends and enemies alike,’ he declared, ‘and regardless of what you feel was the reason of your coming, I love you. I love you because I know God sent you here tonight. That is really why you’re present!’”¹¹⁹ He continued, “‘And remember, it matters not to me what others choose to say about you. The only thing with which your Reverend Cobbs is concerned is that which he himself knows about you; and on that alone I judge you and am with you to the end!’”¹²⁰ In the spirit of Maria Stewart and of gospel music’s portrayal of women disciples, and most closely, anticipating John Grimes’ statement to Elisha at the end of Baldwin’s *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Cobb posited that recognition from the state or civil society did not determine whether one could be an apostle for Jesus. Thus, if much of Jordan’s oeuvre argued that the police power imperiled the ability of heteronormative black social life to facilitate black progress, “Beans and Cornbread” suggested that Chicago’s black queer religious life disseminated a formulation that both revealed the police power’s

¹¹⁷ “Radio Pastor Sues Defender for \$250,000: Says ‘Virtue and Integrity Were Injured,’” *Chicago Defender*, Dec. 9, 1939: 9.

¹¹⁸ Newton Minow, *The Illinois Proposal to Confine Sexually Dangerous Persons*, 40 *J. Crim. L. & Criminology* 186 (1949-1950); William H. Hanes, Harry R. Hoffman, and Robert A. Messer, “Commitments Under the Criminal Sexual Psychopath Law in the Criminal Court of Cook County, Illinois,” *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 5, Issue 6, Dec. 1948: 420-425: 420; John Kercher, “Sex Crimes,” *Illinois Medical Journal*, 73:171-172 (Feb. 1938); George Painter, “The Sensibilities of Our Forefathers: The History of Sodomy Laws in the United States: Illinois,” <http://www.glapn.org/sodomylaws/sensibilities/illinois.htm#fn26>, accessed 10.19.2016.

¹¹⁹ David H. Orro, “Six Sleuths Put On Trail Of Shocking Rumors In Rev. Cobbs ‘Scandal,’” *Chicago Defender*, Dec. 2, 1939: 12.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

incongruence with the love and judgment of God, and pointed toward an adjudication of violence that was not based on that power.

Cobb's approach to youth violence in the 1960s indicated that "Beans and Cornbread" reflected the values of his youth outreach. In July 1964, about three weeks after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, Cobb was one of "30 clergymen of all races and creeds" who met with police officers to discuss crime and racial violence.¹²¹ Some of the black pastors in attendance were allies of Martin Luther King, and Cobb was one of the Chicago pastors whom King thought he could trust.¹²² At the meeting, Rev. Archibald Carey, Jr., probably King's closest friend among Black Chicago clergy, feared that "the cause of civil rights is being undone by hooliganism. The summer is half over but we're still sitting on a powder keg."¹²³ The desegregation of local public accommodations and the rapid transition of much of the South Side from predominantly white to predominantly black had sparked violent interactions between gangs of whites and blacks.¹²⁴ In this heated moment, most of the black pastors present saw clergy's societal role as an extension of law enforcement, and advocated for strict law and order policies to suppress racial violence.¹²⁵ One King-allied pastor, storefront Baptist Rev. John W. Hunter, stated approvingly that "nightsticks and tear gas can break up any mob," even though he was often a leading organizer against police brutality.¹²⁶ In fact, a month after the meeting, an episode of police brutality would spark a riot in Black Chicago, as they did in several other cities that summer.

¹²¹ Lillian S. Calhoun, "Police and Clergy Meet, See Hope for Chicago," *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 28, 1964: 3, 8.

¹²² Martin Luther King, Jr. to Chicago Clergy, November 20, 1961. Martin Luther King, Jr. Collection, Box 107, Folder 4, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.

¹²³ Calhoun, "Police and Clergy Meet, See Hope for Chicago."

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

But at the meeting, Cobb “took issue with” such rhetoric, and stated that ““We must learn to draw youth in and develop their friendship. If we become hostile, we’re wrong, too. We must be partners to the children and partners with the police.””¹²⁷ Like “Beans and Cornbread,” Cobb suggested that the corner would not be redeemed by a punitive disposition reflecting the law’s hostility toward the youth, but rather by developing “friendship.” Cobb was not hostile to law enforcement per se. However, considering his comments in light of his reputation for accepting those afoul of the law into his church, as well as his own history with the criminal justice system, suggests that he did not see law as equivalent to justice. Law’s hostility to the most precarious people in the black community could sabotage the opportunity to develop the “friendship” in Jesus that could stem violence.

IV. Sit Down, Children

Chicago gospel thus not only envisioned the cessation of violence, but also assisted in trying to make that cessation present in the world. Much of the gospel community did not spread the gospel as a way of assimilating black people to respectable or legal norms—as we have seen, the community often lived in violation of those norms. Carl Bean observed that “The straight boys who play around with girls, and make babies, and break their mother’s hearts, they live in the streets. The well-behaved boys, the sensitive, quiet kids, the ones we now call nerds and sissies, they’ve always landed in church.”¹²⁸ Bean’s distinction between “straight” and “nerds and sissies” was not primarily about sexuality, but rather an alternative disposition: “well-behaved,” “sensitive,” “quiet.”

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Quoted in Heilbut, “The Children and Their Secret Closet,” 8.

Bean's statement is limited in terms of its focus on "boys." Additionally, as Chicago soul pioneer Etta James noted while recalling a party at which Alex Bradford and Little Richard were present, "when it came to partying, the gospel gang could swing all night long"; thus, gospel's quietness often did not prohibit partying with street-savvy soul rebels like James, and many singers straddled both groups.¹²⁹ Indeed, in 1954 Louis Jordan headlined what the *Chicago Defender* described as an "entirely 'Broadway'" fundraising "party" for the opening of Cobb's church's nursery in front of 4,000 concertgoers at the South Side's Trianon Ballroom, showing how partying could work in the service of cultivating quiet.¹³⁰

Like Cobb at the clergy summit with police, the Helen Robinson Youth Chorus showed how gospel's emphasis on quiet could promote an alternative disposition to that advocated by civil rights reformers even while aligning itself with the movement. Its story was characteristic of the antinomies of the emergence of the urban crisis in black Chicago. In 1933, 18-year-old Robinson migrated from New Orleans to Chicago after her brother Roy Evans, a railroad employee and jazz musician, bought her a train ticket.¹³¹ Within a year, she married Robert Robinson from the nearby suburb of Evanston, and the couple moved into a two-story South Side apartment on 3232 South Wentworth Ave, converting the first floor into a grocery store. Helen Robinson soon became active in her new community, which was on the western edge of Bronzeville's racial boundary. As president of the Daniel Webster Elementary School PTA, she presided over the PTA's fleeting integration as the school steadily transitioned from white to black.¹³² Tragically, her husband died in 1946; reflecting on the time decades later, she said that

¹²⁹ Etta James with David Ritz, *Rage to Survive: The Etta James Story* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 76.

¹³⁰ "Louis Jordan Plays Church Benefit, Hits," *Chicago Defender*, Nov. 13 1954, p.7; "Louis Jordan Packs Trianon for First Church Nursery Fete," *Chicago Defender*, Nov. 20, 1954, p.6.

¹³¹ Youngers; She Cared

¹³² She cared; Michael W. Homel, *Down from Equality: Black Chicagoans and the Public Schools, 1920-1941* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 36.

“I took sick feeling sorry for myself,” but realized that she had to “be both mother and father to” their seven small children.¹³³ She was intermittently on welfare during this period, but resisted threats that her aid would be cut off if she didn’t take the children out of school and put them to work: “[S]ometimes my children had to go to school with holes in their shoes and no breakfast, but they stayed in school.”¹³⁴ The experience stoked in her an even deeper solidarity with other neighborhood mothers. In 1949 she formed a chorus of mothers from the Webster School PTA; after school, the chorus gained popularity singing “from church to church; not for money, just to keep those mothers from sitting at home feeling sorry for themselves.”¹³⁵

Expanding on this initiative, two years later she started the Helen Robinson Youth Choir (originally the Junior Robinson Chorus) with her seven children and twenty “neighborhood” children; the choir would at times reach 100 members with, according to the *Chicago Defender*, the goal of using Jesus to combat juvenile delinquency.^{136 137} (However, this was oriented by quiet, not uplift.) Such concerns intensified as the community faced mounting crises. Webster closed in 1960 as much of the neighborhood was razed to make room for the 14-lane Dan Ryan Expressway and the ever-expanding row of public housing behemoths, constructed to stockade tens of thousands of incoming poor black migrants, paralleling the Dan Ryan along State Street.¹³⁸ Together, these structures constituted an imposing spatial, psychological, and economic barrier separating Black Chicago from the rest of the city.¹³⁹

¹³³ She Cared; Youngsters

¹³⁴ She Cared

¹³⁵ She Cared

¹³⁶ “32-Voice Group to Sing at ‘Gospel of Freedom,’” *Chicago Defender*, Oct. 2, 1962, p.10.

¹³⁷ Ibid; Bob Hunter, “Youth Chorus Begun With Neighborhood Youngsters Wins National Fame,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, January 3, 1963, p. 16.

¹³⁸ Adam Cohen and Elizabeth Taylor, *American Pharaoh: Mayor Richard J. Daley: His Battle for Chicago and the Nation* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2000), 189.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 189-190.

Yet in the midst of this upheaval, the Helen Robinson Youth Choir rose to prominence in Chicago's gospel circuit with support from local stalwarts such as Albertina Walker of the Caravans, Evelyn Gay of the Gay Sisters, and James Cleveland, who produced the group's first single in 1955.¹⁴⁰ The choir often featured older sacred songs reworked to be made relevant to the struggles of ghettoized black children. One of its most popular songs was 1959's "Sit Down, Children," a cover of a 1957 hit by the Gospelairees of Dayton that the Choir used to address the social isolation of children in black Chicago. In a call-and-response format, the Choir intoned variations of "Sit down, wooh sit down," as its lead singer, Helen Robinson's daughter Jeanette, sang:

Sit down, children
I know you had a hard time
I know you had to pray sometimes
You better sit down, you better rest a little while

I know you come a long way
I know you had to pray sometimes
I know you had to moan, child
I know you had to lie awake at night
Know you are motherless
Didn't have a father
You better sit down, you better rest a little while.

Well I know you been 'buked, and I know you been scorned
And I know you had to give up the right for the wrong
And when your friends are talkin' on every side
You don't have to worry, and if God you are there
Know you are weak, but God is strong
He holds the power, the right from the wrong
Said if you keep walking up the narrow way
One of these mornings you're gonna hear him say
You better sit down, sit down, sit down, sit down, sit down, sit down
Jesus said
You better rest a little while.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Hilliard J. McFall, "Helen Robinson Youth Choir Among Top Gospel Singers in Nation," *Chicago Defender*, April 14, 1962, p.21; "Birthday Musical," *Chicago Daily Defender*, June 5, 1963, p.14; "Choir, Singers Plan Musical," *Chicago Daily Defender*, May 5, 1959, p.A15; Marovich, *A City Called Heaven*, 268.

¹⁴¹ Helen Robinson Youth Choir, "Sit Down, Children," *Golden Age Gospel Choirs* (Specialty, 1997).

On October 21, 1962, the Choir performed at the SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) fundraiser “Gospel for Freedom” at McCormick Place along with several other acts, including the Caravans, James Cleveland (who had written, sung and played piano on a Caravans song that had become a movement anthem, “We Are Soldiers in the Army”), the Highway QCs (which functioned as a minor league of sorts for the Soul Stirrers and had produced Sam Cooke), and SNCC’s Freedom Chorus.¹⁴² Additionally, SNCC was to present James Meredith, who integrated the University of Mississippi that fall, with a “Freedom Fighter Award” in absentia.¹⁴³

In an atmosphere thick with the movement, the Robinson Choir likely performed “Sit Down, Children” at the fundraiser. As a large youth group, the Choir could ideally represent Black Chicago youth’s identification with their counterparts organizing and demonstrating in the South. Thus despite the Choir being much less famous than some of the other participants, the *Chicago Defender* advertised its participation more than any other act, even printing a promotional photo of Roswell Spencer, white Democratic candidate for Cook County Sheriff, buying a concert ticket from a smiling Jeanette Robinson.¹⁴⁴ Additionally, the student sit-ins were often described as “sit-down” protests, making “Sit Down, Children” a natural anthem.¹⁴⁵ On April 2, 1960, two months after the seminal Greensboro, North Carolina sit-in, the *Baltimore Afro-American* used the song name to title an article supporting the burgeoning movement.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² “Gospel for Freedom Set for McCormick Place Concert,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, Oct. 18, 1962, p.18; “The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee presents Gospel for Freedom,” Display Ad. No. 47, *Chicago Defender*, Oct, 6, 1962, p. 10.

¹⁴³ “Student Unit to Honor Meredith at Freedom Rally,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, Oct. 10, 1962, p. 6.

¹⁴⁴ Photo of Jeanette Robinson, Carl Proctor, and Roswell T. Spencer, Standalone 11—No Title, *Chicago Daily Defender*, Oct. 16, 1962, p.17.

¹⁴⁵ See for example “A&T Student College Senior Explains Current Sit-Down Strike,” *Guildfordian*, May 10, 1960 [page unknown]; “16 Negro Students Stage ‘Sit Down’ in White School,” *New York Amsterdam News*, April 7, 1956, p. 25.

¹⁴⁶ Daniel W. Collins, “Sit Down, Children,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 2, 1960, p.4.

The Greensboro epiphany quickly led to the adaptation of “Sit Down, Children” into a freedom song, with new movement-oriented lyrics such as “Sit down, children, sit down / in every Jim Crow state and town.”¹⁴⁷ But this modification demonstrated how politicizing the sacred necessitated narrowing the scope of God’s justice as envisaged in gospel music to focus on the more immediate legal goals of the civil rights movement (as opposed to the movement’s more far-reaching aspirations and inspirations). The original “Sit Down, Children” signified the resonance of the sit-in movement with the black sacred music and sacred social movement traditions. With its invocation of the “motherless” and those who “didn’t have a father,” “Sit Down, Children” echoed what Du Bois in *Black Reconstruction* conceived of as the religious impetus behind the black worker’s general strike from slave labor: the struggle to remake earthly law in the image of God’s eternal kingdom in which the motherless and fatherless find adoption.¹⁴⁸

Furthermore, the song derived from “Sit Down, Servant,” a spiritual rooted in one of Afro-Protestantism’s core biblical passages, Matthew 11:28-29: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” The link of the rest of heavy laden laborers with liberation imagined by spirituals such as “Sit Down, Servant” provided the best support for Du Bois’ portrayal of the spirituals as “gospel” songs sounding the black

¹⁴⁷ Betty Sanders, “Sit Down, Children,” *Sing Out!* Vol. 10, No.2, April-May 1960, p. 25.

¹⁴⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1998 [1935]), 124. This reading is based on considering Du Bois’ allusion here to Paul’s invocation of the move from the spirit of bondage to the Spirit of adoption in Romans 8:15-17, in relation to *The Souls of Black Folk*’s depiction of the “wretched” as “fatherless and un-mothered.” All three of these passages stem from Psalm 68:5-6: “A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation. God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound in chains.”

worker's general strike. Thus, "Sit Down, Children" lent credence to the notion that sit-ins and other nonviolent activism heralded the second Reconstruction Du Bois had hoped for.

But the freedom song version of "Sit Down, Children" shows how, rather than simply "politicizing" sacred music in a manner that broadened its concept of freedom, freedom songs curated sacred meanings in ways that could constrict in one paradigm (urban crisis) as they expanded in another (desegregation). To the extent that this was a political necessity, it revealed the black freedom struggle as less a conventional march from slavery to freedom, or an arc bending toward justice, than a guerilla struggle in which using limited resources to secure one area left others vulnerable. The freedom song version emphasized that "rest" happened when one engaged in desegregating places barred to blacks. However, years after fighting a losing battle for integration at the recently closed Webster School, Helen Robinson's focus on combating social isolation in the increasingly hypersegregated South Side aligned with Kierkegaard's observation in his meditation on Matthew 11:28 that Jesus is indicating "I am that rest, or, to abide with me is rest."¹⁴⁹ Thus, rest in Jesus was not a location one had to travel to¹⁵⁰ or desegregate. Furthermore, Jeanette Robinson promoted the SNCC concert with a Sheriff candidate representing a local Democratic Party that professed opposition to Southern Jim Crow as it simultaneously transformed her childhood neighborhood into what historian Arnold Hirsch has called "the second ghetto," a party that wielded an early version of "welfare-to-work" as a cudgel against her education and her "fatherless" family.¹⁵¹ A decade after "Gospel for Freedom," Helen Robinson's connection to SNCC continued to show how the spaces the sit-ins

¹⁴⁹ Soren Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, trans. Walter Lowrie, D.D. (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 9.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 11.

¹⁵¹ Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*; for welfare as social control in the postwar North, see Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare: Updated Edition* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); and Lisa Levenstein, *A Movement without Marches: African American Women and the Politics of Poverty in Postwar Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

opened to blacks seemed paralleled by the growing precarity of black spaces of rest. In 1972, SNCC veteran and Georgia legislator Julian Bond came to a fundraiser aimed at saving the cash-strapped Helen Robinson Library, a community library Robinson ran to provide children with books on black history.¹⁵²

V. Jail

The temporal difference between the freedom song and gospel versions of “Sit Down, Children” evinced the greatest difficulty in reconciling Chicago gospel and the civil rights movement. To sit-in at a lunch counter was a comparably brief action; to sit down and rest in Jesus was to be a lifelong disposition, in preparation for an eternal one. Understanding the sociopolitical importance of the contrast requires examining how gospel and the civil rights movement differently perceived the location that both sit-in protestors and, according to the *Chicago Defender’s* logic, those children who did not rest in Jesus often spent time: the jail. The Five Blind Boys of Mississippi, who relocated to Chicago to further develop the emerging ‘hard’ gospel style in its mecca, lend insight into the gospel view of jail in their version of “That Awful Hour.” Lead singer Archie Brownlee sang “you may never go to prison, you may never go to jail, but you’re gonna need somebody to go your bail,” indicating that remaining respectable and avoiding incarceration didn’t make one’s soul better than a jailed person’s to Jesus. The great equalizer between the incarcerated and those on the outside was eternity; all people regardless of carceral status needed Jesus to bail out their souls.

¹⁵² CD

In the song's next line, Brownlee, an Ur-voice of soul who adumbrated Ray Charles, Little Richard, and James Brown, reprised the penultimate lyric from the Blind Boys' hit gospel setting of the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father," to lay out what could be read as a rationale for the relationship between black protest, melismatic singing, and the sacred: "when your voice cannot be heard, you gonna wanna stretch out on God's word." It seems fitting, then, that this phraseology on jail entered the civil rights movement. The popular freedom song "Get on Board, Children," based on the Negro spiritual "Gospel Train," contained the couplet, "as fighters we're aware of the fact that we may go to jail / but when you fight for freedom, the Lord will go your bail."¹⁵³ On one hand, this religious identification with prisoners had been nurtured by postwar gospel's moving Paul and Silas and the Hebrew children in the fiery furnace nearer to the front rank of black sacred music's biblical heroes, and was now being expressed through adapted gospel phraseology. The civil rights movement's call to "fill the jails" was one of its most novel aspects, exploding conceptions of black college student respectability and leading to philosophically and politically fertile episodes of civil rights activists and other prisoners searching out community while behind bars.

And yet, the freedom song's use of "but" signified a larger rhetorical tendency of the movement to distinguish between those imprisoned for freedom fighting and those imprisoned for other reasons. Whereas the Blind Boys' song viewed the jail through the universal need to reckon with the eternal, the civil rights movement suggested that activists operated in a different temporality than other prisoners. Martin Luther King's writings and speeches during the

¹⁵³ Willie Peacock, "Get On Board, Children," on Various Artists, *Voices of the Civil Rights Movement*. Interestingly, the adaptation of SNCC workers Charles Block and Willie Peacock's version that was published in a prominent book of freedom songs during the civil rights movement secularized their lyric in a way that altered its meaning: see Candie Carawan and Guy Carawan, *Sing for Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement Through Its Songs* (Montgomery, AL: NewSouth Books, 2007), 76.

Birmingham campaign show how this was rooted in a moral and political distinction.

Throughout the campaign, Martin Luther King, Jr. contrasted “political prisoners” with those in jail for “robbery” or “gettin’ drunk.”¹⁵⁴ This served a strategic purpose in part: he used such a distinction in his famous “Letter from Birmingham Jail” to convince white moderates of the moral righteousness of breaking unjust laws, and he used it in mass meetings during the “Children’s Crusade” to reassure worried parents of the hundreds of jailed elementary- and high school student protestors that their children would not be treated like common criminals and would be protected by the Kennedy Administration.¹⁵⁵

Still, King’s rhetoric was not only pragmatic; it was rooted in black progressive Christian reflection, particularly that of Howard Thurman. In the “Letter,” King seems to have paraphrased Howard Thurman’s discussion of the Gospel of Luke passage depicting Jesus’ interaction with the two “malefactors” being crucified next to him, from Thurman’s 1950 book *Deep is the Hunger: Meditations for Apostles of Sensitiveness*.¹⁵⁶ Reprising Thurman’s notion that to follow Jesus’ example was to overcome environmental trappings, King observed (now paraphrasing Thurman) that while the two were “extremists for immorality, and thus fell below [their] environment,” Jesus was an “extremist for love, truth and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment.”¹⁵⁷ By contrast, gospel songs tended to identify with the man crucified next to Jesus in Luke who states that he, unlike Jesus, has been rightly condemned and asks Jesus, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom” (Luke 23:42). James Cleveland

¹⁵⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.,” on Various Artists, *Sing for Freedom*.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid; Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” 431-445: 435, 437-438; Martin Luther King, Jr., “Speech at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church,” in *“We Want Our Freedom”: Rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. W. Stuart Towns (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 147-151: 150.

¹⁵⁶ Thurman, *Deep is the Hunger*, 31. For King’s paraphrasing of and borrowing from other preachers, see Keith D. Miller, *Voice of Deliverance: The Language of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Its Sources* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

¹⁵⁷ King, “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” 440.

powerfully set this passage in a song titled “Lord, Remember Me,” a phrase abounding in the black sacred tradition (Cleveland also adlibs, “Lord, I’m a motherless child”). Like the Blind Boys, by considering the afterlife, Cleveland and others did not portray incarceration as temporally distinct from being on the outside. Indeed, Cleveland’s depiction of the condemned man was interchangeable with Sam Cooke’s depiction of the Hebrew children in the fiery furnace—ethically righteous faithful prisoners—on the Soul Stirrers’ “Lord Remember Me.” Cooke’s own sympathetic portrayal of prisoners on his post-Soul Stirrers 1960 soul classic “Chain Gang,” did not comment on whether their imprisonment was just, and thus aligned with Cleveland’s portrait of the faithful condemned man.

Civil rights religion’s depiction of the temporality of the jail was rooted in their personal experience of it. Activists could emphasize overcoming incarceration because they were usually not jailed for a protracted time, or given long sentences. In a manner related to the notion of the modern prison as a redemptive space, activists could see jail as a rite of passage from dawning oppositional consciousness to firm commitment to the movement.¹⁵⁸ They sang freedom songs, discussed plans and philosophies with each other and other prisoners, endured all manner of brutalities and privations, and even at times even defied racist guards. They thereby, King proclaimed in an echo of Thurman on shame, “transformed jails and prisons from dungeons of shame to havens of freedom and justice.”¹⁵⁹ However, as prison activism scholar Dan Berger states, “this counterfactual embrace of the jail was premised in part on the leniency, at least in terms of sentencing guidelines, for multiple misdemeanor arrests at the time.”¹⁶⁰ Thus even for

¹⁵⁸ Caleb Smith, *The Prison and the American Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); Dan Berger, *Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 36.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 41.

those activists who followed the “Jail, No Bail” philosophy and determined to serve out their sentences, “the Lord” went to freedom fighters’ “bail” because the state handed out relatively light penalties for civil disobedience.¹⁶¹

These different temporalities bring to mind the distinction that Sidney Poitiers’ character Virgil Tibbs makes in the classic 1967 film *In the Heat of the Night*, between “white time in jail, and colored time. The worst you can do is colored time.”¹⁶² Black studies theorist Jared Sexton defines this colored time as “interminable, perhaps even incalculable, stalled time.”¹⁶³ In the “Letter,” King critiqued the “white moderate” who disapproved of “direct action” and “paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and constantly advises the Negro to wait for a ‘more convenient season.’”¹⁶⁴ This appears to have resonated with Walter Benjamin’s notion of the temporality of inexorable progress as a mythical time that obfuscated generations of the oppressed, a time which only a messianic eruption could interrupt in a manner that could redeem the oppressed of the present and the past.¹⁶⁵ Like Benjamin, King seemed to argue that every time is potentially the “now-time” into which the Messiah might enter. However, King’s stating that the Kennedy Justice Department’s “big fish” would protect jailed Birmingham protestors, and the manner in which “Get on Board, Children” understood relatively lenient punishment for civil disobedience as the Lord coming to activists’ bail, suggest that the civil rights movement was not a messianic eruption that could redeem those serving “colored time”, but rather was an ardent cooptation of

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² *In the Heat of the Night*, 1967.

¹⁶³ Jared A. Sexton, “The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-pessimism and black optimism,” *InTensions*, Issue 5 (Fall/Winter 2011), 4.

¹⁶⁴ King, “Letter from Birmingham Jail.”

¹⁶⁵ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 253-264.

Tibbsian “white time.” As the movement’s own rhetoric suggested, one could not use “white time” to redeem those doing “colored time.” Colored time was condemned time, damned time, time beyond the redemptive possibilities of a Second Emancipation because it was consistent with the Thirteenth Amendment: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, *except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted*, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”¹⁶⁶ [Italics mine]

In a turn away from much black popular culture up to Sam Cooke’s “Chain Gang,” the civil rights movement’s conception of the jail begat an era in which even black popular culture’s most trenchant critiques of the carceral state, such as James Baldwin’s 1974 novel *If Beale Street Could Talk* and Public Enemy’s 1988 song “Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos,” tended to legitimate their perspectives by grounding them in the exceptional moral innocence of the imprisoned protagonist.¹⁶⁷ But through Black Chicago novelist and essayist Leon Forrest, the civil rights-era Black Chicago gospel tradition continued to challenge this idea. Born in 1937, as a boy Forrest attended Pilgrim Baptist Church with his father, who was a member of the church choir and director of the junior choir.¹⁶⁸ Thus, his father worked under Thomas Dorsey, Pilgrim’s Minister of Music; probably directed James Cleveland, a member of the junior choir as a boy; and also would have worked with Roberta Martin, junior choir pianist and a mentor of Cleveland’s. Like Cleveland’s, and like Chicago gospel’s more broadly, Forrest’s understanding of the relationship between the eternal and the worldly resulted in a conception of redemption did not align perfectly with, and indeed shone light on the limits of, celebrated notions of progressive political action.

¹⁶⁶ Thirteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

¹⁶⁷ James Baldwin, *If Beale Street Could Talk* (New York: Vintage, 2006 [1974]), Public Enemy, “Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos,” *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (Def Jam, 1988).

¹⁶⁸ Cite.

Forrest's 1983 novel *Two Wings to Veil My Face* demonstrated how Pilgrim's gospel tradition made this connection between the spiritual and the political outside of conventional conceptions of movement. Forrest named the book after a common biblically-derived black gospel lyric set most famously in James Cleveland's canonical 1964 song "Two Wings":

Give me two wings to veil my face
Two wings to veil my feet
Two wings to fly away
And the world can't do me no harm.

The lyric seems to epitomize the shame, resignation, and otherworldly escapism often ascribed to gospel music. But Forrest weaved variations of the lyric throughout his novel in a way that forwarded a perspective aligned with Cleveland's in "Lord Remember Me." Grand-Momma Sweetie Reed tells her husband Jericho Witherspoon, an escaped slave who became a prototypical 'Race Man' lawyer, "I used to tell you that all those security locks and jail cells you stole through to free up falsely accused folk wouldn't pick nothing clean, or bolt up nothing in the final go-round, if they and you didn't have the spirit stuck to your ribs."¹⁶⁹ The novel throughout indicated that a main reason for Jericho's dismissal of Sweetie Reed's faith was that "despite all the good Jerry did in His world, he was about to drown looking at his own self in the pool of his good deeds."¹⁷⁰ Jericho's self-regard was fueled by his sense that his activism was righteous because he focused on those jailed under false pretenses, and thus those who should have remained free under a just application of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments. Thus, his denigration of the eternal, the "final go-round," obscured the limitations of his activism resulting from his acceptance of the terms of emancipation bequeathed to the slave. Ultimately,

¹⁶⁹ Leon Forrest, *Two Wings to Veil My Face* (New York: Random House, 1983), 36.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 14.

despite his accomplishments, his hubris contributed to his demise at the hands of white supremacy.

VI. Jubilee

The music of the Caravans indicated that reconciling the ideal of black freedom with that of eternal salvation, rather than attempting to transcend the eternal with political action or secular social progress, would constitute a Jubilee. A century earlier, slaves envisioned emancipation as Jubilee. Studies of the 1860s suggest that for the masses of freedpeople, Jubilee entailed notions of familial, communal, economic and agricultural autonomy at odds with the attempts of Northern capitalists, Southern planters, Radical Republicans, and even militant black abolitionists such as Martin R. Delany to convert ex-slaves into productive wage laborers for capitalism.¹⁷¹ Thus, Jubilee was inconsistent with what Saidiya Hartman has called the “the debt of emancipation,” Reconstruction’s fashioning the freed black subject into a wage-laboring “man” ensnared by coercive forms of economic debt, as well as by affective debt: indebtedness to the white Union sacrifice on his behalf, and even to the benevolent institution of slavery that had provided for him in the past.¹⁷² Consonant with earlier generations, the Caravans sang a conception of Jubilee that critiqued attempts to integrate a rising post-World War II black middle class into the mainstream of postwar economic life, attempts often reminiscent of the problems plaguing Reconstruction. Locating the Caravans’ music and Bible interpretation in early 1960s

¹⁷¹ See especially Julie Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Laborer in South Carolina, 1860-1870* (Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne, Australia: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Delany; Holt, *The Problem of Freedom and perhaps Black over White*; other stuff

¹⁷² Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 130-163.

black Chicago shows that for them, Jubilee was, as it was for Jesus, the elimination of debt.¹⁷³ Therefore, it was a cancellation of the terms of freedom handed to the slave and subsequently, the Black Chicago homebuyer.

The Caravans' particular emphasis on eliminating debt was a departure from the prophetic conception of biblical social justice, i.e., the Hebrew prophets' argument that leaders are supposed to provide for the fatherless, the widow, the poor and the stranger. Following a line of black thought stretching back at least as far as David Walker and Maria Stewart's generation, Black Chicago churches influenced by the Social Gospel interpreted tithing as a way to practice the prophetic social justice that white supremacy denied to black people. While, generally, in biblical scholar Pieter Verhoef's words, "from the legislation in Deuteronomy it is clear that the recipients of the tithes were the people themselves," Deuteronomy 14:28-29 states that every third year, the tithe was to be used to help "the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates."¹⁷⁴ But in order to engage in such social justice praxis, ideally churches had to first overcome burdensome financial obligations, particularly the debts incurred in purchasing, constructing, and/or renovating church edifices.

This overcoming could be rendered in emancipationist terms. Citing biblical examples of tithing as models of giving to the church, Pilgrim Baptist Church interpreted its emancipation from "the shackles of debt" as a call to "tackle the big issues of our faith," which meant "(b)uilding a haven for the outcast...providing a home for the aged, unguided youth, and the wayfarers," categories corresponding to Deuteronomy's Levite, widows, fatherless, and

¹⁷³ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 60-75. For Jesus, see especially the Lord's Prayer (the Our Father): "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 303-304.

stranger.¹⁷⁵ Cosmopolitan Community Church pastor Mary Evans' use of Malachi 3:10—which was often used in relation to tithing and collecting offerings—tied her church's much-lauded tithing, which helped her pay off the debt on her building, to a “social action program” epitomized by a Community Center that Cosmopolitan built in 1949. Hailed by the *Defender* as “What a Woman, Faith and Tithing Did in Chicago,” the Center provided free children's programs and facilities, and its five free clinics helped fight the effects of health care segregation.¹⁷⁶ In 1960, Greater Bethesda Baptist Church argued that tithing was not a “remnant of out-grown legalism,” nor a “substitute for ‘justice, mercy and faith,’” but was a “constant barrier to selfishness and greed” and thus imitative of God's eternal steadfastness: “Since God's mercies are constant and unfailing, our response should be of the same nature in proportion to our ability.”¹⁷⁷ Tithing accounted for about 1/4th of Greater Bethesda's \$95,000 budget, and helped the church run a free ambulance service out of a 1953 Cadillac Ambulance with a full-time registered nurse.¹⁷⁸

As Greater Bethesda indicated, churches' ability to overcome debt relied upon having a core of congregants whose financial stability enabled them to give substantial sums of money. Pilgrim argued that its congregants should “view giving not simply as a duty and debt but as a privilege and delight.”¹⁷⁹ It is here where, in their 1961 song “Hold to God's Unchanging Hand,” the Caravans used the perceived messianism of the Hebrew Scriptures to intervene in the church

¹⁷⁵ “God's Example of Love Is Giving” and “Pilgrim.....What Now?” in J.C. Austin, *Pilgrim Baptist Church Achievement Celebration*, 1939. Charles L. Blockson Afro-American History Collection, Temple University.

¹⁷⁶ *Cosmopolitan Community Herald*, Vol. VI, No. 47, November 21, 1937, St. Clair Drake Papers, Box 57, Folder 11. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. For Cosmopolitan's tithing and Evans' NAACP organizing, see Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 150 and 167-168, respectively. For the Center, see “What a Woman, Faith and Tithing Did in Chicago:

¹⁷⁷ “Ten Basic Facts About Tithing,” *The Greater Harvest Christian Informer*, Vol. XI, Number 21, Sunday, May 29, 1960. SCDP, Box 57, Folder 12.

¹⁷⁸ “Greater Harvest Gives Clothing, Food to Poor,” *Chicago Defender*, Jan. 5, 1957: 7.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

discourse on tithing. “Hold to God’s Unchanging Hand” expressed doubt that the black middle class would fuel potent outreach to the less fortunate. More importantly, by intimating that Black Chicago homebuyers’ own indebtedness undermined the familial upward mobility that would enable the homebuyers’ churches to overcome debt and practice a modicum of prophetic justice, “Hold to God’s Unchanging Hand” demonstrated the need for a messianic Jubilee: a cancellation of the terms of debt.

The Caravans’ “Hold to God’s Unchanging Hand” was their take on a Protestant hymn that had become a staple of the black gospel repertory. The hymn derived from the declaration in Malachi 3:6, “For I am the Lord, I change not.” The first half of the Caravans’ version consisted of an Inez Andrews sermonette depicting a conversation between a “rich woman” and a “poor woman,” possibly echoing Malachi’s unique dialogical style.¹⁸⁰ Here the rich woman and poor woman each approximate a biblical Israelite class: the “daughters of Zion” and the “fatherless,” respectively (Isaiah 3:16, 1:23). The rich woman “was doin’ like so many of us do today, goin’ around bragging” about the dress and shoes her father bought her, as well as her father’s yacht and mansion, akin to the “haughty” daughters of Zion, marked by the “bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet,” and their “fine linen” (Is. 3:16, 3:18, 3:23). The daughters of Zion represent an Israel led by corrupt “princes” who “loveth gifts” (Is. 1:23, 1:21); therefore, the princes give the daughters the accoutrements of harlotry (sex work), rather than serve God by doing their duty to “relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Is. 1:17). In “Hold to God’s Unchanging Hand,” the poor woman replies to the rich woman by saying that although she has ragged clothing and no substantial consumer commodities—intimating her oppressed, fatherless and/or widowed state—her “Father,” God, lets her share in the world’s

¹⁸⁰ For an overview of scholarly assessments of the structure and style of Malachi’s dialogue, see Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 164-166.

natural bounties, such as the land the rich woman's mansion is built upon. Additionally, God will take care of her in the afterlife. She then warns the rich woman to "start buildin' your hope on things eternal." In the song's second half, the Caravans they sing two verses derived from the original hymn to elaborate on the poor woman's warning, contrasting the ephemerality and mercuriality of earthly time with the eternity of God:

Time is filled with swift transition
Naught of earth unmoved can stand
Build your hope on things eternal
Hold on to God's unchanging hand

Trust in Him who will not leave you,
Whatsoever years may bring
Build your hope on things eternal
Hold on to God's unchanging hand

The rich woman understands her condition as the product of a secure upward mobility: her father gave her what she has, and she does not believe, or will not acknowledge, that she can lose it. But the poor woman replies that "time is filled with swift transition": time is not a story of steadily accumulating wealth, especially not for black women. At the end of the song, Inez Andrews engages in a call and response with the chorus of Caravans (the response parts are in parentheses):

If your father dies! (Hold on)
If your friend dies! (Hold on)
If you cry all night long! (Hold on)
Yeah, yeah! (Hold on to God's unchanging hand)

This final section underscores that the "swift transition" is not only Jesus' apocalyptic return to earth. Rather than the poor woman discussing only what will happen to the rich woman's soul after she dies and/or in the apocalypse, the poor woman warns of what will happen to the rich woman in this life if her father dies. The song therefore testifies to how the precariousness of black middle class status manifested in a disproportionate amount of intergenerational downward mobility, in the inability of many respectable, "striving" black

households to translate middle class consumption of homes and other goods into stable middle class foundations for their children.¹⁸¹

Contextualizing the biblical foundation of “Hold to God’s Unchanging Hand” within the housing crisis in postwar Black Chicago sheds further light on the song’s message. The call and response at the end of the song resonates with Malachi 3:5-6: “I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the lord of hosts. For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” Malachi 3 is one of the most resonant Old Testament chapters for Christianity. The Synoptic Gospels indicate that its references to the coming of the “Lord,” preceded by a “messenger,” foretell that the hope for a Messiah will be fulfilled by Jesus, who will be preceded by John the Baptist (Matthew 11:10, Mark 1:2, Luke 7:27).¹⁸² In the chapter, the Lord comes to “purify” those who have “robbed” him “in tithes and offerings” (Malachi 3:3, 3:8). Black Chicago churches could use Malachi to highlight God’s ____ favor with the oppressed. In 1957, a sermon delivered at St. Mary’s AME Church with a title derived from Malachi 3:11, “Things You Can’t Destroy,” contrasted the ephemerality of the “persecutions” and “death” people suffer with the un-“movable” “foundation” of God.¹⁸³ Malachi 3:11 states, “And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts.” The sermon therefore

¹⁸¹ For black middle class intergenerational downward mobility in Chicago, see Mary Pattillo-McCoy, *Black Picket Fences: Promise and Peril among the Black Middle Class* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Patrick Sharkey, “Neighborhoods and the Black-White Mobility Gap,” Economic Mobility Project, 2009; and Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic*, 2014.

¹⁸² For scholarly disputes over whether Malachi is referring to the Messiah, see Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 287-289.

¹⁸³ St. Mary’s AME Church, *St. Mary’s Guide*, Sunday, April 28, 1957, Box 57, Folder 12, SCDP.

harnessed a biblical passage conjuring a central aspect of the downfall of the Jubilee of the 1860s—the compelling of freedpeople to farm according to the dictates of others—to interpret the persecutions of the 1950s.

Thus, according to black Chicago churches’ understanding of the importance of tithing to freedom as well as economic and social justice, the situation of the Levites excluded from land ownership in the Promised Land in Deuteronomy, or the hirelings oppressed in their wages and the stranger turned aside from his right in Malachi, resonated with the postwar predicament of Black Chicago homebuyers. Blacks were racially segregated from the official housing market by the Federal Housing Authority and the Home Owners Loan Corporation.¹⁸⁴ So, members of the striving black middle class bought their homes at inflated prices “on contract” from speculators.¹⁸⁵ Buyers “put down a small down payment on the property and agreed to pay monthly installments and cover the cost of upkeep until the ‘contract’ was paid off.”¹⁸⁶ Buying families worked feverishly to both make each payment and keep up maintenance and appearance. This proved particularly difficult since they were barred from building equity, and since rapid racial transition of homebuyers’ neighborhoods led to declining city services. Thus, since the speculators retained the deed to the property and were allowed to do what they wished, they would soon evict the buyers on often spurious grounds, or grounds set by the difficulty in maintaining upkeep, and then sell the property to a new black buyer.¹⁸⁷ Homebuyers frequently lost everything. A 1958 study concluded that 85 percent of homes purchased in areas of Chicago

¹⁸⁴ Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 10; Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 216.

¹⁸⁵ Beryl Satter, *Family Properties: How the Struggle over Race and Real Estate Transformed Chicago and Urban America* (New York: Picador, 2009).

¹⁸⁶ Helgeson, *Crucibles of Black Empowerment*, 119.

¹⁸⁷ Satter, *Family Properties*.

transitioning from white to black were bought on contract, and that contract selling extracted an average of 1 million dollars per day from the city's black population.¹⁸⁸

Hence, in the Caravans' "Hold to God's Unchanging Hand," the rich woman approximated someone in a striving middle-class black household riding the wave of unprecedented postwar prosperity, but imperiled by eviction. Reading the song's cathartic ending through the Hebrew prophets, particularly the Lamentations of Jeremiah, shows that the time of the death of the rich woman's father or friend is the time in which the Lord "slew all that were pleasant to the eye in the tabernacle of the daughter of Zion," "hath swallowed up all her palaces," and "increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation" (Lamentations 2:4-5). In that awful hour, she will "become as a widow" with "none to comfort her" as "her enemies prosper" (Lamentations 1:1-2, 1:5). And yet the poor woman tells the rich woman that if she holds on to the Lord's unchanging hand in that hour of dispossession, she will be "not consumed" (Malachi 3:6).

This lack of consumption points to how for the Caravans, the messianic redemption operated outside of upward mobility. The Caravans invert the trajectory of prophetic justice, so that instead of the poor woman receiving prophetic justice from the daughter, the poor woman, like the women of the Gospels, gives to the daughter the message that only Jesus saves—not houses, other commodities, or even giving aid to the less fortunate. Therefore, unlike the social outreach of well-off churches, the poor woman's gift (which is actually the gift of God) operates outside of the debt economy fueling Black Chicago's housing expansion. As Black Chicagoans were exchanged and consumed as commodities by speculators, the Caravans' purifying wails set

¹⁸⁸ Satter, *Family Properties*, 5. Hirsch states that this study's 85 percent figure was corroborated by the Chicago Commission on Human Rights, but does not mention the million dollar figure: see Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 32.

against punitive, proto-funk drum fills evoke Fred Moten's analysis of Aunt Hester's whip-reaped screams as depicted in Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*: the wailing bore witness to black music as a "rupture of...the familial" reproduction of capital, a "rigorously sounded critique of the theory of value," a testament that "commodities speak."¹⁸⁹

VII. Workin' on a Building

As discussed in the previous chapter, the New Negro conception of prophetic social justice was rooted in the notion that emancipation transformed slaves into workers and enabled black people to build a civil society. But the segregation of post-World War II black middle-class homebuyers into the peculiarly anti-black category of the indebted commodity lends credence to Frank Wilderson's point that African Americans have existed outside of the categories of labor and worker, because "the constituent elements of slavery are not exploitation and alienation but rather accumulation and fungibility"; fungibility meaning, in Hartman's definition, "the joy made possible by the replaceability and interchangeability of the slave."¹⁹⁰

Indeed, while Du Bois labeled the black slave as "the black worker" in order to depict black resistance in the Civil War as a general strike from slave labor, he also depicted the overthrow of the black worker's "abolition democracy" as not only bloody but semiotic: an overthrow of the sign of "black worker" itself. By driving blacks away from their labor instead of toward it, terrorizing "hard-working Negroes," and most symbolically damning, imposing "taxation without representation," whites lamp-blackened the black worker as signifying nothing

¹⁸⁹ Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press), 14, 18, 11.

¹⁹⁰ Wilderson, *Red, White, & Black*, 14; Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 21.

more than an uppity “slave,” a category defined not by labor but by racial blackness.¹⁹¹

Conjuring whites’ chaining of blackness to the involuntary servitude exception for convicts in the Thirteenth Amendment, Du Bois quoted Oscar Wilde to depict the re-subjugated, de-labored black as ““this wretched man...Deep down below a prison-yard...Wrapt in a sheet of flame””¹⁹²: a prisoner, in hell on earth.

Yet the resonance of the Caravans’ critique of Black Chicago’s housing market with the slaves’ vision of Jubilee provides insight into the group’s conception of the spiritual valence of “work.” Just as the Caravans indicated that the singing and praying commodity could by faith break the logic of her enslavement in the contract housing market, they also sang that the practice of being faithful meant “working” outside of the logics of legal and employment progress ascendant during the civil rights era. This entailed a very different messianic labor Christianity than the militant apocalypticism that Du Bois identified as “The Coming of the Lord.” The prophetic Christian tradition has long sought to recover such militancy, particularly as espoused by David Walker and embodied by Nat Turner. But in her history of black agricultural workers in 1860s South Carolina, Julie Saville suggestively alludes to how the slaves’ “quietest millennial tradition” did not lead to visions of glorious messiahs stoking slave insurrections; rather, it manifested during emancipation as a “prepolitical idiom of song, dance, religious enthusiasm, and the interpretation of omens.”¹⁹³ The idiom expressed freed families’ desire to own land that they could farm together according to their own idiosyncratic divisions of labor in order to sustain themselves self-sufficiently.¹⁹⁴ This desire clashed with capitalists’ plan

¹⁹¹ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 674, 696.

¹⁹² *Ibid*, 709.

¹⁹³ Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction*, 86. Saville references Genovese’s discussion of the slaves and messianism here: see Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 278-279.

¹⁹⁴ Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction*.

to convert freedpeople into individual wage laborers farming profitable crops for the market.¹⁹⁵ Saville's work indicates that quiet millennialism could, in its own still small way, have been more radical than loud militancy, because it helped facilitate slaves' departure from conceiving of themselves as a normative working-class laboring in accordance with the capitalist system.¹⁹⁶

Resonant with Carl Bean's discussion of "quiet," this quiet millennialism was likely closer than dramatic visions of Exodus to the quotidian heart of the "old-time religion" that the Caravans, James Cleveland, Alex Bradford, and generations of sacred singers since the nineteenth century sang of as being simply "good enough for me."¹⁹⁷ It possessed a spiritually-facilitated non-progressive, non-teleological conception of work: work geared toward neither capitalist wealth creation, nor the Marxist dialectic, nor the artisanal ambitions of free labor ideology.¹⁹⁸ This idea of work sheds light on how the notion of being "down here workin' on my soul shack" enabled Southern migrant Shirley Caesar, the Caravans' youngest star singer, to envision living redemption in Chicago in a manner that challenged the "policeman walking his beat" and "the gambler throwing dice in the street" alike.¹⁹⁹ In depicting work as inextricable from the eternally saved soul, Shirley Caesar envisioned the blessing of the Lord enabling even the lowliest black Chicagoan to exist free of what historian Thomas Holt has called "the curse of modernity—the alienation of work from life."²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 2; Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), xxii-xxiii.

¹⁹⁷ Rev. James Cleveland and the Caravans, "Old Time Religion," *Nuggets of Golden Age Gospel 1945-1958*; The Caravans, "Show Me Some Sign," *The Best of the Caravans*; James Cleveland and the Cleveland Singers, "Heaven, That Will Be Good Enough"; Bradford with the Abyssinian Baptist Choir, "Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody"; "Gimme Dat Ol' Time Religion," in James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson, eds., *The Books of American Negro Spirituals* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), 76-77.

¹⁹⁸ For the quixotic anachronism of Civil War era free labor ideology, see Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction*, 2.

¹⁹⁹ The Caravans, "Soul Salvation," *The Best of Shirley Caesar with the Caravans* (Savoy Records, 1987); The Caravans, "Choose Ye This Day," *The Best of the Caravans*.

²⁰⁰ Thomas C. Holt, "Marking: Race, Race-Making, and the Writing of History," *American Historical Review*, Feb. 1995, 1-11: 3.

Shirley Ann Caesar was born in 1938 in Durham, North Carolina, the tenth of thirteen children born to Hannah and Jim Caesar. Growing up in the Pentecostal church, Caesar's big voice made her stand out, and at thirteen she made her first gospel recordings, "I'd Rather Have Jesus" and "I Know Jesus Will Save." Around this time, her father died. This placed great pressure on the household, particularly since Caesar's mother's work opportunities were limited because, Caesar recalled, her mother "was lame on one of her feet. It was completely turned over."²⁰¹ Telling her parents' story would become central to her work; for example, she narrated her upbringing in 1967's "I'll Go," a song with the chorus of "I may be fatherless, I'll go / If the Lord wants somebody, here I am, send me."²⁰² Here Caesar inverted the call of the prophet Isaiah in Is. 6:8: "I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I, send me." Rather than Isaiah being called to tell the "rulers" to "judge the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Is. 1:10, 1:17), Caesar, the fatherless daughter of a disabled widow with limited work opportunities, took up the call of Isaiah to proclaim God's sovereignty to the rulers with her own conception of redemptive black labor.

²⁰¹ Interview with Shirley Caesar, Columbia, p. 5.

²⁰² Shirley Caesar, "I'll Go," ; Similarly, on the Spirit of Memphis' version, Silas Steele sings, "I may be poor, I'll go / I may be crippled, I'll go, if I'm blind I'll go, if I'm paralyzed I'll go, so paralyzed I can't speak my name, I'll go just the same." See the Spirit of Memphis, "I'll Go," *Happy in the Service of the Lord, 1950-54*. (make sure lyrics are right)

Chapter Six

The Location of Charisma: The Chicago Freedom Movement, Urban Renewal, and Black Religious Space

"Where do we go from here: chaos or community?"
-Martin Luther King, Jr.

*"Nowhere, nowhere, nowhere, nowhere
Nowhere we can go but to the Lord."*
-Roberta Martin Singers of Chicago

I. Introduction

On March 30, 1965, a jubilating 77-year-old Rev. J. C. Austin, pastor of Chicago's Pilgrim Baptist Church, wrote to Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. that "my prayers across the years, together with your fathers and a million others, are being answered. Israel produced her Moses and at long last, 'thanks be to God,' we have produced our Moses."¹ It was five days after the voting rights march from Selma to Montgomery, and nearly forty-three years since Austin proclaimed Marcus Garvey "a Moses...appointed by God" at the 1922 International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World.² King was the latest fixation of Austin's forty-year search for an alternative to the mainstream Afro-Baptist ideology of Olivet Baptist Church, the most powerful black church in Chicago and perhaps the nation.³ This search had taken Pilgrim's congregants across geographies and genres of faith, from dogfights with Fascist warplanes in the skies above Haile Selassie's Ethiopia, to the depths of Mahalia Jackson's contralto.⁴

¹ J.C. Austin to Martin Luther King, Jr., March 30, 1965. Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. (hereafter PMLK), Box 42, Folder 52. Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolence and Social Change, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter CNSC).

² "Dr. Austin's Speech," *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume IV: 1 September 1921—2 September 1922*, ed. Robert A. Hill (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1985), 801-104: 802.

³ For background on some of Austin's political commitments, see Randall K. Burkett, "The Baptist Church in Years of Crisis: J.C. Austin and Pilgrim Baptist Church, 1926-1950," in *African American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture*, eds. Timothy E. Fulop and Albert J. Raboteau (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 311-340.

⁴ For Pilgrim and the Italo-Ethiopian War, see Chapter 2; for Pilgrim and gospel music, see Chapter 4.

Yet when King spent much of the next year and a half in Chicago confronting the forces of ghettoization in the urban North that endured despite the Southern civil rights victories, he and Austin were unable to get together. In May 1966, Austin told King he was dismayed that King did not reply to his request that the younger minister speak at the celebration of the 40th Anniversary of his Pilgrim pastorate, since “I belong to your father’s generation, and...the [service] I have rendered the denomination makes me feel that I am worthy of some consideration.”⁵ It would be easy to dismiss Austin’s attitude as typical ministerial hubris, as rooted in the Baptist hierarchy’s preoccupation with seniority, or as simply poorly timed. After all, the Chicago Freedom Movement, an alliance between the King-led Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and local activist groups that comprised the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations (CCCO), was about to launch a nonviolent direct action campaign against residential segregation that would culminate that August in a series of harrowing marches for open housing.⁶

But Austin’s hailing King as “Moses,” and then focusing on his own denominational work during the Mosaic moment he had been praying for, suggests a new way to understand how blacks perceived King’s charismatic leadership, and how charismatic leadership has functioned in black political consciousness more generally. In her study *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership*, literary historian Erica Edwards defines charisma as “a mixture of sacred and secular narrative impulses” that “situates authority...in one exceptional figure perceived to be gifted

⁵ J.C. Austin to Martin Luther King, Jr., May 17, 1966. PMLK, Box 42, Folder 52.

⁶ For book-length studies of the Chicago Freedom Movement, see James R. Ralph, Jr., *Northern Protest: Martin Luther King, Jr., Chicago, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1993); Alan B. Anderson and George W. Pickering, *Confronting the Color Line: The Broken Promise of Civil Rights in Chicago* (Athens, GA and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1986); Robert B. Kersie, *A Decisive Decade: An Insider’s View of the Chicago Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013); Mary Lou Finley, Bernard Lafayette, Jr., James R. Ralph, Jr., and Pam Smith, eds., *The Chicago Freedom Movement: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Civil Rights Activism in the North* (University Press of Kentucky, forthcoming 2016).

with a privileged connection to the divine.”⁷ This paradigmatically male figure is the “necessary protagonist in a messianic narrative of black progress.”⁸ Many black Chicagoans seemed to perceive King as such a figure. Reflecting on their time in the city, Coretta Scott King wrote in 1969 that her husband was “almost like a Messiah” to “the people of the ghetto,” and surveys conducted in the spring of 1967 indicated that Martin Luther King was by far black Chicago’s most popular black leader even as residential segregation persisted and Black Power soared.⁹

Scholars have argued that while King’s charisma was based in the pulpit, the historical lodestone of black charismatic leadership, it uniquely projected ever outward through his ability to embody and articulate the hopes of his race, his nation, the darker peoples of the world, and perhaps all of humanity.¹⁰ Other accounts of charisma can help augment this view.

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz discussed how charisma has been deployed by power centers, while Europeanist historian Lynn Hunt has argued that differences in “the location of charisma...have great implications for the politics in any society.”¹¹ And following political theorist Cedric Robinson’s critique of such definitions that emphasize charisma as a locus of power, Edwards draws upon Apostle Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians to define an

⁷ Erica R. Edwards, *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 16.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York, Chicago and San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 280; Maurice Moore and James McKeown, *A Study of Integrated Living in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Community and Family Study Center, 1968), 35-37. Unfortunately, the research did not control for the ages of the respondents.

¹⁰ Nathan Irving Huggins, “Martin Luther King, Jr.: Charisma and Leadership,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 74, No. 2. (Sept, 1987), pp. 477-481; Lewis V. Baldwin, *There is a Balm in Gilead: The Cultural Roots of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), Ch. 4: “Up, You Mighty Race!: The Black Messianic Hope,” pp. 229-272; Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 91-93.

¹¹ Clifford Geertz, “Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power,” in *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual, and Power since the Middle Ages*, ed. Sean Wilentz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 13-40; Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1992), 197.

oppositional, group-oriented iteration—“*charismata*”—as “the embodied, ecstatic experience of collective formation that produces (rather than is produced by) a leader” as it resists power.¹²

Combining aspects of these two lines of inquiry, this chapter argues that black Chicagoans conceived of charismatic political leadership, including King’s, as tied to the preservation or inauguration of local black religious space, rather than primarily to broader racial, national, or human destiny. Here I define black religious space as space in which black people could institutionalize the collective practice of their faith; space where they could, in the words of a Negro spiritual, “break bread together” and “praise God together.”¹³ Thus while black Chicago residents could render King as a God-given leader in explicitly biblical messianic terms, they conceived of his messiahship in particularistic, local, and quotidian ways. Because of this, instead of mobilizing or even necessarily conceptualizing a black polity unified under a single leader, messianism disaggregated black political consciousness, a disaggregation that only deepened when the messiah arrived.

For black Chicago Protestants, religious space was politically salient primarily because it was the location of collective worship of the divine, not, W.E.B. Du Bois argued, because it provided a space independent of white society for blacks to hold mass meetings and develop organizational structure, social societies, outreach programs, and economic cohesion.¹⁴ Indeed,

¹² Edwards, *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership*, 119.

¹³ “Let Us Break Bread Together” (Negro spiritual). For a helpful definition of “spiritual space” as “a space for contemplatives” that “connects a finite and determine locality...to a theology of the infinite,” see Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 217.

¹⁴ For influential variations of the this argument, see W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam, 1989 [1903]), 142-143; Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 4; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 186. For variations emphasizing Chicago, see Wallace D. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 4; Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); William J. Grimshaw, *Bitter Fruit: Black Politics and the Chicago Machine, 1931-1992* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 63-64; St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, *Black*

Austin may have especially appreciated the longevity of his pastorate because black religious space was not safe: the seemingly inexhaustible forces of racial oppression in Chicago placed it in constant danger. This danger set the context for messianism's political orientation toward the local and the everyday. Scholarly focus on government repression of black religion has concentrated on the national security state's offensives against nationally-prominent dissidents such as Garvey, King and the Nation of Islam aimed at stopping the emergence of a unifying black "Messiah," as FBI director J. Edgar Hoover feared.¹⁵ But black Chicagoans generally experienced religious repression as black religious space coming under attack from seemingly innocuous, unremarkable, and nonracial municipal activity, such as parking space ordinances and the regulation of marriage solicitation. This activity proved inextricable from more canonical manifestations of metropolitan antiblackness, such as slum clearance (which blacks often called "Negro clearance"), urban renewal ("Negro removal"), the segregated housing market, and police brutality. Thus in 1960s Chicago, black churches' safe space was not so much an institutional reality in the present, as it was an aspiration of faith, presently located in perilous, imperiled space.

Austin and King's strained communication sheds new light on a grave obstacle the Chicago Freedom Movement faced within the black community: a dearth of participation by black churches. Scholars often attribute the churches' reticence to their fear of Mayor Richard J. Daley's wrath if they took part, as well as to the influence of Daley's ally Rev. Joseph H. Jackson, pastor of Olivet Baptist Church, president of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A.,

Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993 [1945]), 422-429.

¹⁵ Sylvester A. Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000: Colonialism, Democracy, and Freedom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

opponent of civil rights demonstrations, and fierce King critic.¹⁶ However, like some of the other more established black ministers, Austin had long openly opposed Daley's power over black Chicago. Austin had also been a rival of Jackson and his predecessor at both Olivet and the National Baptist Convention presidency, Lacey Kirk Williams, since before King was born. Austin's history of involvement in the black freedom struggle highlights the importance of examining how discrepancies within oppositional black Christianity impacted the Movement. Because they stressed the importance of black space, even local adversaries of Joseph H. Jackson diverged ideologically from SCLC's notion of "breaking up the slum" through the piecemeal integration of nuclear families that could afford to buy homes in white neighborhoods. They could even diverge from SCLC's larger goal of forging a universal Beloved Community.

The ideological discord between King and black Chicagoans who thought of him favorably as the preeminent black leader also contests how two strains of scholarship on King have approached the Chicago Freedom Movement. Scholars comfortable with King's prominent place in the black historical narrative indicate that his experience in Chicago helped motivate him to even greater heights of prophetic witness, as evidenced by his opposition to the Vietnam War, organizing the Poor People's Campaign, and fateful participation in the Memphis sanitation workers' strike.¹⁷ Scholars more critical of King's prominence depict the intra-racial differences

¹⁶ For the King-Jackson conflict, see esp. Peter J. Paris, *Black Religious Leaders: Conflict in Unity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991); Wallace Best, "'The Right Achieved and the Wrong Way Conquered': J.H. Jackson, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Conflict over Civil Rights," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* Vol. 16, No. 2 (Summer 2006), pp. 195-226; Sam Hitchmough, « Missions of Patriotism: Joseph H. Jackson and Martin Luther King », *European journal of American studies* [Online], Vol 6, No 1 | 2011, document 3, Online since 23 June 2011, connection on 16 November 2015. URL : <http://ejas.revues.org/>; James R. Ralph, Jr., *Northern Protest: Martin Luther King, Jr., Chicago, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 79-80; Barbara Dianne Savage, *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us: The Politics of Black Religion* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 200-203; and Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-1963* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1988), 335-339, 500-507.

¹⁷ Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Struggle for Economic Justice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 197, 277, 280, 298; Michael Eric Dyson, *I May Not*

that marked the Chicago episode as indicative of the limitations of the “charismatic,” “messianic,” ministerial mode of leadership that he epitomized.¹⁸ But understanding how the belief in King’s leadership functioned necessitates turning from a focus on King that either assumes his followers were in accord with him or refrains from addressing the issue, to a focus on the tensions inherent in the belief itself.

Ultimately, rather than a critical commentary on the merits of charismatic leadership in an oppositional movement, black Chicago Protestants’ tension with SCLC’s outlook troubled the very concept of “freedom movement.” Much work focuses on how black movement has signified black freedom, or how black resistance, even black radicalism, has manifested as escape, flight, fugitivity, or withdrawal.¹⁹ But often overlooked is the notion of freedom as staying, which in 1960s black Chicago began with freedom from eviction, from having one’s neighborhood razed,

Get There With You: The True Martin Luther King, Jr. (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 39, 69, 80, 84; Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word that Moved America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 263-266; James H. Cone, *Malcolm & Martin & America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 224-226; Taylor Branch, *At Canaan’s Edge: America in the King Years 1965-68* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2006), 523; David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 525.

¹⁸ Edwards, *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership*, esp. 108; Robert J. Patterson, *Exodus Politics: Civil Rights and Leadership in African American Literature and Culture* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2013), 8, 125-152. See also Manning Marable, *Black Leadership: Four Great American Leaders and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), xiii; Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Religious Myth* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1982), 175-182; Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *In A Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 152.

¹⁹ For diverse examples, see LeRoi Jones, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Harper, 2002 [1963]); Patrick Sharkey, *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress toward Racial Equality* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Steven F. Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America Since 1941* (New York: McGraw Hill, Inc., 1991); Jacqueline Dowd-Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 91, No.4 (March 2005), 1233-1263; Daphne A. Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006); Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Maroonage* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015); Steven Hahn, *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2009).

and from having one's mere presence send one's neighbors into a violent panic.²⁰ The echo of Exodus audible in such a freedom problematizes the standard idea that Exodus, the predominant black freedom paradigm, centers upon movement.²¹ Exodus 14:14 states, "The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be still," which black sacred song and sermons rendered as variations of "Be still, God will fight your battles."²² The emphasis on stillness suggested that in the Bible, the Exodus was accomplished through Israel's un-moved faith in God and God's destruction of Pharaoh's army—not through Israel's own fighting.²³

On September 19, 1963, four days after the bombing of Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church that killed four girls, Pilgrim Baptist Church junior choir alum and Roberta Martin protégé James Cleveland cut one of the decade's seminal gospel records, "Peace Be Still," with Roberta Martin Singers alum Lawrence Roberts' Angelic Choir of Nutley, New

²⁰ My thinking on freedom as staying is influenced by Kevin Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2012); the discussion of "obstinate waiting" in Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), 65-69, 83; the elaboration of Henri Lefebvre's theorization of "the right to the city" in David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (New York and London: Verso, 2012); Lisa Levenstein, *A Movement without Marches: African American Women and the Politics of Poverty in Postwar Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); and James Cleveland and the Angelic Choir, "Peace Be Still," *James Cleveland and the Angelic Choir, Vol. 3: 'Peace Be Still'* (Savoy Records, 1964).

²¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., "I See the Promised Land," in Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 279-288; Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*; Albert J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African-American Religious History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 34; Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *Exodus!: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth Century Black America* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 166; Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land*; Christopher Z. Hobson, *The Mount of Vision: African American Prophetic Tradition, 1800-1950* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992).

²² "Be Still, God Will Fight Your Battles," *African American Heritage Hymnal*, ed. Rev. Dr. Delores Carpenter and Rev. Dr. Nolan E. Williams, Jr. (Chicago: GIA Productions, Inc., 2001), 148-149; Albert J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African-American Religious History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995), 32.

²³ John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids Michigan and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994 [1972]), 77.

Jersey.²⁴ The song bore witness to the Gospels' interpolation of this Exodus [sentiment] in Mark 4:39, rendered in the song as "Get up, Jesus! Because the wind and the waves shall obey thy will / 'Peace, be still.'" Recorded live at Trinity Temple Seventh Day Adventist Church in Newark, New Jersey, the bestselling single and eponymous LP sparked the proliferation of live gospel recordings, underscoring the enduring importance but ever-present vulnerability of church space in an age of technological reproduction and cascading violence.²⁵

Thus, elements of Afro-Protestantism suggested that "freedom movement" was an oxymoron if it was not grounded in the stillness of faith and looking toward the tranquility to come in the Kingdom of God.²⁶ This lends insight into why Austin viewed his priestly work in the increasingly impoverished, hypersegregated heart of black Chicago as so important, even with "Moses" on the cusp of the Chicago Freedom Movement's open housing marches. Rather than envisioning a "stride toward freedom," black Chicago Protestants' messianism constituted a meditation on whether urbanized black people could live in redemption where they were, without

²⁴ James Cleveland and the Angelic Choir, "Peace Be Still"; for the Birmingham contextualization, see Robert M. Marovich, *A City Called Heaven: Chicago and the Birth of Gospel Music* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 302-303. For the Roberta Martin Singers, see Chapters 4 and 5 above.

²⁵ Marovich, *A City Called Heaven*, 302; I'm also arguing that live recordings both underscored the importance of church ritual and reflected the danger church ritual faced in the 1960s; for a different take on mechanical reproduction's relationship to sacred ritual, see Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 217-251: 224.

²⁶ Indeed, Jacksonian-era black radical abolitionists David Walker and, more subtly, Maria Stewart, critiqued such deployments of Exodus as unable to capture the brutality of American slavery, and thus unable to inspire the black agency needed to overthrow it. While Thomas Jefferson was Walker's principle interlocutor, John Locke loomed larger in how Walker's critical engagement with Exodus facilitated his meditation on the slaves' right of revolt ("appeal to heaven"). See David Walker, *Walker's appeal in four articles, together with a preamble to the coloured citizens of the world, but in particular, and very expressly, to those in the United States of America* (Boston: Revised and published by David Walker, 1830), 11-13; Maria W. Stewart, *Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart*, in *Spiritual Narratives*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 1-84: 69; and John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1980), 19, 87-88.

having their spiritual, social, and political-economic existence reduced to the fuel and flotsam of American progress—or even black progress.²⁷

II. King and Church Integration in 1950s Chicago

The ideological rift between black Chicago churches and the Chicago Freedom Movement was rooted in King's early engagement with the city in the 1950s. Once the 1955-1956 Montgomery Bus Boycott made King a national figure, Chicago became one of his principal bastions of support outside the black South. He traveled to the city several times and corresponded frequently with various local religious leaders. Contrasting King's interactions with Chicago's white liberal and integrated churches and his interactions with black churches provides insight into how his conception of the Northern freedom struggle developed. King attempted to aid (white) Chicago churches pursuing integration. His graduate school work in the North, particularly at Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, impressed upon him the possibilities of multiracial religious life in the North.²⁸ Yet the particular ways that he was drawn into supporting that life once he became an icon of integrationist religion aligned him with the massive slum clearance and urban renewal project underway in black Chicago, a project opposed by many of black Chicago's ministers. It thus revealed King and the ministers' fundamentally dissimilar conceptions of the relationship between religion and social politics in the urban North.

King's secretaries' responses to different Chicago-area churches showed that he prioritized supporting white churches as they considered and pursued integration. One such integrationist church was Salem Lutheran Church, located in the increasingly black South Side

²⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010 [1957]).

²⁸ Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 70-71, 75.

neighborhood of Park Manor. Having accepted its first black members in the early 1950s, Salem Lutheran braved bombs, white riots and white flight to become a leader in the effort to build interracial community in Park Manor, as well as in the broader Augusta Lutheran denomination.²⁹ Requesting that King make an appearance, Salem's pastor Rev. James Claypool wrote to King in 1959 that "differences in color have been obliterated by the new experience of oneness in Christ which the members have discovered. This experience has given this congregation depth and a dynamic which I find is missing in many of our all-white congregations."³⁰ King's secretary Maude Ballou replied that King would be interested in Claypool's "noble work" in the "integrated church," and that she was certain King "will be very happy to be with you and your congregation when he is in the Chicago area again."³¹ Similarly, when Rev. Theophilus Ringsmuth of white suburban Glenview Community Church wrote King that same spring saying that the church's 350-plus youth "from privileged families" who "represent real leaders of tomorrow" "desperately need the impact" that "direct" and "personal" interaction with King would have (presumably on their outlook on integration), Ballou replied that she was "sure that he will be happy to be with you and the young people of Glenview."³² After visiting the church, an impressed King wanted to learn more about its youth ministry's programs.³³

²⁹ "Lutheran Youth Hit Bias At Confab Here: Young People Face Big Issues," *Chicago Defender*, July 15, 1957: 12; for a memoir/history of Salem's experience of integration by its former pastor, see Philip A. Johnson, *Call Me Neighbor, Call Me Friend: The Case History of the Integration of a Neighborhood on Chicago's South Side* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company 1965).

³⁰ James P. Claypool to Martin Luther King, Jr., April 6, 1959. Martin Luther King Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University [Hereafter MLKC], Box 49, Folder 3.

³¹ Maude P. Ballou (sic) to James P. Claypool, April 11, 1959, MLKC Box 49, Folder 3.

³² Ted Ringsmuth to Martin Luther King, Jr., March 2, 1959, MLKC Box 49, Folder 2; Maude L. Ballou to Ted Ringsmuth, March 9, 1959, PMLK Box 49, Folder 2.

³³ Hilda S. Proctor, note to Martin Luther King, Jr., April 14th 1958, MLKC Box 49, Folder 2.

These interactions demonstrated the valence of King's charisma for religious white racial liberals. To them, King was unique in that he was neither simply a "race leader" pleading blacks' case, nor was he "a leader not of one race but of two," as W.E.B. Du Bois described Booker T. Washington's positioning himself as the mediator between segregated races.³⁴ Rather, King was the voice of an integrated America and "one true church" struggling to emerge from the pall of segregation.³⁵ King's cross-racial charisma was bolstered by his lacing the positive outlook of his early speeches, sermons, and books with references to—and often wholesale borrowings from—renowned white liberal preachers and theologians.³⁶

But when dedicated white racial liberals of faith reciprocated this positivity in their communications with him, they were often unable or unwilling to convey the depth of the challenges confronting integration in their churches and neighborhoods. Salem Lutheran Rev. Claypool's statement that "differences of color have been obliterated" elided the fact that the church continued to lose white members to outmigration. In fact, Salem had never been optimistic about the long-term prospects of integration. When it decided in favor of integration in 1950, Salem's Committee on Church and Neighborhood noted not that the church's actions could help keep Park Manor integrated, but only that "'The neighborhood will probably remain integrated for some time.'"³⁷ Yet the church viewed the experience of integration as worthwhile despite its likely ephemerality. Thus in 1965, former pastor Philip A. Johnson still recalled the endeavor as in important ways a success even though "Not too many white people now live in

³⁴ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*.

³⁵ Lischer, *The Preacher King*, 11.

³⁶ Keith D. Miller, *Voice of Deliverance: The Language of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Its Sources* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

³⁷ Johnson, *Call Me Neighbor, Call Me Friend*, 57.

Park Manor. Those who do are mostly older people or building janitors, and, of course, Salem's pastor and his family."³⁸

King's interaction with the First Presbyterian Church of Chicago in 1958 even more acutely demonstrated how his overly positive exchanges with liberal integrationist churches obscured the fact that church integration did not so much herald an interracial Beloved Community as help facilitate a somewhat less violent, less hermetic re-segregation. Founded four years before Chicago's incorporation, First Presbyterian seemed to epitomize the city's potential for successful integration. In the 1930s, the church relocated to the South Side's Woodlawn neighborhood. Soon this neighborhood underwent a rapid racial transition stemming from the housing shortage in black Chicago.

Even after the Supreme Court deemed racial covenants unconstitutional in 1948, persisting residential segregation policies and practices combined with increasing black migration from the South to intensify black Chicago's ongoing housing crisis. In 1947, much of black Chicago was declared "blight" to be cleared and redeveloped, worsening the situation. Public housing, which had begun to replace "slum" housing in black Chicago in the late 1930s, was one of the main methods of redevelopment. Late 1940s policies limited public housing eligibility to low-income couples with children displaced by slum clearance and redevelopment, thereby excluding 70 percent of the displaced families.³⁹ Instead of building public housing on vacant land in white areas, white opposition to integration, combined with the quixotic thinking of the then-progressive Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), led to the relegation of public

³⁸ Ibid, 158.

³⁹ Preston H. Smith II, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis: Housing Policy in Postwar Chicago* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 105.

housing construction to slum-cleared black neighborhoods.⁴⁰ This further exacerbated the housing shortage and neighborhood upheaval. By 1951, black Chicago's population of 500,000 people included 90,000 families living "doubled-up" in housing designed for a single family, and 180,000 families in what a CHA report described as "substandard dwellings which are fully occupied because *there is no place else to live*" (emphasis in original).⁴¹ Then the black population doubled between 1950 and 1960. Lacking space to live, many families that were able began pushing out from the old Black Belt.

Thus, between 1940 and 1960, increasing numbers of black families fleeing overcrowding or displaced by slum clearance in their old neighborhoods moved south and east into Woodlawn, helping to precipitate a white exodus that flipped the neighborhood from 86 percent white to 86 percent black.⁴² Responding to the demographic changes, First Presbyterian's congregation voted to remain in the transitioning neighborhood, and the church began to integrate in 1953. By 1958 it had installed two co-pastors, one black and one white, and boasted black participation throughout its congregational organizations and "official boards."⁴³

Yet First Presbyterian's 1958 125th Anniversary program, at which the church was inviting King to speak, was a celebration of the specific version of integration devised principally by the University of Chicago, located a few blocks away from the church in the adjacent Hyde Park-Kenwood area. The church's interracial co-pastorate of Revs. Ulysses

⁴⁰ Ibid, 105; D. Bradford Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster: The Unraveling of Chicago Public Housing* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 67-97.

⁴¹ Quoted in Smith, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis*, 106.

⁴² John Hall Fish, *Black Power/White Control: The Struggle of the Woodlawn Organization in Chicago* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015 [1973]), 12.

⁴³ Ulysses B. Blakeley and Charles T. Leber to Martin Luther King, Jr., March 21, 1958, MLKC Box 49, Folder 2.

Blakeley and Charles Leber wrote to King that “[t]he University of Chicago has taken a strong lead in this city to bring about a successful program of urban renewal and redevelopment.”⁴⁴

This program had begun in the early 1950s as a collaboration between the University and the Council of Hyde Park Churches and Synagogues. They used concern over neighborhood decay to put together a new organization, the South East Chicago Commission (SECC), to design a program for limiting black migration into the neighborhood, even though, historian Arnold Hirsch points out, “the only ‘blighted’ sectors in Hyde Park were predominantly white.”⁴⁵

Developed incrementally, the centerpiece of the SECC’s program was the Hyde Park-Kenwood Urban Renewal Plan, which the city approved in February 1958, one month before the ministers reached out to King.⁴⁶ The Plan called for the demolition of about 20 percent of the housing in the neighborhood between 47th Street and 59th Street.⁴⁷

Blakely and Leber told King that “we are asking the Chancellor of this University, Dr. Lawrence Kimpton, to share with us on this occasion his concern for a continuing and successful integration of the community and its organizations.”⁴⁸ But Kimpton, whose Vice-Chancellor did end up speaking at the event, had framed the plan as a way to prevent a repeat of the racial transition that had occurred in Woodlawn by “‘cutting down [the] number of Negroes’ living in the area’” via replacing the housing affordable to the lower-income blacks moving in with more expensive housing for white professionals.⁴⁹ Perhaps Blakeley and Leber were not privy to Kimpton’s language, but people on all sides of the renewal debate were well aware that the Final

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999 [1983]), 143-144, 169.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 136; Adam Cohen and Elizabeth Taylor, *American Pharaoh: Mayor Richard J. Daley: His Battle for Chicago and the Nation* (New York: Warner Books, 2000), 210.

⁴⁷ Cohen and Taylor, *American Pharaoh*, 210; Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*.

⁴⁸ Ulysses B. Blakeley and Charles T. Leber to Martin Luther King, Jr., May 8, 1958, MLKC Box 39, Folder 2.

⁴⁹ *Cohen and Taylor*, *American Pharaoh*, 209.

Plan would do just what Kimpton said.⁵⁰ Still, integrationist “lakefront liberal”-dominated organizations such as the NAACP’s Hyde Park Unit and the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference supported the plan while suppressing the dissent of the nearly all-black Southwest Hyde Park Neighborhood Association, which had managed to stave off the project for two years.⁵¹ And indeed, the black population of Hyde Park declined by forty percent during the 1960s. While about half of the displaced lower-income whites relocated elsewhere around Hyde Park-Kenwood, nearly 85 percent of the displaced lower-income blacks were pushed out entirely.⁵² The vast majority of these likely ended up back in the slum-cleared, housing project-studded black neighborhoods from which they had moved into Hyde Park-Kenwood in the first place.⁵³

The Hyde Park-Kenwood Renewal also laid bare class tensions among blacks. Agreeing with University officials’ disparaging characterizations of poorer black residents, well-to-do Hyde Park blacks largely supported the Hyde Park Urban Renewal Plan in the hope that they would finally escape the expanding ghetto for good.⁵⁴ Thus, black as well as white liberals conceived of religious integration as small numbers of middle-class blacks joining predominantly white churches in order to avoid reaching the demographic tipping point at which

⁵⁰ Jim Cunningham, “Final Plan for HERALD,” Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Regenstein Library (Hereafter HPKCC) Box 96, Folder 6; Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference, Flyer, “Can You Afford to Live in Renewed Hyde Park-Kenwood?” Feb 28, 1958, HPKCC Box 96, Folder 6; Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference, Flyer, “Final Urban Renewal Plan: The Remaining Question: Housing,” June 6, 1958, HPKCC Box 96, Folder 6.

⁵¹ Ibid; “Statement of Hyde Park Unit, NAACP Presented to the Conservation Community Council on Hyde-Park-Kenwood Community Plans,” March 12, 1958, HPKCC Box 96, Folder 6; Christopher Robert Reed, *The Chicago NAACP and the Rise of Black Professional Leadership, 1910-1966* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 194; Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 137-163; St. Clair Drake, “A Memorandum on the Situation in Southwest Hyde Park,” St. Clair Drake Papers [hereafter SCDP], Box 58, Folder 16, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; Smith, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis*, 145-149.

⁵² Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 169.

⁵³ Cohen and Taylor, *American Pharaoh*; Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*; Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 67-97.

⁵⁴ Smith, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis*, 151-155.

a congregations and neighborhoods would lose all of their whites. In the early 1950s, Hyde Park-Kenwood's First Baptist Church considered selling its property and relocating to vacant land elsewhere in the area.⁵⁵ But with the assent of its black members, the church abandoned the notion when it found that "only a Negro church was interested in buying," because "[t]his, the congregation felt, would not contribute to the maintenance of an interracial community."⁵⁶ There was no place for predominantly black religious space in an interracial landscape, only white religious space with a few middle-class black people in it.

Even within such a class-exclusive interracial context, bridging black and white religious space proved difficult. The ideological dynamics of outmigration hampered attempts to promote the interracial fellowship that liberal organizations such as the Church Federation of Greater Chicago thought was so vital to conserving the urban church.⁵⁷ Chicago pastors in the National Conference on Catholic Charities posited that church members who moved away were often those with "the least feeling of pride...in the old Church in which they were baptized, in which they were married and which enshrines so many of their sacred memories."⁵⁸ Thus, a 1958 account of integration at Hyde Park Baptist Church (now Hyde Park Union Church) explained, "a real schism" could develop among remaining white congregants between "those who feel there should be an active program to recruit Negroes," and the generally older members who "feel they are fighting the problems of integration every day and especially need a sanctuary on Sunday. They feel they are forced to live with the Negroes but shouldn't be forced to pray with

⁵⁵ Julia Abrahamson, *A Neighborhood Finds Itself* (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1971 [1959]), 288.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ The Church Federation of Greater Chicago, "The Role of the Church in Community Conservation," 1954: 3, HPKCC Box 79, Folder 9.

⁵⁸ National Conference of Catholic Charities, "The Church and Neighborhood Conservation in Chicago: The Experience of a Group of Chicago Pastors," 1955: 5, HPKCC Box 79, Folder 9. But for a different view on members' outmigration, see Johnson, *Call Me Neighbor, Call Me Friend*.

them.”⁵⁹ Because of this, the church was “inter-racial in membership although not in fellowship.”⁶⁰

J.C. Austin had a different idea than the ministers of white and integrated churches of what King’s impact on Chicago could be. In 1960, he wrote King a letter of praise, telling him that “A new star of hope is born as you sat and reasoned with God’s enemies.”⁶¹ But Austin, like many black ministers, was an opponent of the city’s plans for slum clearance and urban renewal. He was the most prominent ministerial advisor to the Champions, a group protesting “Negro clearance” led by Alice C. Browning, stalwart of Chicago’s left-leaning black cultural front and founding editor of *Negro Story*, the first black short-story magazine in the nation.⁶² Black liberal proponents of clearance and renewal often critiqued such cultural elites as, in the words of federal housing agency officer George Nesbitt, “busy women and spellbinding politicians and preachers [who] deride and dismiss the valiant few anti-ghettoists as ‘Uncle Toms’ and ‘tools of the whites.’”⁶³ Black liberals saw the housing projects as the first step to integration, and argued that people like Austin and Browning only opposed the projects because they would lose their constituency if black Chicago were broken up.⁶⁴ While integration was a legitimate threat to such figures for this reason, many blacks feared that the city wanted them completely removed from their location near downtown. Nesbitt was flabbergasted as to why blacks did not want “any part of” these ostensibly benevolent projects: “We complain of over-crowding but now that some

⁵⁹ Jeanett Fields, *Integration on Trial in the North* (New York: Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, 1958), 12.

⁶⁰ Fields, *Integration on Trial in the North*, 11.

⁶¹ J.C. Austin to Martin Luther King, Jr., April 21, 1960, PMLK Box 49, Folder 3.

⁶² Smith, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis*, 89-94; for more on Browning and *Negro Story*, see Bill V. Mullen, *Popular Fronts: Chicago and African-American Cultural Politics, 1935-46* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

⁶³ Quoted in Smith, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis*, 98.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

relief is in the offing, [we] begin to shout: ‘The South Side is ours! Only ours! We are not leaving.’”⁶⁵

The discrepancy between Austin and King’s orientations toward renewal and integration led to different conceptualizations of socially-engaged religion. Four months after Austin’s letter of praise, Pilgrim’s prison ministry, the E.B. Hogan Missionary Circle, wrote to King that “As missionaries in the penal institutions of this city...it is very bad when parents are afraid of their children” who have “grouped off in gangs...Our greatest desire is that you would give us an evening as early as [possible] to speak to the [parents] of Chicago Illinois.”⁶⁶ The letter evinced how King’s charisma often stimulated a different language for black Chicago Protestants than for the city’s white liberal Protestants: rather than optimistically promoting an emerging integrated community, the prison ministry tried to convey to King the urgency of a rising problem in its extant segregated community.

But following King’s direction, SCLC staff member James Wood replied to the ministry that “The deep and grave concern Dr. King shares with us all in the future of our young men and women who are growing into man-hood and woman-hood on the streets of our crowded cities, is exceeded only by his commitment to the Church and the social struggle.”⁶⁷ Thus, “recent developments in the social struggle and on the political front” made it “impossible” for King to “visit with” the group.⁶⁸ The rise of the sit-in movement, mounting tension within the National Baptist Convention over civil rights, and the 1960 presidential campaign probably kept King busier than he had been in the late 1950s. Still, his assistant’s response indicated that King visited with integrated churches and white middle-class suburban youth ministries rather than

⁶⁵ Ibid, 100.

⁶⁶ E.B. Hogan Missionary Circle to Martin Luther King, Jr., August 23, 1960, PMLK Box 49, Folder 3.

⁶⁷ James R. Wood to Theresa Cook, September 16, 1960, PMLK Box 49, Folder 3.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

with the prison ministry of one of black Chicago's flagship churches because he viewed the former two as part of the sociopolitical struggle, but not the latter. This also meant that he viewed the achievements of middle-class blacks in the area of religious integration socio-politically, but not the activity of ministering to disproportionately poorer blacks in prison. Understanding how this interpretive difference shaped the Chicago Freedom Movement necessitates contextualizing it further in the sociopolitical history of black Chicago churches in the civil rights era.

III. Storefront Rights, Charlatans, and the Loop's "Marryin' Bishop"

Storefront churches were the last institutions many would have expected to galvanize Northern civil rights activity, except perhaps in a negative sense. "An original institutional creation among urban blacks in the twentieth century," storefronts arose as black migrants converted vacant stores in dilapidated commercial districts into makeshift church edifices.⁶⁹ In 1945, black Chicago chroniclers St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton figured that three fourths of the churches in black Chicago were "'store-front' or house churches, with an average membership of less than twenty five people."⁷⁰ Many people viewed storefronts as symptoms of ghettoization and urban blight.⁷¹ Not only did storefronts appear to predominate in the most rundown areas, but people accused them of being a cultish "racket" engaged in "selling religion" to naïve, world-weary, poor migrants from the South.⁷² Thus, some read their preponderance as a profusion of what Gil Scott-Heron called "The Get Out of the Ghetto Blues."⁷³ As it mulled integration, Salem

⁶⁹ Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 51, 55.

⁷⁰ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 415.

⁷¹ "Effects of Jim Crow Housing Seen on Chicago's 'Congo Trail,'" *Chicago Daily Defender*, Dec 11, 1963: 19.

⁷² Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*; Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 53, 55.

⁷³ Gil Scott-Heron, "The Get Out of the Ghetto Blues," *Free Will*, Flying Dutchman/RCA, 1972.

Lutheran Church gleaned from black Lutheran Rev. Robbin Skyles, pastor of what the leading local black newspaper the *Chicago Defender* described as the “Aristocratic” St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church, that “Negroes are being exploited in religion and are in need of good Christian leadership. They have too many store-front churches and religious racketeering is very prevalent.”⁷⁴

Yet despite concerns about economic bamboozlement and antimodernist recalcitrance, Drake and Cayton and the *Defender* could also appreciate the storefronts as buoys of lower class black vitality against long odds. For example, the *Defender* offered sympathetic, even dignifying coverage of the followers of Father De Paz, a West Indian émigré who proclaimed his immortality and “lavished” homes and Cadillacs upon impoverished members of his New Heaven Sanctuary, Inc. storefront on the burgeoning black West Side, as they sought to wrest his properties from the state’s takeover upon his death.⁷⁵ De Paz’s flock’s actions demonstrated how continuing faith in a charismatic leader could merge with the cherishing of black religious space to inspire grassroots oppositional stirrings.

By 1956, the rhetoric around storefronts intensified. Black policy victories, such as the striking down of the racist procedures that had essentially relegated the several hundred thousand black Chicagoans to two of the Chicago area’s 77 major hospitals, indicated to some that the race was making progress toward defeating segregation. Meanwhile, the Montgomery Bus Boycott was showing that enlightened, progressive, well-organized churches were critical to the struggle. Thus the regrettable yet admittedly colorful ghetto idiosyncrasies of the storefronts could now derail a movement on the brink of bearing fruit. Interviewed in the late 1950s, one upper-class

⁷⁴ “Swersie Turpin Becomes Bride Of Alfred Dumetz,” *Chicago Defender*, July 2, 1949:9; Johnson, *Call Me Neighbor, Call Me Friend*, 58.

⁷⁵ George Daniels, “Store Front Prophet Leaves \$1,000,000: No Will, No Heirs Left By De Paz,” *The Chicago Defender*, May 7, 1955: 1; “State Hangs On To De Paz Estate,” *The Chicago Defender*, May 14, 1955: 5.

Baptist minister who had started out as a storefront pastor said of the storefronts: “Personally, I think they should be closed down by law,” but “You say something like that on the South Side, and everybody will be after you.”⁷⁶ *Defender* columnist Greg Harris incurred such outrage in 1958 when he wrote an op-ed claiming that “legitimate clergymen” must fight the “evil” propagated by the extortionist “charlatan” of the storefront church.⁷⁷ While he pointed out that “the one thing we must never allow is for the government to dictate religious matters,” he also mused that fraudulent leaders in other fields were rightfully jailed.⁷⁸ The column caused enough of a “Stir” that Harris wrote a follow-up the next week, in which he thanked both the “majority” who supported his view as well as those “who want my head on a platter.”⁷⁹ The next month, he joked that the rumor that “a storefront church held a mock funeral for me last Sunday!” should not be believed.⁸⁰

Yet in both faith and activism, Father De Paz’s church, and not commentators who would denigrate or outlaw it, foreshadowed the rise of black Chicago churches’ engagement in the civil rights movement. The political valence of the storefronts changed dramatically in the early 1960s, as the civil right movement escalated locally as well as nationally. In 1962 Chicago passed an ordinance requiring churches in areas zoned as business districts to have one parking space per 12 seats.⁸¹ Like urban renewal more broadly, the ordinance was part of the Daley regime’s attempt to turn Chicago into what some urban social scientists have deemed a “growth machine,” a city that pursues stimulating metropolitan economic growth in ways that often do

⁷⁶ Quoted in James Q. Wilson, *Negro Politics: The Search for Leadership* (New York: The Free Press, 1965 [1960]), 128.

⁷⁷ “Phony Churches Should Be Closed,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, May 13, 1958: A8.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Greg Harris, “Phony Churches Item Causes Stir,” *Chicago Daily Defender*: May 20, 1958: 8.

⁸⁰ “The GREG HARRIS notebook,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, June 10, 1958: A8.

⁸¹ City Council of the City of Chicago, *Chapter 194A Municipal Code of Chicago* (Chicago: Chicago Index Pub. Corp., 1962), 32A.

not align with local neighborhood interests.⁸² In tandem with the expressway system, improved parking throughout the city, and particularly in business districts, was essential to the growth machine because it provided easy automobile access to the central city's commercial outlets from the segregated suburbs.⁸³ Church parking requirements could make it easier for out-migrating members to come back into the city or neighborhood to worship, then stay to dine or shop after services. Churches unable to comply with the ordinance could be closed and eventually replaced with more economically viable enterprises.

In the abstract, black and white interests in parking were not utterly opposed: there was a growing black automobile market that would welcome more city-sanctioned parking space, some whites as well as blacks complained of unnecessary or otherwise problematic new parking lots, and parking issues caused citywide inconveniences for families with and without cars. Most importantly for blacks, cars and car infrastructure could make them less reliant on using public transit for traversing racially hostile neighborhoods. But in Chicago as in many other cities, growth initiatives centered on streamlining car use came at the expense of the communal and territorial integrity of black neighborhoods.⁸⁴ Like the expressway system, the parking boom was in many respects another manifestation of urban renewal-as-“Negro removal.”⁸⁵ In their statements of approval of the Hyde Park-Kenwood urban renewal plan, neighborhood block groups' willingness to reduce the black population in order to “save” the neighborhood

⁸² For Daley's pro-growth initiatives, see Cohen and Taylor, *American Pharaoh*, 10-11. For the theorization of the city as “growth machine,” see John R. Logan and Harvey L. Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (Berkeley, California and London: University of California Press, 1987). For Chicago as a growth machine, see Gregory D. Squires, Larry Bennett, Kathleen McCourt, and Philip Nyden, *Chicago: Race, Class, and the Response to Urban Decline* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

⁸³ Department of City Planning, *Basic Policies for the Comprehensive Plan of Chicago* (Chicago: The Department of City Planning, 1964), 69.

⁸⁴ See for example Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Knopf, 1974); Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2004).

⁸⁵ For the Dan Ryan Expressway as a bulwark of ghettoization, see Cohen and Taylor, *American Pharaoh*, 189.

complemented their desire for better off-street parking.⁸⁶ Hyde Park residents and neighborhood officials described uncontrolled black migration and unfettered car use as causing the same problems, such as noise, street congestion, environmental pollution, and the improper use of buildings and vacant lots.⁸⁷

Improper use of buildings was the most pressing neighborhood issue. The city's lack of adequate car accommodations spurred people to convert properties into makeshift garages and repair shops in violation of various regulations.⁸⁸ Similarly, buildings with black residences tended to become unlawfully overcrowded due to contract selling and the housing crunch. Because blacks were denied official mortgages, higher-earning black families bought homes "on contract" from speculators, who had bought the homes from absconding whites and then doubled or tripled the prices.⁸⁹ Under a contract sale, the speculator retained the deed to the property until the family paid off the home's entire cost. If the family missed one payment, the speculator could evict and then sell the property to another black buyer. The family then lost the equity they had built up, often beginning a slide into the lower classes. Desperate to make each payment and low on money due to the inflated price of purchase, families avoided paying for maintenance as much as possible, worked extra jobs, and subdivided their homes to other blacks often fleeing clearance and renewal. Public housing was designed to inculcate middle-class values in poor couples with children, but most blacks displaced by clearance were ineligible for public housing

⁸⁶ Cunningham, "Final Plan for HERALD"; Mrs. Donald Rowley, "Statement of the 5400 Greenwood block group regarding Urban Renewal Program," HPKCC Box 96, Folder 6.

⁸⁷ Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference, "Block Organizations in the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference Area," 1959: 2, HPKCC Box 96, Folder 9; Harold Rosenstein, "Zoning Violation," March 18, 1963, HPKCC Box 121 Folder 8; Note: to John Hibben, March 14, 1963, HPKCC Box 121, Folder 8; Teelander Bros., "Zoning Violations," March 18, 1963, HPKCC Box 121 Folder 8.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ The following description of contract selling is derived from Beryl Satter, "'Our Greatest Moments of Glory Have Been Fighting the Institutions We Love Most': The Rise and Fall of Chicago's Interreligious Council on Urban Affairs, 1958-1969," *U.S. Catholic Historian*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Urbanism and American Religion (Spring, 2004), 33-44: 36.

because their incomes were too high, they were single, or they did not have children.⁹⁰ They therefore crammed into the few buildings the city left standing that they were allowed to live in. These were frequently the subdivided, poorly-maintained homes bought “on contract” by more middle-class families barely holding on to—and often losing—their properties. Thus, the combination of respectable and nonconforming people led to the proliferation of buildings in violation of various codes and ordinances, which the city labeled as “non-conforming” buildings.⁹¹ These buildings were a primary reason why neighborhoods appeared to decline as they transitioned from white to black.

The church parking requirement positioned storefront churches as an epicenter of black religious, economic, structural, social, and demographic nonconformity. The City Council stipulated that owners of “non-conforming” buildings would have some time to decide on a plan of action or make necessary modifications once they were found in violation.⁹² However, the city began to punish churches that did not meet the parking requirement almost immediately. In the first few months of 1962, the city closed several storefront churches found to be in violation on the South and West Sides and forced ministers to pay \$200-800 fines or go to jail.⁹³ In response, black storefront clergy and churchgoers formed the Ministers and Laymen Freedom Advancement League (hereafter MLFAL).

MLFAL’s president was Rev. John W. Hunter, pastor of Elohim Baptist Church, a storefront at 942 East 75th street. The city handed Hunter an \$800 fine after he refused to vacate Elohim once it was found in violation, but Elohim eventually was moved later in the year to a

⁹⁰ Smith, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis*, 105-106.

⁹¹ City Council of the City of Chicago, *Chapter 194A Municipal Code of Chicago*, 8A-11A.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Hilliard J. McFall, “Ministers Push Fight to Save ‘Storefront’ Churches,” *The Chicago Defender*, April 28, 1962: 1; “‘Storefront’ Preachers Protest \$800 Fine Here,” *The Chicago Defender*, June 9, 1962: 3.

nearby location.⁹⁴ Elohim was about 12 blocks away from Salem Lutheran Church, in the Grand Crossing neighborhood adjacent Park Manor. The neighborhood was undergoing rapid racial transition. The area around Elohim had virtually no black residents in 1950, although the tip of the protruding Black Belt was just a few blocks to the north.⁹⁵ By 1960, Greater Grand Crossing, which included Grand Crossing, Park Manor and a few other neighborhoods in the area, was 86 percent black.⁹⁶ Greater Grand Crossing quickly became a stronghold of the emerging black middle class moving south of the old Black Belt, and sported by far the most owner-occupant black households of all Chicago neighborhoods in 1960.⁹⁷

But these improved housing conditions were often temporary. The maintenance of residential segregation, combined with a continuing (though decelerating) black in-migration, meant that new “striver” oases were quickly redlined by banks, experienced government and landlord neglect, accumulated buildings overstuffed with public housing-ineligible tenants to pay off inflated “contract” mortgages and/or fill the coffers of speculators, and so on.⁹⁸ Yet the presence and prominence of a storefront such as Elohim indicated that, rather than simply catalyzing social pathologies, such communities nurtured dynamic political cultures unimagined in the class-stratified discourse on the storefronts just a few years earlier. The city’s attempt to cow storefronts like Elohim could also have bolstered citywide black solidarity by showing that black religious space would not be secure just as long as it migrated from the increasingly poor

⁹⁴ Hilliard J. McFall, “Church Group Challenges Zoning Fine,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, December 26, 1963: 6.

⁹⁵ Otis Dudley Duncan and Beverly Duncan, *The Negro Population of Chicago: A Study of Residential Succession* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), Fig. 8, Negro Population, Chicago, 1950.

⁹⁶ Wallace Best, “Greater Grand Crossing,” *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/547.html>.

⁹⁷ Chicago Urban League, *Black Homeownership in Transition Areas* (Chicago: Chicago Urban League, 1981), 7.

⁹⁸ Smith, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis*, 98; Harvey and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, 130.

Black Belt neighborhoods slated for slum clearance, even once violently resistive whites fled transitioning neighborhoods.

Indeed, Elohim Baptist Church demonstrated how faith in Jesus was integral to the danger the political status quo faced as an inexorably expanding black Chicago began to literally outgrow the Daley machine. The storefront rights movement was part of a broader front challenging the local Democratic Party on race. Both Hunter and allies in the traditional church establishment such as J.C. Austin had supported T.R.M. Howard's unsuccessful 1958 campaign to unseat Congressman William Dawson, who up to around then had been the leader of the black "submachine" undergirding the Democratic Party's local electoral strength until Daley began to siphon off his power.⁹⁹ MLFAL now accused 6th Ward Alderman Robert Miller, a Dawson protégé-turned-Daley apparatchik, of refusing to support the storefronts. The alliance between storefront preachers and established pastors such as Austin invited two kinds of accusations of charlatanry: the kind traditionally associated with small-time storefront preachers described above, and the long-held notion that ministers of large, sophisticated churches were more interested in profiting from their relationships with political parties than in praising the Lord.¹⁰⁰ J.C. Austin supported Eisenhower for president over Illinois "native son" Adlai Stevenson in 1956 amid rumors that the Republicans bribed him with up to \$30,000; Congressman and Rev. Adam Clayton Powell of Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church faced similar accusations over his Eisenhower support.¹⁰¹ Just as blacks supporting T.R.M. Howard's campaign to unseat Congressman Dawson invoked Easter via the Negro spirituals by comparing Dawson to disciples who 'nevuh said a mumblin' word' as Jesus was crucified, a local black woman, Mary Wright,

⁹⁹ ["Little" Lucy Smith Collier Papers docs]; Grimshaw, *Bitter Fruit*.

¹⁰⁰ Cite *Black Metropolis*.

¹⁰¹ "Pastor Denies He Got Money For Politics," *The Chicago Defender*, Nov 24, 1956: 3. CD with "native son" quote.

hoped that God would help chase “Negro preachers selling their souls to political charlatans for a few pieces of silver...out of His temple” in a letter the *Defender* published during the 1956 campaign, thereby equating such preachers to Judas and the temple moneychangers of the Easter story.¹⁰²

This discourse reveals that demonstrating authentic faith in Christ was crucial to political-ecclesiastic legitimacy. Thus MLFAL’s purpose was, according to the *Defender*, “to fight for ‘Freedom of Religion,’ and to protect the rights of all Christians to worship God in their own way.”¹⁰³ Abie Miller, president of another group supporting the storefronts, the South Side League for Political Progress, best summed up the dilemma by wondering, “‘Have we reached the point...where Negroes cannot even worship God in peace?’”¹⁰⁴ Miller went on to note that although “‘a few of the churches are operated by fakes and quacks who are more concerned about making extra money than they are with teaching about Jesus,’” his organization found that “‘90 percent of these ‘store front’ pastors and members are sincere, dedicated Christians whose sole purpose in these churches is to serve and praise God...they simply don’t have the money!’” to upgrade their buildings or comply with new parking requirements.¹⁰⁵

With “freedom of religion” as its rallying cry, the storefront rights movement fused two seemingly incongruent black Chicago cultural mainstays: classical liberalism, epitomized by *Ebony* magazine; and ambiguously, somewhat paradoxically black nationalist spiritual esoterica, evinced by Ethiopianism and musical acts from the Sun Ra Arkestra to Earth, Wind & Fire.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² [Lucy Smith Collier docs]; Mary Wright, “The People Speak: Clean Up Churches,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, Oct 2, 1956: 9. Break up/reorganize.

¹⁰³ “Storefront Preachers Protest \$800 Fine Here.”

¹⁰⁴ “Charges Store Front Ordinance Is Illegal,” *The Chicago Defender*, June 16, 1962: 2.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ For *Ebony* as an exemplar of black Chicago’s centrality to African American “classic liberalism,” see Green, *Selling the Race*, 174-176. For Ethiopianism, see Chapters 1 and 2 above.

The movement's conception of "freedom of religion" diverged from the main thrust of the civil rights movement, and particularly from King's outreach to white liberal and integrated churches, in that it explicitly foregrounded the importance of black churches as the site of black religion's radical difference from mainstream white civil religion, and thus as the site of spiritual resistance to white supremacy.¹⁰⁷ The leading Afro-Christian elements of the Southern struggle approximated the universalist (within the U.S. context) vision of the religious advocates of religious liberty among the nation's Founders. The Southern movement's alternative to segregationist and neo-Bookerite theologies would ultimately lead the nation to a higher realization of freedom, and thus, as SCLC's slogan put it, "redeem the soul of America."¹⁰⁸ But Chicago's storefront rights movement was more Madisonian, in that instead of a nationwide redemption, the liberty of minority religions—specifically Afro-Christianities—to conceive of redemption as they saw fit and *where* they saw fit was of paramount importance.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, unlike the civil rights-aligned interfaith movement, storefront rights prioritized the defense of the devotional practices and sacred values of heterodox black congregations over notions of the sacredness of the individual and the consensus-building righteousness of America's "Judeo-Christian" heritage.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ This formulation is influenced by Stephen L. Carter, "The Black Church and Religious Freedom," in *Black Faith and Black Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone's Black Theology and Black Power*, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 20-28.

¹⁰⁸ Eric Slauter, *The State as a Work of Art: The Cultural Origins of the Constitution* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 290; Darryl D. Roberts, "An Examination of the Impact of the Climate of Religious Freedom during the Civil Rights Movement on the Pursuit of Civil Rights and Religious Liberty," Ph.D. diss (Emory University, 2014), 4; Harry Kalven, Jr., *The Negro and the 1st Amendment* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), esp. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Slauter, *The State as a Work of Art*, 290.

¹¹⁰ Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 268-269; Wendy L. Wall, *Inventing the "American Way": The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Spatializing James Madison's dictum that "the security for civil rights must be the same as that for religious rights," storefronts' independence from domination by City Hall and its black church satellites was inextricable from their support of nonviolent direct action in the South.¹¹¹ As they fought for their own survival, MLFAL storefronts also defended Chicago Baptist churches whose participation in the Albany, Georgia freedom struggle over the past year drew Rev. Joseph H. Jackson's ire.¹¹² It is not entirely clear why, in the *Defender's* words, "the 'store front' churches...have long been at odds with Dr. Jackson."¹¹³ But their small size, symbolization of ghetto dysfunction, and eccentricities of faith and finance ran contrary to Jackson's preference for a centralized Afro-Baptist hierarchy, as well as his neo-Bookerite philosophy of fighting for civil rights through "production," which meant developing stable, respectable black institutions.¹¹⁴ By contrast, for the storefronts, the freedom of religion that should allow them to stay and worship where they were regardless of the city's plans for economic growth or other blacks' programs to achieve racial equality, was the same freedom that should enable Northern congregations to go help overthrow Jim Crow.

Lacking the support of groups affiliated with or fearful of the Daley machine or Joseph H. Jackson's Baptist establishment, relying primarily on storefront churchgoers and, as Abie Miller stated, "average working people," the storefront rights movement had its greatest champion in the *Chicago Defender*.¹¹⁵ As it became more politically progressive, the newspaper forged a particularly strong relationship with Rev. Hunter, underscoring his dedication to

¹¹¹ James Madison, *Federalist* No. 51, in Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers* (New York: The New American Library, 1961), 320-325:324.

¹¹² "More Strife for Baptists? Expect 25,000 at Convention," *The Chicago Defender*, September 1, 1962: 1.

¹¹³ "Baptist Group Disagrees With Dr. Jackson, Backs Ministers Trip To Albany," *Chicago Daily Defender*, September 12, 1962: 1.

¹¹⁴ Paris, *Black Religious Leaders*, 87.

¹¹⁵ "Underscore Poor Support From Monied Negroes," *Chicago Daily Defender*, May 31, 1962: 5.

fighting racial injustice. Channeling Jackie Wilson's #1 R&B hit from that past spring, the dancefloor clarion "Baby Workout," in October 1963 the *Defender* grooved approvingly as it recounted Hunter's following up on the case of his neighbor, a white police officer then off-duty and in civilian clothes, brandishing a gun at a black motorist on their street: "Work out, Rev."¹¹⁶ By 1964, the *Defender's* escalating critiques of the South Side's 4th Ward Alderman Claude Holman, a Daley sycophant loathe to support Lyndon Johnson's civil rights bill or the second black boycott of the Chicago Public Schools in two years, caused Holman to declare war on both the paper and Hunter.¹¹⁷ The *Defender* proudly wrote about Hunter's statement that Baptists would continue to stand by the newspaper despite Holman's announcement that the "Pro-Holman—Anti-DEFENDER Committee" would picket the homes and churches of Hunter and another minister supporting the paper.¹¹⁸ That one of Chicago's most powerful black politicians would challenge the city's most influential black newspaper by picketing a precarious storefront church exemplified the storefronts' power to upset the political status quo while staying in their local contexts.

But as the case of Bishop Luther B. Hylton demonstrates, the Daley machine's infamy can obscure both the pervasiveness of antiblackness in Chicago's political culture, and the oppositional undercurrents that could unite black Chicagoans in defending black religious space even when they disagreed on virtually everything else. Hylton was one of the most prominent Chicago clergymen in the largest African American Pentecostal denomination, the Church of God in Christ (COGIC). He was also a loyal Democratic precinct captain in Claude Holman's 4th

¹¹⁶ Ole Nosey, "Everybody Goes When the Wagon Comes," *The Chicago Defender*, Oct 12, 1963: 10; "Cop Brandishes Gun, Terrorizes Neighbors," *Chicago Daily Defender*, September 25, 1963: A3. Jackie Wilson's "Baby Workout" was Billboard's R&B No. 1 from May 5-May 18, 1963.

¹¹⁷ On Holman, see Grimshaw, *Bitter Fruit*, 108-110.

¹¹⁸ "Ministers Vote to Support DEFENDER," *Chicago Daily Defender*, June 10, 1964: 3. Hunter neither lived nor preached in the 4th ward, so perhaps Holman saw little risk of offending his constituents.

Ward, which produced the 6th and 7th most votes for Daley of all Chicago wards in the 1959 and 1963 mayoral elections, respectively.¹¹⁹ The 4th Ward was one of Chicago's most variegated: it included virtually all-black, housing project-heavy Oakland, which was ranked in 1966 as the city's second poorest community, as well as more integrated and black middle-class areas in northern Hyde Park-Kenwood, where Hylton lived in the 21-room "Hylton Mansion" at 49th and Dorchester.¹²⁰ An embodiment of the complexity of COGIC's incomplete "rise to respectability" from its stigmatization as a low-class cult of "holy rollers," the Texas-born Hylton had studied at the University of Chicago, led initiatives to promote education and gang peace, occasionally wrote for the *Chicago Defender*, and hosted various radio programs.¹²¹

While Hylton misguidedly portrayed Mayor Daley as a leader in the fight against local racial segregation, Hylton himself ardently pursued the goal of opening up downtown Chicago to blacks not just as a place for shopping and leisure, but a place in which institutionalizing black faith could unsettle other social conventions.¹²² Hylton converted his office adjacent to City Hall at 145 N. Clark Street into a "marriage chapel," and began encountering trouble with authorities.¹²³ Allegedly, a clerk in City Hall told a "Chinese man" and a white woman who wanted Hylton to marry them that Hylton was running a scam, and to go to the marriage court instead. As Hylton's 17-year-old part-time secretary, Darfender Smith, showed the couple the way to the court, they encountered Eddie White, a former police officer serving as the personal

¹¹⁹ Grimshaw, *Bitter Fruit*, 127.

¹²⁰ David K. Fremon, *Chicago Politics: Ward by Ward* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 42-43; Pierre de Vise, *Chicago's Widening Color Gap* (Chicago: Interuniversity Social Research Committee, 1967), 59.

¹²¹ Calvin White, Jr., *The Rise to Respectability: Race, Religion, and the Church of God in Christ* (Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 2012); "Bishop Hilton Out for Title," *Chicago Daily Defender*, January 7, 1957: 9; "Bishop Hylton to Return to Airwaves," *Chicago Daily Defender*, November 30, 1968: 9.

¹²² Luther B. Hylton, "Sees 'Invisible Hand' Behind Newspaper Stories," *Chicago Daily Defender*, February 17, 1960: 11.

¹²³ "Probe Beating in City Hall," *Chicago Daily Defender*, April 6, 1961: 2.

bodyguard of his longtime friend, County Clerk Edward J. Barrett. According to Smith, White grabbed her arm and demanded to know what she told the couple. The Chinese man pulled White off of Smith and told him to leave her alone. But after the couple left, White pushed and kicked Smith down a flight of stairs.¹²⁴ White apparently denied the story but admitted to threatening to kick her down the stairs.¹²⁵ Barrett told Hylton that he would “take necessary precautions” to address the situation.¹²⁶

The incident suggested both the substance of an “undercommon” oppositional multiracial network (running in this case from black Chicago to Chinatown to City Hall), and the limits placed on that network by the persistent exceptional degradation of blackness despite blacks’ greater incorporation into the U.S. political establishment and, arguably, national imaginary than other racial minorities.¹²⁷ As blacks joined Salem Lutheran Church, “nigger-lover” was “the dreaded epithet” feared by white worshippers, and within the church interracial romance was one of the most delicate subjects.¹²⁸ Yet in the City Hall incident, a city representative condoned and even facilitated a non-black interracial marriage while he assaulted a black girl for representing improper black encroachment into white space.

Five months after the incident, Hylton opened up the “Million Dollar Temple in the Sky” on the 14th and 22nd floors of 32 W. Randolph St, in the heart of the downtown Loop district’s

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ “Clerk Denies City Hall Brawl,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, April 10, 1961: 2.

¹²⁶ “Probe Beating in City Hall.”

¹²⁷ For the debate in black critical theory over the political utility of multiracial alliances, see for instance Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe, New York, and Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2013); Stuart Hall, “Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity,” in Stuart Hall, *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1996), 411-440; Jared Sexton, “People-of-Color-Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery,” *Social Text* 103, Vol. 28, No. 2, Summer 2010: 31-56; Frank B. Wilderson III, “The Prison Slave as (Hegemony’s) Silent Scandal,” in *Warfare in the American Homeland: Policing and Prison in a Penal Democracy*, ed. Joy James (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 23-34.

¹²⁸ Johnson, *Call Me Neighbor, Call Me Friend*, 44, 101, 105-106.

governmental, financial, and commercial center.¹²⁹ The temple could accommodate between 2,700-5,000 people.¹³⁰ During the temple dedication services, Hylton flew around the building in a helicopter dropping confetti on onlookers filling the streets below.¹³¹ Hylton reportedly made the money for the temple by what the *Defender* called “hustling weddings,” i.e., marriage solicitation, which after 15 years of practice had [reportedly] grown to a \$35,000-50,000 a year enterprise. Just as Hunter’s Elohim Baptist Church signaled black Chicago’s spreading south beyond the Daley machine’s Black Belt stronghold, the Temple in the Sky was a striking display of Afro-Christianity’s ability to literally scale the heights of the white power structure, at a time when many thousands of black Chicagoans were moving into segregated high-rise housing projects. The Temple held events such as a Helen Robinson Youth Choir concert, a program celebrating Ethiopian culture, a “Freedom Meeting,” and a gospel concert on a yacht in Lake Michigan.

In January 1963, Hylton, three other COGIC ministers and a waiter who had just been married a few days prior were arrested for being “‘too aggressive’ in approaching couples who go to the county building to take out marriage licenses”; they were detained for four hours and then released.¹³² Hylton alleged that Cook County Sheriff Ogilvie was, in the *Defender*’s words, “waging a campaign of religious persecution against Negro ministers in the County Building.”¹³³ Ogilvie claimed to have made soliciting marriage in the County Building illegal in 1961, perhaps in response to the Barrett-Smith controversy more than anything. But there was confusion over whether it was already illegal, and over whether Ogilvie had the authority to make it so.

¹²⁹ Hilliard J. McFall, “Hold Dedication Services for Hylton Temple,” *The Chicago Defender*, September 23, 1961.

¹³⁰ Ibid; “Set to Dedicated Hylton’s Temple in the ‘Sky,’” *The Chicago Defender*, September 9, 1961.

¹³¹ McFall, “Hold Dedication Services for Hylton Temple.”

¹³² “Four Ministers Arrested in County Bldg. Mixup,” *The Chicago Defender*, January 26, 1963: 1.

¹³³ “Cleric Accuses Ogilvie of ‘Religious Persecution,’” *The Chicago Defender*, February 2, 1963: 1.

Another one of the ministers, Rev. J. Lawrence Bufford, was arrested two more times over the next few days, once while walking on the street in front of the County Building, and again for protesting the recent arrests by picketing a speaking event Ogilvie held in the Black Belt.¹³⁴ Hylton was in one stretch ““arrested five times in a row”” but released without trial each time, and other ““marrying ministers”” were arrested as ““pickpockets.””¹³⁵ As the arrests mounted, a convoluted legal battle ensued in which allegations of bribery and corruption flew between Hylton and Ogilvie.¹³⁶ The battle quickly brought Ministers and Laymen Freedom Advancement League president Rev. John W. Hunter and 4th Ward Alderman Claude Holman into alignment on the same side. Hunter was part of a Baptist delegation that met with Ogilvie to argue that the police stop harassing the ministers in the County Building, while Holman represented his precinct captain Hylton in court against their Republican rival.¹³⁷

A few months later, Rev. Johnny Ross, a black minister who married couples in his office a couple of blocks from the Temple in the Sky after they got licensed from the country clerk’s office, was arrested in front of City Hall, taken to a jail in the lily white Skokie suburb, allegedly handcuffed and beaten there, then charged with assault, resisting arrest and disorderly conduct.¹³⁸ Hylton seems never to have been brutalized in such a way, but by Thanksgiving 1963 the Temple in the Sky was shut down, and Hylton was convicted of bribing a policeman to allow him to continue soliciting marriage from licensed couples in the County Building.¹³⁹ Hylton said

¹³⁴ “Clerics Picket Ogilvie To Protest Loop Arrests,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, February 4, 1963: 2.

¹³⁵ Dave Potter, “Is Bishop Hylton Being Taken On ‘Railroad Ride’ By Officer?” *Chicago Daily Defender*, November 4, 1963: 4.

¹³⁶ “Sheriff Jails Bishop Hylton for Bribery: Arrest Bishop Hylton On Charge Of Bribery,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, February 21, 1963: 1; Hilliard J. McFall, “Bishop Charges Bribe!” *The Chicago Defender*, February 23, 1963.

¹³⁷ “Shift Hearing For Minister in Marriage Feud,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, February 11, 1963: 4; “Hylton’s Bribe, ‘Frame’ Cases Set For Court,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, February 27, 1963: 11.

¹³⁸ “Minister Charges Beating: ‘Deputies Beat Me, Cleric Says,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 20, 1963: 1.

¹³⁹ Dave Potter, “‘I Am A Sacrificial Lamb,’ Says Bishop After Bribery Conviction,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, November 20, 1963: 4.

that ““Everybody said”” he ““wasn’t a bishop, but a self-styled confidence-man-cleric,” but ultimately, just as Jesus ““was the Son of God, I am the Son of God of this day, doing what I was put here to do—helping my fellow man.””¹⁴⁰ Hylton was soon also convicted of marriage solicitation and sentenced to a year’s court supervision; three other ministers were convicted as well.¹⁴¹

Black newspapers from outside of Chicago depicted Hylton as either simply an intriguing story, or a charlatan whose hustling finally caught up with him; they neither mentioned police brutality, nor conveyed any sense that his predicament was related to the cresting civil rights movement of 1963.¹⁴² They also questioned the validity of the marriages he conducted.¹⁴³ Overall their coverage was similar to that of the *Chicago Tribune*, a generally racially illiberal paper that cheered the running down of Rev. Ross.¹⁴⁴ By contrast, the *Chicago Defender*’s coverage did not directly question the marriages’ validity. Furthermore, the *Defender* implied that Hylton’s struggle was an extension of the storefront rights movement and the fight for civil rights more broadly, despite his being a lieutenant of the paper’s political targets.

That Hylton’s cause was able to bring such opposed political forces into alignment was a testament to the importance of freedom of religion in black Chicago. The cause brought conflicting black Chicagoans together, but to safeguard their right to disagree politically and theologically. Such disagreement was to be protected even if turning Hylton into a kind of civil rights hero would on one hand help shore up the Democratic machine’s credibility (which Hunter

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ “Bishop Hylton Gets A Year’s Supervision,” *Chicago Defender*, Feb 20, 1964.

¹⁴² “Couple Questions Quickie Marriage,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 23, 1963: 19; “Five-Year-Old Marriage Was Never Recorded,” *Atlanta Daily World*, March 17, 1963: A1; “Marrying Bishop’s Temple In Sky Is Gone: Jail Awaits,” *Atlanta Daily World*, November 5, 1963: 6; “Chi’s ‘Marrying Bishop’ Denies Bribery Charge,” *San Antonio Register*, March 1, 1963: 1.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ “Hylton Found Guilty In Cop Bribing Case,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 26, 1963: C8;

and the *Defender* would not have wanted), and on the other hand help legitimate clerical nonviolent direct action (which machine-oriented black leaders would not have wanted). Thus, the defense of Hylton coalesced the politics of black religion momentarily in a way that defended that politics' longer-term disaggregation. If decolonization is an agenda of total "disorder," as Franz Fanon argued echoing Max Weber's study of Jewish charismatic messiahs in the Roman Empire, then Hylton's burlesquing the institutions of marriage and downtown property ownership while spectacularly claiming the center of city government as a black Pentecostal worship space evinced an incipient anticolonial quality that tickled black freedom dreams as it frightened white city fathers.¹⁴⁵

Hylton's burlesque was unique not in quality, but in location and scale. It reflected how despite the notion of marriage and the church as respectable institutions, the housing shortage and parking space ordinances meant that many married couples and storefronts subsisted in "non-conforming" buildings that burlesqued respectable ideals of marriage, homeownership, and property ownership. Black nonconformity housed diverse, seemingly conflicting desires together, from heteronormative married couples looking forward to owning a single-family home, to individuals and family members with various non-normative inklings of the good life; from storefront pastors striving to expand their flocks, move into larger edifices, and participate in mainline denominational activity, to worshippers who cherished the intimacy of small congregations and esoteric theologies.¹⁴⁶ Despite their differences, a broad front of black Chicagoans tenuously agreed that it was neither the city's right nor business to reform this

¹⁴⁵ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004 [1961]), 2; Cedric J. Robinson, *The Terms of Order: Political Science and the Myth of Leadership* (Albany, NY: The State of University of New York Press, 1980), 152.

¹⁴⁶ This conceptualization of housing nonconformity as encompassing both people ostensibly striving for normalcy and people who were not striving for normalcy is influenced by Fred Moten, "The Subprime and the Beautiful," *African Identities* Vol. 11, No. 2 (2013), 237-245.

nonconformity by clearing and removing it, especially since the city denied access to adequate living space. Building off this sentiment, Hylton's project intimated that black Chicagoans had to challenge the logic of good city order that was eviscerating their neighborhoods, by institutionalizing black religious space and black nonconformity at the seat of that order's power. But as the contrast between local and national black coverage of Hylton indicated, black Chicago Protestants' support for this challenge showed that their ideas about the role of religion in the local freedom struggle were diverging from the ideological thrust of the larger civil rights movement as Martin Luther King turned his attention to their city in 1965.

IV. Chicago Freedom = Movement?

While scholarship generally interprets the Chicago Freedom Movement as a narrowly political struggle between King and Daley's respective forces, from an intra-racial black perspective it was an ideological struggle over two institutions black intellectuals had long critically engaged in relation to each other: "the Negro church" and "the Negro home." In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois stated that "that the Negro church antedates the Negro home, leads to an explanation of much that is paradoxical in the communistic institution and in the morals of its members."¹⁴⁷ Ironically, Du Bois and other black intellectuals, including King mentor Benjamin E. Mays, exhibited a paradox in their studies of the church. They argued that the Negro church destabilized Negro home life by drawing away the women who comprised the clear majority of church members and organizers.¹⁴⁸ Yet they still conceived of black churches as "governments of men" which therefore held the untapped potential to lead a patriarchal black freedom

¹⁴⁷ Du Bois, *The Souls of the Black Folk*, 145.

¹⁴⁸ Savage, *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us*.

struggle.¹⁴⁹ SCLC translated the paradoxes of the Negro church into nationwide mass movement politics, exacerbating their spatial tensions. While SCLC's leading ministers traveled the country and received much of the glory, women continued to sustain the 'home churches' that anchored the ministers' community credibility, train cadres of civil rights workers in places such as Septima Clark's Citizenship School, and power unheralded local struggles.

In the year and a half between the Selma campaign and the Chicago Freedom Movement's open housing marches, the metastasizing controversy over "the Negro family" stretched these spatial tensions even further. This lightning rod of this controversy was Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, known as "the Moynihan Report," which was published in March 1965, the same month as Selma. While derivative of earlier social science, the Moynihan Report rocked the national discourse on the civil rights movement with the suggestion that the Negro family was trapped in a "tangle of pathology" in which simultaneously overbearing and uncaring black "matriarchs" ruined the ego of black men, denying them their rightful patriarchal roles.¹⁵⁰ If historian Charles Payne is correct in suggesting that "behavior patterns in this society that are socially coded as feminine" powered the civil rights movement, and if this dissertation is correct in arguing in an earlier chapter that gospel music associated freedom with mothering, then the Moynihan Report's sexism and assault on black mothers discredited the sociocultural logic of the mid-twentieth century black freedom struggle.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 143; Savage, *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us*.

¹⁵⁰ For the influence of the Moynihan Report on coverage of the civil rights movement after Selma, see Branch, *At Canaan's Edge*, 370-372.

¹⁵¹ Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1995), 426.

Yet King, the black freedom struggle's symbolic leader, largely concurred with the Moynihan Report's characterization of black families. In a speech in Chicago in 1966, he stated that "The Negro male existed in a larger society that was patriarchal while he was the subordinate in a matriarchy...the shattering blows on the Negro family have made it fragile, deprived and often psychopathic."¹⁵² SCLC had to find a way to distance the civil rights insurgency from such deprived psychopathy, particularly as the organization moved into the urban black neighborhoods often thought of as hotbeds of such dysfunction.

King's solution was to conceive of nonconformity as political and not social. When the Georgia legislature refused to seat Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) veteran and newly-elected Congressman Julian Bond due to his declared opposition to the Vietnam War, King defended Bond as an exemplary "non-conformist" in a January 1966 sermon at Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church, which he co-pastored with his father.¹⁵³ Anchoring his words in Apostle Paul's statement, "be not conformed," King argued Christians are to be "men of moral nobility rather than men of social respectability. As Christians, we are called on to live differently."¹⁵⁴ Two months later, King implored readers of leading black newspapers to reject the "negative normalcy" of the racial status quo, for "every people who have ever struck for freedom—have rejected the normal and embraced the abnormal."¹⁵⁵ But King specifically meant a rather narrow conception of political nonconformity and abnormality centered on the legitimacy of using nonviolent direct action to transgress unjust and exclusionary laws. This discourse made sense when it came to challenging Jim Crow laws in the South, and perhaps even segregated housing policy in the North. But in Chicago, as we have seen, the battle against

¹⁵² Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Dignity of Family Life," PMLK Box 9, Folder 10: 7-8.

¹⁵³ Martin Luther King, Jr., Sermon at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, January 16, 1966: 2. PMLK Box 10.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 3.

¹⁵⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr., "Civil Rights and Negative Normalcy," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 12, 1966: 3.

official laws and policies prioritized defending extant black religious spaces and black homes regardless of their social standing, which blurred the distinction between political and social nonconformity. Black Chicagoans' emphasis on defending black spaces thought to be problematically overdetermined by women led them to interpret King's leadership in ways that challenged SCLC's patriarchal conception of prophetic protest Christianity and its ideological alliance with a similarly patriarchal mid-1960s left-liberal coalition, even as they valorized and at times divinized that leadership.

This interpretation of King was rooted in the earlier struggles to defend black space. Greater New Era Baptist Church Rev. P.A. Cantrell's biblical rendering of King provided a glimpse into how black Chicago Protestantism conceived of the gendered dynamics of religious spatiality. Aligned with the more progressive Chicago Baptist ministers, in 1964 Cantrell organized with Rev. John W. Hunter against police brutality. Three years earlier in 1961, he wrote to King praising him for his "manly," "Christ like" advocacy for black equality.¹⁵⁶ Cantrell noted that Rev. Joseph H. Jackson's attempts to "castigate" King for his civil rights work at that year's pugnacious meeting of the National Baptist Convention reminded him of how in the "case of David after he had slain Goliath, Saul envied him and desired to destroy him he tried, but he failed in his attempt." Jesus has often been rendered as a descendant of David in order to shore up his messianic credentials as the rightful King of Israel, most famously in the Gospel of Matthew. (This does not necessarily mean biological descent; it can also mean being appointed by God as the restorer of the Davidic kingdom in some way.) Having compared King to David and Christ, one would expect that Cantrell would then, if anything, place King in this particular messianic lineage. However, Cantrell concluded by stating, "I am thinking now of what a great

¹⁵⁶ P.A. Cantrell to Martin Luther King, Jr.

monument Jesus of Nazareth build to the memory of Mary of Bethany. Kings, and Queens, Confessors, Teachers, Preachers, and tens of thousands of great good men and women have passed around before the shrine of that monument, and gazed at the epitaph ‘She Hath Done What She Could’ I place you in the same category with the immortal Mary.” Instead of comparing King to Jesus, Cantrell ultimately compared him to Mary of Bethany, who anointed Jesus’ feet shortly before his entrance into Jerusalem. Usually, this ritual was performed by a male prophet anointing a king’s head. Mary’s anointing Jesus’ feet renders him a Messiah, but also is a performance of the women’s ritual of preparing a loved one for burial. Thus, Cantrell’s identifying King as similar to Mary rendered King’s leadership as paradigmatically womanly rather than manly. Furthermore, by framing Jesus’ defense of Mary’s use of expensive ointment to anoint his feet, “She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying” (Mark 14:8), as an epitaph, Cantrell indicated that Jesus reciprocates Mary’s anointing him for burial with his own funereal rite for her, and thereby underscored the paradigmatic womanliness of messiahship. Here Cantrell read the common use of this phrase for a tombstone epitaph into the biblical story itself.

Cantrell used this emphasis on the womanly and the funereal in order to rethink how politicized faith functioned in space. The next verse, Mark 14:9, “Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her,” is usually interpreted as the story of Mary’s devotion reaching people all over the world, implying it can be in many places at once and thus unify far-flung believers spiritually. But by interpreting “memorial” as a “buil(t)” “monument” rather than an orally or textually disseminated memorialization, Cantrell indicated that people come to where Mary is. Thus, rather than charismatic inspiration travelling to potential devotees,

devotees had to be where the charisma emanated from. Ironically, Cantrell's praise of King foreshadowed both contemporary activists' and recent historians' critiques of SCLC's tendency to arrive in a town in a highly publicized flurry of demonstrating, but soon leave the indigenous black population to deal with the white backlash and to reenergize longstanding local organizing efforts that the spectacle of King's presence had suffocated. This tendency tended to make SCLC the protagonists of the civil rights story, rather than the individual struggles in those locations. Cantrell's centralizing a monumentalized Mary therefore aligned with Charles Payne's notion of the "socially-coded feminine" quality of local organizing work, often done by churchwomen, as the backbone of the civil rights movement.¹⁵⁷ It also ran against the prophetic model itself, which emphasized the prophet's free agency and lack of being tethered to a location, unlike a priest or a king.

As King turned his attention to Chicago, black Chicagoan understandings of his messiahship continued to diverge from his own understanding of his mission. Early in 1966, a black Woodlawn resident, William Andrew Reese, wrote King a letter beginning with a title-of-sorts, "From the stump of Jesse," drawn from Isaiah 11:1. Isaiah 11 became one of the central biblical chapters for messianic traditions, as many have used it to foretell that a descendant of Jesse, father of David, will arise as the Messiah.¹⁵⁸ Imploring King to "please read Isaiah 11 chp all of it," Reese related that he "had a dream on 8-7-65 that the Republican party will draft you to run for president of the United States for 1968." Just as, as Hebrew Bible scholar John Collins argues, "messianic expectation could imply dissatisfaction with actual Jewish kings in the Hellenistic and Roman periods," Reese saying that he had dreamed of King running against

¹⁵⁷ Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 426.

¹⁵⁸ John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), Chapter 3: "A Shoot from the Stump of Jesse," 49-73.

Lyndon Johnson's reelection bid on the day after Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act implied some dissatisfaction with the Johnson Administration.¹⁵⁹

An exhausting set of local developments underscoring the intractability of ghettoization unfolded in rapid succession to set the context for Reese's vision of King opposing Johnson. King came to Chicago in late July 1965 in search of a city suitable for a Northern campaign. His leading 15,000 protestors in a march through the Loop invigorated the local movement; one marcher even likened it to the "millennium."¹⁶⁰ But following King's departure, the movement's newly inspired efforts seemed no more effective in opening the city. Most deflating, on August 2, thousands of white residents of Mayor Daley's Bridgeport neighborhood rained stones, eggs and tomatoes onto protest marchers led by comedian Dick Gregory.¹⁶¹ Four days later, as Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, Reese's Woodlawn neighborhood, like much of the rest of black Chicago, continued to deteriorate. Within a week of Reese's dream, the black West Side erupted in a riot, a day after the much larger Watts riot began.

Like the riots, Reese's vision of a biblically prophesied King-led Republican Party departed from the perspectives of King and his allies in the civil rights movement because it both eschewed nonviolent protest and exhibited a deep discomfort with the electoral status quo. Unlike the riots, it embraced the two-party system as transformative, if a messianic King led one of the parties. This differed markedly from the famous political turn advocated by Bayard Rustin, a King advisor and longtime activist. In 1965, Rustin wrote that the civil rights movement should move "from protest to politics" to take advantage of what appeared to be an ascendant progressive majority as evidenced by Johnson's overwhelming defeat of conservative

¹⁵⁹ Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 25.

¹⁶⁰ Ralph, *Northern Protest*, 37.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 37.

Republican Barry Goldwater in the 1964 election.¹⁶² By contrast, Reese's embrace of the electoral potential of the Republicans against Johnson rejected the notion that black freedom was tied to extending the Democratic Party liberalism of the New Deal and the Great Society. Reese also diverged from King's preferred model of leading a social movement outside of electoral politics that was capable of pressuring liberal or sympathetic elected officials such as Johnson to enact policies promoting black equality. Thus, Reese's conceptualization of black Republicanism did not align with King's celebration of Massachusetts' November 1966 election of a moderate black Republican senator, Edward Brooke, as a sign that whites were still receptive to the idea of racial equality despite all the talk of a white backlash.¹⁶³

By 1967, prominent leftists and antiwar activists attempted to convince King to run for president.¹⁶⁴ King believed that such a candidacy would not be designed to win the election, but to provide an alternative to the political establishment.¹⁶⁵ After giving the idea more consideration, King decided against running because he needed to be his "own man" and operate "outside the realm of partisan politics."¹⁶⁶ But for Reese, King's running would not be just to provide an alternative; he would run to win, to fulfill Isaiah 11. Thus his would not be a protest candidacy. Excited by King's return to Chicago on a more long-term basis in the winter of 1965-66, Reese ended the letter by telling him to "Please call or send me a letter so I can be of more help to you and your staff." Reese yearned to participate in a SCLC-led effort to stir a messianic

¹⁶² Bayard Rustin, "From Protest to Politics: The Future of the Civil Rights Movement," *Commentary*, February 1, 1965.

¹⁶³ Leah Wright Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), 118.

¹⁶⁴ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 542, 557.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 542.

¹⁶⁶ King quoted in *Ibid*, 558-559.

polity, but not necessarily an effort to protest in order to wrench concessions from Chicago's Democratic Party establishment.

Erma Lee Jordan's letter to King resonated with aspects of Cantrell's discussion of gendered spatiality and Andrews' critique of Johnson Administration liberalism in a manner that ultimately countered SCLC's vision of the relationship between the church and the home in the black freedom struggle. Jordan was a welfare recipient living in a small low-income private housing area between the two wings of the 3,000-unit Horner-Rockwell group of public housing projects in the black Near West Side, the 6th poorest Chicago neighborhood in 1966.¹⁶⁷ She wrote to King on January 30th, 1966, telling him that while he was in town, "I hope there will be some thing I can do to help the poor" who "is paying too much rent. And its not sufficient I mean there apartment for too much rent."¹⁶⁸ Her concern was that "A.D.C."—the welfare program Aid to Dependent Children, which had been renamed Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in 1961, "will pay high rent, but what worrie me every body that live in rats + roaches."¹⁶⁹ Jordan believed that recipients were "afraid they will get cut off the A.D.C." if they complained about their living conditions. This was a legitimate fear: any attention recipients drew to substandard conditions could invite officials to withdraw their grants under "suitable home" policies, which disproportionately targeted blacks.¹⁷⁰ "But," Jordan continued, "deep in my heart I don't think the A.D.C. should pay all this high rent. And let people live like dogs." Jordan's concern reflected the plight of the 84 percent of ADC recipients in Chicago living in private

¹⁶⁷ Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, Figure 1; de Vise, *Chicago's Widening Color Gap*, 59.

¹⁶⁸ Erma Lee Jordan to Martin Luther King, Jr., January 30, 1966. PMLK Box 96, Folder 6.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. Following Jordan, in this chapter I will use the abbreviation ADC, which other sources also continued to use throughout the 1960s despite the official change to AFDC. This also perhaps reflected a critique of the politics of the name change, which implied that only legitimate "families" should receive aid.

¹⁷⁰ Winifred Bell, *Aid to Dependent Children* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1965); Ellen Reese, *Backlash against Welfare Mothers: Past and Present* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2005), 44.

housing, around half of whom were in substandard housing beset by building code violations.¹⁷¹ Monthly rents were on average higher than the average monthly rental grants.¹⁷² Furthermore, the number of persons per household had little impact on determining the amount of money in the grants.¹⁷³ Similarly, the difference in cost between housing units with good maintenance service and units with poor service was so negligible that, the Cook County Department of Public Aid surmised in 1969, “sound buildings with good services may rapidly deteriorate,” since landlords would either be unable or have no motivation to keep up standards.¹⁷⁴

In one sense, Martin Luther King likely sympathized with the plight of ADC recipients. One of the Chicago Freedom Movement’s early focuses in the winter of 1965-66 was organizing tenants into tenant unions and conducting rent strikes to protest landlord neglect. However, King’s agreement with the Moynihan Report’s characterization of black families also concurred with the reasoning for the maintenance of the conditions Jordan described. By the mid-1960s, both civil rights activists and adversaries increasingly associated ADC with so-called “matriarchal” black women, who comprised about 40 percent of the caseload.¹⁷⁵ A few weeks before Jordan wrote her letter, SCLC’s working blueprint for the Chicago campaign, known as the Chicago Plan, deemed “The Welfare System” as one of the central cogs maintaining the slum because “it contributes to the breakdown of family life by making it more difficult to obtain money if the father is in the household and subjects families to a dehumanized existence at the

¹⁷¹ Cook County Department of Public Aid, *Castles of the Poor: A Study of Housing Conditions of Public Aid Families in Cook County, Illinois* (Chicago: Cook County Department of Public Aid, 1969), 41, 69.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, 174.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 175.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 176.

¹⁷⁵ The National Urban League’s Whitney Young quoted in Marisa Chappell, *The War on Welfare: Family, Poverty, and Politics in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 53; Reese, *Backlash against Welfare Mothers*, 118.

hand of an impersonal self-perpetuating bureaucracy.”¹⁷⁶ This explanation for black single motherhood, an article of faith in the Johnson Administration and across virtually the entire left-liberal spectrum, was actually one reason why officials kept welfare payments low, thereby enabling housing degradation.¹⁷⁷ Low payments would prevent welfare mothers from getting too comfortable, and thus encourage them to get off the rolls.

King’s accordance with this thinking remained in place even as his understanding of welfare grew more sophisticated. In February 1968, after women from the six-month-old National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), educated King on the importance of the welfare rights struggle, King incorporated their agenda into SCLC’s despite opposition from other SCLC ministers.¹⁷⁸ SCLC and NWRO were part of a coalition lobbying for one of the great progressive causes of the age, the guaranteed annual income (GAI). GAI received wide-ranging support, from left-leaning Bayard Rustin to neoliberal economist Milton Friedman, who argued that it would replace the bureaucracy of the welfare state.¹⁷⁹ In fact, many advocates across the ideological spectrum envisioned GAI replacing welfare. The NWRO wanted the GAI platform to include a provision to allow women on welfare who worked to keep some of their welfare grant money so that they could earn their way off the rolls.¹⁸⁰ But the NWRO also argued that “There is a desperate need for jobs in the ghettos for men to permit them to assume normal roles as breadwinners and heads of families.”¹⁸¹ On or off welfare, women should earn enough to supplement a man’s income, but no more. Thus even though King eventually embraced welfare

¹⁷⁶ Southern Christian Leadership Conference, “A Proposal by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference for the Development of a Nonviolent Action Movement for the Greater Chicago Area,” January 5, 1966, in *Eyes on the Prize: Civil Rights Reader*, ed. Clayborn Carson et al (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 291-300: 295-296.

¹⁷⁷ Chappell, *The War on Welfare*, 54.

¹⁷⁸ Branch, *At Canaan’s Edge*, 686-687; Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights*, 345-346.

¹⁷⁹ Chappell, *The War on Welfare*, 59, 61.

¹⁸⁰ Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights*, 345.

¹⁸¹ Pamphlet quoted in *Ibid.*

rights advocacy, this advocacy still adhered to the logic undergirding the West Side recipients' poor housing conditions: that poor black single mothers should be incentivized to restore patriarchal order.

But when Jordan invoked her faith, she challenged the gender assumptions of the War on Poverty consensus. Jordan thought some welfare recipients did not speak out because "they been down so long, and have so little faith in Christ." By contrast, she had "spoke this" critique of the ADC living situation "once to them" (probably meaning ADC officials, possibly recipients as well) because "I trust in my maker who is Christ. He has brought me this far and I know he will lead me on," she testified, echoing the epochal Chicago gospel anthem, Pilgrim Baptist Church music director Thomas Dorsey's "Precious Lord," King's favorite song. She continued, "I don't think no living beam can touch my strength in Christ unless I disobey the voice of Christ. I cry at nite want to do the will of God's but I happened got with the right people. While lying on my bed at night no body around I talk to the Lord..." Jordan did not attempt to escape the misery of her housing situation into the comfort of her faith. Nor, contrary to some black popular discourses on single black women's faith, did she experience Christ as an otherworldly yet sensual compensatory husband.¹⁸² Rather, her intimacy with Christ facilitated her speaking out about the ADC housing conditions underwritten by male breadwinner ideology. It lead her to claim the right to stay in a well-maintained home even if she remained poor and single.

While Jordan told King she was going to "night school" perhaps to gain skills to make her more employable, her claiming the right to stay also contested the ascendant racial conservative anti-welfare discourse which held that black women were fit only for labor outside

¹⁸² For contemporaneous variations of this idea, see James Baldwin, *The Amen Corner* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998 [1968]); and LeRoi Jones, *The Baptism*, in *The Baptism and the Toilet* (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

of the home, and therefore were unsuited to be stay-at-home mothers.¹⁸³ This line of thought seamlessly derived from what Hortense Spillers has seminally interpreted as enslaved African women and men's "*being for the captor*," an ungendering violence that elided the distinction between "mother" and "enslavement."¹⁸⁴ To be for Christ and not for the captor, Jordan had to get with "the right people," so that "someday what burning me deep down in my heart I can let out. And it will help some body. Cause if (the ADC recipients') faith was strength I think they will wake up and live. So," she concluded, "I would love to here from you one way are another by mail." Thus, Jordan reached out to King as someone who could help create a faith community to awaken West Side black welfare recipients slipping under the rising tide of the patriarchal anti-welfare, antipoverty aegis that King increasingly aligned with.

The mid-1960s assault on black mothers centered on the notion that black matriarchy produced children predisposed to crime and delinquency, a theory many thought was validated by the riots. Letters King received from white Chicagoans frequently tied their opposition to his work in Chicago and to black assertions of freedom more generally to the inability of black mothers to raise their children properly. As this apparent backlash threatened to engulf youth activism in a pall of pathology, King struggled to defend the legitimacy of children's nonviolent direct action. In a 1966 Chicago speech on the Moynihan Report and the black family, King defended children's demonstrating by arguing that black "family life will be born anew if we fight together," parents and children.¹⁸⁵ By framing such protesting as the result of the

¹⁸³ Chappell, *The War on Welfare*, 52; Reese, *Backlash Against Welfare Mothers*, 119.

¹⁸⁴ Hortense J. Spillers, *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book*, *Diacritics*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Culture and Countermemory: The "American" Connection (Summer, 1987), pp. 64-81: 67, 79. Italics in original.

¹⁸⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Dignity of Family Life," 7. PMLK Box 9.

desperation of the struggle of “the Negro” to “emerge fully as a total human being,” King depicted it as broken black families attempting to catch up to white patriarchal norms.¹⁸⁶

But the spatiality of Chicago children’s activism belied the growing pro-and anti-civil rights consensus that their mothers had bequeathed them generations of antisocial dysfunction. In January 28, 1966, two days before Erma Lee Jordan wrote her letter, Gertrude Burton, a white “housewife” from the integrated Lake Meadows development on the South Side, wrote a letter to King. Noting that “many Negroes consider you to be their ‘Moses,’” Burton stated that because “There are many mothers absent from homes,” black Chicago children were “loud, dirty, uncouth, and always demanding their rights.”¹⁸⁷ Most alarming was how they expressed this demand spatially: “Now at noon all the school children from the poverty groups near here come to the mall to eat their lunch...They are so rowdy you can hardly pass. If you speak to them their answer generally concerns their ‘rights.’”¹⁸⁸ While it is not clear if Burton meant that these children were among those who thought of King as “their ‘Moses,’” the children identified with the language and possibly the legend of their counterparts in Birmingham and other Southern towns, undermining the assumption of an ideological binary between Northern and Southern black youth.

The interactions between the housewife and the children must be contextualized in the history of Lake Meadows. Built between 1953 and 1960 in the Black Belt, Lake Meadows displaced 15,000 blacks of varying class levels already living on the site, despite widespread (if ineffectual) black opposition to the project.¹⁸⁹ The old neighborhood was replaced with an upscale community of about 960 dwelling units and a resident population 2/3 nonwhite and 1/3

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Gertrude R. Burton to Martin Luther King, Jr., January 28, 1966. PMLK Box 94, Folder 9.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 207; Smith, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis*, 127.

white by 1967.¹⁹⁰ Black Lake Meadows households were higher-earning and more likely to be “male-headed” than their white counterparts.¹⁹¹ Thus the housewife was distinguishing the “children from the poverty groups” from the black Lake Meadows families. The children’s invocation of “rights” indicates that they perceived their eating lunch in the park as a political act, and perhaps as nonviolent direct action. But in contrast to King’s interpretation of children’s nonviolent direct action, these children were not striving for a full humanity black Americans had yet to realize. Rather, they were re-inhabiting the space of a community life that they would have shared had it not been demolished more-or-less within their lifetimes.¹⁹² Their breaking bread together in the space intimated that black Chicago was being torn asunder by bulldozers, not bad mothers.

Jesse Jackson was a young South Carolina preacher studying at Chicago Theological Seminary who first encountered SCLC when he joined thousands who answered King’s call to come to Selma in 1965. Jackson’s brimming ambition and affinity for “black capitalism” vexed King, whose own democratic socialist convictions were deepening.¹⁹³ But the younger minister’s drive and magnetism propelled his successful stewardship of the Chicago iteration of Operation Breadbasket, SCLC’s Atlanta-based initiative to get corporations to hire black employees. Jackson’s May 31, 1966 report, “A Strategy to End Slums,” evinced how the Movement’s conception of the spatial politics of black religion contrasted with, and was indeed hostile to, many black Chicago Protestants’. Like much of SCLC’s Southern-reared leadership, Jackson

¹⁹⁰ Moore and McKeown, *A Study of Life in Integrated Chicago*, 3.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, 11-12.

¹⁹² Associated Negro Press editor Claude Barnett, who lived in the neighborhood adjacent to the Lake Meadows site, lamented that the neighborhood demolished to build Lake Meadows “was a neighborhood just like ours and...was part of ours.” Barnett quoted in Smith, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis*, 135.

¹⁹³ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 585.

conceived of Northern black neighborhoods in almost exclusively pejorative terms.¹⁹⁴ He thought that the “Tenacious clinging to church life as the only release/source of meaning—many hours are spent at church on Sunday with services extending from 11 to 2 and from 7 to 10”—evinced that black Chicago’s isolation from the rest of the city caused spiritual and psychological ruin.¹⁹⁵ Thus, he envisioned the CFM as an “Exodus west” into “Canaan,” “a movement out of the oppressing density and decay into the broad land of decent houses, fresh air, and clean neighborhoods” in the white areas on the Northwest and Southwest Sides and the suburbs beyond.¹⁹⁶ Jackson proposed, in effect, to replace a religion of recalcitrant staying with a religion of progressive moving.

By applying a conventional Exodus-as-movement framework to its analysis of the “slum,” the CFM misinterpreted or ignored how black Chicagoans conceived of their struggle. While overcrowding was an enormous problem—black Chicago was on average 10 times as dense as white Chicago—for many black Chicagoans the problem stemmed as much from the wider metropolis’s incursion into black neighborhoods as from its segregation of black people. This was evident from campaigns CCCO was privy to in the years before the formation of the CFM, as well as SCLC’s preliminary research on the nature of ghettoization. CCCO was aware of black Chicagoans’ efforts in 1964 and 1965 to stop the Central Englewood Urban Renewal Plan, which would destroy the homes of 528 families—85 percent of them black—in order to triple the amount of parking around a shopping center, even though the extant parking was only half-used at peak hours and just 10 percent of the housing to be destroyed was found to be

¹⁹⁴ Ralph, *Northern Protest*, 89-90.

¹⁹⁵ Jesse L. Jackson, “A Strategy to End Slums,” May 31, 1966: 3, 4. Records of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, MLKC, Box 149 Folder 35.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 9.

substandard.¹⁹⁷ These residents adopted the civil rights/labor anthem “We Shall Not Be Moved” as a rallying cry.¹⁹⁸ Even the CFM’s research on Lawndale revealed that “Shell Oil had the corner of Kedzie and Douglas rezoned into a commercial zone in order to build a gas station there, but there is a possibility that the West Side Organization has blocked that action.”¹⁹⁹ Thus the CFM had some evidence that black Chicagoans were willing to organize to protect their neighborhoods from being replaced with infrastructure for automobiles, but this was fundamentally at odds with its conception of those neighborhoods as abominations to be moved away from or “destroyed.” Additionally, because the CFM’s rhetoric and outlook did not challenge the logic of slum clearance and urban renewal, it was easy for Daley to outmaneuver King in the public relations battle that SCLC thought so important by proposing new clearance and renewal projects that promised to accomplish more than the CFM’s meager resources would ever be able to muster.

Jackson’s use of the Exodus paradigm evinced how the romance of the prophet contributed to SCLC’s faulty apprehension of ghettoization. SCLC disparaged much of Chicago’s local black activist leadership as too oriented toward the goals of the black middle class.²⁰⁰ Following the biblical prophetic imperative of justice for the poor, the fatherless, and the widow, SCLC wanted to focus on the worst off black Chicagoans, which in part led it to focus on what were viewed as the particularly impoverished communities on West Side and Lawndale. In actuality, aside from the Far South Side, the poorest overall communities in black Chicago were the old pre-World War II Bronzeville wards that had been slum-cleared and studded with public

¹⁹⁷ Citizens’ Housing Committee, “Statement before Chicago Plan Commission,” June 29, 1964: 2. Records of the SCLC (hereafter RSCLC), Box 46, Folder 8, MLKC. Helen Hart Jones to Martin Luther King, Jr., July 13, 1965: 1-2. PMLK Box 5, Folder 24.

¹⁹⁸ Citizens’ Housing Committee, Flyer, “We Shall Not Be Moved,” 1965. RSCLC Box 46, Folder 8.

¹⁹⁹ “Fact Sheet on Lawndale Area,” 1965.

²⁰⁰ Ralph, *Northern Protest*, 49, 86-89.

housing.²⁰¹ But it was actually black Chicago's *high* average income (relative to blacks elsewhere except auto industry capital Detroit) that fueled the systematic destabilization of black households and neighborhoods. Blacks' high incomes rendered many thousands of them ineligible for the public housing that replaced their slum-cleared housing, and their disposable income continued to grease the segregated "contract" mortgage market. This led to unstable middle-income and mixed income areas on one hand, and several of the densest concentrations of poverty in the United States on the other.²⁰²

One of the key supporters of Jackson's Operation Breadbasket, the gospel group the Staple Singers, demonstrated how different conceptions of space could divide black Chicago Protestants on the movement. By the mid-1960s, the Staple Singers—father Roebuck "Pop" Staples, daughters Mavis and Cleotha, and son Pervis—were the most popular gospel group in the country. Like fellow Chicagoan gospel icon Mahalia Jackson, they were also allies and friends of Martin Luther King. When King came to Chicago, he wanted the Staple Singers to sing at Saturday morning food drives in order to promote Breadbasket.²⁰³ SCLC's coming to Chicago paralleled the Staple Singers' own excursion into more explicitly political music. The group's performance of a new song, "Freedom Highway," at New Nazareth Church on the South Side in April 1965 became the centerpiece of the group's classic 1966 live album *Freedom Highway*.²⁰⁴ The song used the march from Selma to Montgomery on U.S. Route 80 to meditate on black aspirations for the future of the struggle. When lead singer Mavis Staples sang "I think I voted for the right man, said we'd overcome / stay on freedom highway, until the day is done,"

²⁰¹ de Vise, *Chicago's Widening Color Gap*, 59.

²⁰² The 1980 Census revealed that black Chicago contained 10 of the 16 poorest tracts in the United States, including the poorest, the Robert Taylor Homes lining State Street: see Gregory Squires et al, *Chicago*.

²⁰³ Greg Kot, *I'll Take You There: Mavis Staples, the Staple Singers, and the March Up Freedom Highway* (New York: Scribner, 2014), 113.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 104.

the Staple Singers cautiously embraced Lyndon Johnson, who famously adopted the civil rights movement's signature phrase "we shall overcome" in his address to Congress on voting rights, at a time when many civil rights activists were losing faith in the liberal establishment.²⁰⁵

This commitment to the alliance with liberalism shed light on the expanse of the meaning of "freedom highway." In November 1964, in a tale all too typical of the Southern gospel circuit, the Staple Singers stopped at gas station in Memphis to fill up their Cadillac when they were harassed by a white attendant; the ensuing altercation eventually prompted police cars bristling with guns and dogs to take them to a West Memphis police station in handcuffs.²⁰⁶ But, Mavis' brother Pervis later recalled, the police captain walked into the station and said to them, "'My wife loves you,' ... Pretty soon they had us autographing albums we had in the trunk."²⁰⁷ The family was quickly released.²⁰⁸

Thus beyond honoring the Selma march, or even the civil rights struggle more broadly, "Freedom Highway" anticipated Lyndon Johnson's Howard University speech—largely based on the Moynihan Report and approved by King and other civil rights leaders—calling "to fulfill these rights" that black Americans were finally securing.²⁰⁹ The longer New Deal era had, as Ira Katznelson has argued, "constituted a program of affirmative action granting white Americans privileged access to state-sponsored economic mobility."²¹⁰ The roadside injustice the Staple Singers experienced after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act showed that the struggle must keep on pushing beyond what had up until then been defined as civil rights. Black Americans

²⁰⁵ The Staple Singers, "Freedom Highway," *Freedom Highway*, 1966.

²⁰⁶ For more details, Kot, *I'll Take You There*, 96-97.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 97.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*.

²⁰⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, "To Fulfill These Rights," in Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2005), 173-181.

²¹⁰ Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White*, 21.

had to overcome Jim Crow justice to lay claim not only to public accommodations and the vote, but to all that postwar liberalism offered white America, especially the highways that facilitated middle class suburbanization, and the cars that epitomized the speed, mobility, modernity, and consuming appetites of postwar American freedom.²¹¹ The song indicated that the freedom movement was about the freedom of movement.

Yet car ownership could signify blacks' inability to stay, and thereby could align movement with un-freedom. One black Hyde Park resident asked during a public hearing on the 1958 urban renewal plan, "Must we always be on the move?...Must we always be afraid to invest in anything except expensive cars?"²¹² The resident anticipated cultural theorist Paul Gilroy's questions regarding the role of cars in the civil rights movement: "Should the powerful sense of liberation be judged secondary to the destructive and corrosive consequences of automotivity and privatised motorisation? Was this a small victory over segregation or its refinement?"²¹³

Such concerns highlighted the Staple Singers' growing friction with the ideological disposition of many in Chicago's black church community. Interviewed many years afterward, Mavis remembered how upset she was when Christians complained that the Staple Singers turned to "devil music" once they started singing folk songs, writing protest numbers, and gigging in the folk revival scene in the 1960s.²¹⁴ In scholarship and especially in popular culture, such sentiment is usually depicted as quaint resistance to progressive change. After all, the argument generally goes, secularization did not cancel out the spirituality infusing the music. Mavis believed that songs such as "I'll Take You There" were still gospel songs. However, some churchgoers felt that, as the liner notes of a collection of the group's stunning 1950s gospel

²¹¹ Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*, 262-267; Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*, 185.

²¹² Quoted in Smith, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis*, 148.

²¹³ Paul Gilroy, *Darker Than Blue: On the Moral Economies of Black Atlantic Culture*, 27.

²¹⁴ Kot, *I'll Take You There*, 109.

recordings for the Vee-Jay label lamented, the “increasing use of protest songs followed by popular hits like *I’ll Take You There*...estranged the Staple Singers from the church that had nurtured them.”²¹⁵ The liner notes’ grief over estrangement from the church suggests that concerns over the form, function, and future of black religious space motivated hostility to musical secularization. Folk, protest, and soul songs might be religious as well, but they did not reflect Afro-Protestantism’s radical difference in a way that prioritized the spatial integrity grounding that difference.

Refraining from prioritizing the spatial circumscribed the power of protest music in a way that mirrored urban renewal. In 1966, the Staple Singers released “Why? (Am I Treated So Bad),” a tribute to the Little Rock Nine.²¹⁶ The original January 1966 version of the song began with a spoken word monologue in which Pops Staples raps that “I saw a group of little children trying to ride a school bus. By them being of a different nationality, they weren’t allowed to ride the bus.”²¹⁷ The song quickly became a hit; in fact, Mavis Staples biographer Greg Kot writes, “Martin Luther King was also enthralled by ‘Why? (Am I Treated So Bad).’ ‘Stape,’ King would say nearly every time he saw Pops, ‘you gonna play my song tonight?’”²¹⁸ The success of this version led the group’s record label, Epic, to release a shorter version without the monologue, which was an even bigger success.²¹⁹

But cutting the monologue changed the song from a specific lamentation of how certain forms of transit segregation persisted in spite of the iconic desegregation victories of the 1950s—a critique even more poignant considering the looming busing crisis—into a generic evocation of

²¹⁵ Brother John, Liner Notes to the Staple Singers, *Uncloudy Day*.

²¹⁶ Kot, *I’ll Take You There*, 107.

²¹⁷ Staple Singers, “Why? (Am I Treated So Bad),” *Freedom Highway*; “Staple Singers’ ‘Why’ Is A Hit,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, May 11, 1967:16.

²¹⁸ Kot, *I’ll Take You There*, 108.

²¹⁹ “Staple Singers ‘Why’ Is A Hit.”

black suffering. This made the song safe for people who enjoyed listening to aesthetic renderings of the plight of the Negro, but were also comfortable maintaining Jim Crow justice in transit, people such as the Staple Singers' admirers in the West Memphis police station. More disturbingly, the removal of the monologue reprised the logic of liberal Hyde Park residents' silencing blacks who disapproved of the urban renewal plan for the neighborhood. Whether eliminating low-income housing or increasing the exposure of a civil rights anthem, as long as one could claim to empathize with the black freedom struggle, one could hold aloft the banner of racial liberalism while eliminating black space and eliding the specificity of black critique in order to achieve economic growth.²²⁰

In August, the Chicago Freedom Movement's series of open housing marches through white neighborhoods elicited violent responses from white residents so searing that King remarked that he had "never seen as much hatred and hostility on the part of so many people."²²¹ In meetings arranged by the Chicago Conference on Religion and Race late that month, the Movement negotiated with city officials, including Mayor Richard J. Daley and the Chicago Real Estate Board, to end the crisis and open white neighborhoods to black homebuyers. The city's concessions in the final agreement were essentially limited to pledges to pursue the goal of fair, open housing in the future.²²² Many believed that Daley thoroughly outmaneuvered King. St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton wrote in 1969 that "By the end of the following year West Siders, particularly, were convinced that they got nothing from the deal."²²³

²²⁰ See the critique of empathy in Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (Oxford and : Oxford University Press, 1997), 19-22.

²²¹ King quoted in Ralph, *Northern Protest*, 123.

²²² "Agreement of the Subcommittee on the Conference on Fair Housing Convened by the Chicago Conference on Religion and Race," in *Eyes on the Prize: A Civil Rights Reader*, ed. Clayborn Carson et al (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 303-310.

²²³ Drake and Cayton, "Appendix 1969," *Black Metropolis*, 833.

In April 1967, Timuel Black, the President of the Chicago Chapter of the Negro American Labor Council who had organized the Chicago contingent for the 1963 March on Washington, wrote King that “Negroes and their white liberal friends all over the city...feel betrayed and hopeless and helpless” due to his apparent abandonment of the Chicago struggle after reaching the deal.²²⁴ For SCLC, such dissatisfaction, however legitimate and painful, was of secondary concern to the political necessity of being able to claim Chicago as a success on the long march toward freedom at a time when the struggle for civil rights seemed to be faltering in the face of a white backlash and superseded by cries for black power, which had broken out during the Meredith March down South in the summer of 1966. Faced with a cunning, recalcitrant, yet avowedly pro-civil rights municipal leadership and a compounding, multifaceted urban crisis, claiming victory in Chicago meant formal compromise and hasty departure.

Yet some black Chicagoans kept believing that King could be an ally, even a leader, in the fight for black religious space. In May, the West Side Organization, which had fought against the Shell Oil gas station in 1965, asked King lieutenant Andrew Young if King could speak at a gospel music fundraising program which would include the Gay Sisters.²²⁵ WSO Director Chester Robinson explained that since “our area is slated for urban renewal in the very near future,” WSO had to raise money in order to buy a nearby property to convert into “a social center type structure, the only type building allowable under urban renewal restrictions for this area.”²²⁶

Black Chicagoans also continued to view King as a singular champion of black religious space in ways that cut against the grain of his worldview. At 2:00 am on April 26, 1967, Bertha

²²⁴ Timuel D. Black to Martin Luther King, Jr., April 3, 1967. PMLK Box 5, Folder 32.

²²⁵ Chester Robinson to Andrew Young, May 16, 1967. For the Gay Sisters, see Chapter 5.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

Payne, Public Relations Chair of the black sorority Alpha Kappa Alpha, wrote a letter to King inviting him to a “Youth’s Mass Meeting” in Soldier Field to be held in June.²²⁷ The contrast between Payne’s and King’s reflections on the Chicago Freedom Movement illuminates how spatiality structured the ideological difference between King and many black Protestants who viewed him as their leader in messianic terms. King argued that the open housing marches demonstrated that a movement for freedom could compel white people of good will to embrace racial justice, if black people resolved to bring a righteous demand for justice to the gates of power. In his December 1966 essay “A Gift of Love” published in *McCall’s*, a magazine directed to middle-class white women, King used this logic to defend his collaboration with black Chicago youth gangs during the Movement.²²⁸ Meetings King held with scores of Chicago gang-affiliated youth helped persuade them to consider the efficacy of nonviolence.²²⁹ In the summer of 1966, such gang-affiliated youth nonviolently protected marchers from harassers’ projectiles during both the Meredith March down South and in the Chicago open housing marches. King stated that “through nonviolence...[the youths’] hopes for a better life were rekindled. For they saw, in Chicago, that a humane police force—in contrast to police in Mississippi—could defend the exercise of Constitutional rights as well as enforce the law in the ghetto.”²³⁰ Ultimately, King continued, “they saw, in the very heart of a great city, that men of power could be made to listen to the tramp of marching feet...and use their power to work for a truly Open City for all.”²³¹ King was thus able to claim that the agreement the Movement made

²²⁷ Bertha Payne to Martin Luther King, Jr., April 26, 1967.

²²⁸ Martin Luther King, Jr., “A Gift of Love,” *McCall’s*, December 1966; Bonnie J. Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women’s Movement since 1970* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

²²⁹ David Dawley, *A Nation of Lords: The Autobiography of the Vice Lords* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1992).

²³⁰ King, “A Gift of Love.”

²³¹ *Ibid.*

with the city's mayor, Richard J. Daley, would lead to the end of residential segregation. Perhaps most importantly, King argued that gang-affiliated black youths could be agents of freedom rather than embodiments of the social dysfunction resulting from lingering unfreedom.

However, Payne connected the notion of staying to the Exodus narrative (broadly construed) in a way that burrowed past SCLC's formulations to limn the fundamental antagonism between black Chicago and the city leadership. Her invitation to King was a corrective to his and SCLC's approach during the Chicago Freedom Movement. She began her letter stating, "I have wrestled with a Problem and at this point I have decided to 'stay with it.' Yes, it may cost me my life - but as I face the sunset what will it matter if the life of a youth or two can be changed?"²³² The capitalized Problem that Payne referred to was probably some variation of the "race problem" as it manifested locally in Black Chicago. Notably, she did not say that she would solve the problem, but rather simply that she would "'stay with it.'"²³³ King's goal had been to solve the race problem in Chicago, or at least leave Chicago with a blueprint for solving it in place. Thus, the notion of moving in a trajectory toward solving in fact led King to leave the city with the problem unsolved. But for Payne, the only way to truly confront the race problem in Chicago was to "stay with it"—to stay in Chicago and reckon with it.

Furthermore, by stressing to King that "We need you—not as a speaker, but as a preacher" (her underlining), Payne rebuked SCLC's strategy the previous summer of having King speak as plainly and secularly as possible at the Soldier Field rally and other political events outside of churches.²³⁴ King's "A Gift of Love" essay reflected this strategy: King emphasized the practicality of nonviolence, not its religious aspects. Thus when interacting with

²³² Bertha Payne to Martin Luther King, Jr., April 26, 1967. PMLK Box 43, Folder 22.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

the gangs, at the Soldier Field rally, and at political events outside of churches, King presented himself more as a leader of a nonviolent social movement—as a speaker—than as a preacher. SCLC deemed this necessary in order to render the aforementioned “Exodus west” as a political movement of agents marching from the “slum” to the suburb. SCLC’s secular, speakerly presentation could also help the Movement compete for the hearts and minds of Northern black youth—already thought to be alienated from the Southern, Baptist culture that nurtured SCLC—with Stokely Carmichael and other rising black power advocates, who tended to dismiss nonviolence as the self-defeating mysticism of “De Lawd,” a pejorative term for King equating him with the amiable negro God from *The Green Pastures*, Hollywood’s 1935 portrayal of black faith as vibrantly innocuous.²³⁵

Against the secularist turn in the black freedom struggle, Payne indicated that whereas a “speaker” could exhort a movement to persuade a flawed but ultimately decent city power structure, a preacher could cultivate the sacredness, situated in the liturgical locality of a congregation, that was necessary to reckon with the depth of municipal fallenness, i.e., a city leadership whose sinfulness was beyond the civic redemption of secular activism. Signaling the theology underlying her divergence from King’s approach during the previous year, and from normative black prophetic Christianity more generally, Payne beseeched King to “Please become imbued with the Spirit of Elijah and Isaiah, two prophets I love.”²³⁶ Payne’s reference to the Spirit of Elijah and Isaiah was inspired by messianic and apocalyptic texts dating from after the fall of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and the Babylonian exile: the post-exilic prophetic texts Third Isaiah and Malachi, and the New Testament Gospels. Payne resonated with scholar of

²³⁵ Branch, *At Canaan’s Edge*, 485-495, 501, 524; Curtis J. Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 205-206.

²³⁶ Bertha Payne to Martin Luther King, Jr.

apocalypticism Jacob Taubes' observation that in post-exilic prophecy, "with the destruction of the commonwealth, the old political hope loses ground."²³⁷ (Taubes 2010, 21); this leads to a political and spiritual transformation of what Cornel West calls the "prophetic vocation."²³⁸ In invoking post-exilic prophecy, Payne hailed King not as a prophet speaking truth to a reformable power, but as the messiah of a religious body radically opposed to a depraved regime.

Echoing John the Baptist's notion that God can "of these stones raise up children unto Abraham," meaning that God can make of anything a glorified people (Matthew 3:9, Luke 3:8), Payne argued that the only way for gangs to help King liberate black Chicago was if "God will raise up stones to support you. I want these stones to become the youth gangs of Chicago."²³⁹ Gangs could thus only effectively support King through a religious framework. Gang-affiliated youth exemplified the "Negro youth" she saw "as I rode among them to-day—afraid to walk, looked at their faces, sullen expressions, etc. for the first time I understood—and identified with them—my people—without hope."²⁴⁰ Her combination of identification with and uneasy distance from the youth underscored the importance of staying to confronting the "Problem." Staying meant neither uncritically celebrating black Chicago youth's culture nor subsuming their plight under her own political hopes. By staying with the Problem, she observed that these youth were not simply wayward and in need of replacing methods of violence with nonviolence. Worse, they were pawns of the white power structure: "I am told the Underworld—what ever that is—can flourish only by...using our youth and it is supported by the governmental powers

²³⁷ Jacob Taubes, "Martin Buber and the Philosophy of History," in *From Cult to Culture: Fragments Toward a Critique of Historical Reason*, ed. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Amir Engel. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 10-27: 21.

²³⁸ Cornel West, "The Making of an American Radical Democrat of African Descent." In *The Cornel West Reader*. (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999), 15.

²³⁹ Bertha Payne to Martin Luther King, Jr.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

of the land.”²⁴¹ Payne accurately suggested that organized crime’s close relationship to the city government enabled its utilization of black youth.²⁴² She thus countered King’s argument that Chicago’s power structure was essentially good and therefore could be compelled to act justly within a secularizing framework.

Her interpretation of gangs based on her spatial proximity with them also suggested the gender implications of local sacred space. Whereas King as speaker wrote to convince middle-class white women to align with the Movement from afar, Payne indicated that black sororities and black churches, in which women comprised the majority of congregants, were close enough to the gang-affiliated boys to bear witness to the depths of their plight. It suggested the paradigmatically womanist and black feminist valence to staying put that parried how social pathology discourse influenced King’s statements on black youth and black families. Continuing, Payne wrote, “I am glad to hear you denounce War on Men. Yes there must be wars, but on rotten ideas, stealing from one another—keeping God’s children in abject poverty.”²⁴³ Here Payne echoed King’s own critique of how the Vietnam War sapped the funding for the War on Poverty. Ultimately, Payne wanted King to stay in Chicago and be a messianic preacher so that he could wage war on the rotten ideas undergirding Chicago’s power structure. The point here is not that Payne articulated a fully-formed or workable plan for freeing Black Chicago—she did not, nor was that her purpose. Rather, through a commitment to “stay with it,” Payne found the epistemological capacity to identify the underlying state of the relation between black Chicago and the white power structure--a state of war--and the spiritual capacity to confront the truth of

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² John Hagedorn, *The In\$ane Chicago Way: The Daring Plan by Chicago Gangs to Create a Spanish Mafia*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 39.

²⁴³ Bertha Payne to Martin Luther King, Jr.

that war; a capacity located in a profound vulnerability to death in a bleak sunset, in the midst of wretchedness.

CONCLUSION

There have recently been attempts to recast the Chicago Freedom Movement as effective because in the long term it stimulated black sociopolitical development in Chicago, even if it could not end or even mitigate segregation and ghettoization. However, contextualizing the movement in a broader religious context of black Chicagoans' struggle to stay in local religious space throughout the 1960s shows that the movement occurred during a time when the Afro-Protestant religious culture and theological concerns analyzed in this dissertation became recognized as a threat to the good city order that the municipal government and local economic interests wanted to promote. As such, this dissertation demonstrates how black history can be written without recourse to the notion that history is the study of change over time. The rise of Afro-Protestantism in twentieth century Chicago accompanied the increasingly sophisticated and indeed intrusive forces of antiblackness in the city. Thus, the story of mid-twentieth century Afro-Protestantism in Chicago is not one of overcoming, progress, or even effectiveness. At the end of this story, the infrastructure of Afro-Protestantism was in many ways in decline due largely to slum clearance and urban renewal, along with related patterns of outmigration and class stratification. Yet it also not first and foremost, or even necessarily, a story of declension, or of a Joycean paralysis. Staying is not stasis. Rather, from the considerations of the theological meaning of black labor in the interwar period, to the interpretations of divine violence related to the international conflicts of the mid-twentieth century, through the rise of gospel music, to the confrontation with urban renewal in the 1960s, black Chicago Protestants developed a complex critique of how the fallenness of good city order, a fallenness evident in Chicago since the turn of the twentieth century, fastened itself ever more tightly to a deeper structural logic of antiblackness.

The persistence of antiblackness demands histories untethered to the expectations of demonstrating change over time, histories undetermined by hope. The study of religion should be central to such a historiography because in their religion, black people have frequently prayed upon their plight, and drank from the bitter cup of black life in an anti-black world. When black Chicagoans cast their cares upon God rather than the hope for an open city, the fallenness of their city came to light. This challenges the way that in much scholarship, the investment in secular hope has led to a reified binary of “good” prophetic and progressive black religion on one hand, and problematic or recalcitrant otherworldly religion, or at least religion irrelevant to political struggle, on the other. Such a binary is not only overly simplistic, but also obscures the ways that messianic and apocalyptic strains of black religion have reckoned with antiblackness. The theorization and critique of antiblackness in black studies, along with the theological turn in continental philosophy, provide resources for reinterpreting African American religious traditions and uncovering the creativity of the often lay, frequently womanist bottom-up messianic and apocalyptic theologies that have been dismissed or left in the shadows of canonical prophetic figures and concepts. This dissertation is a small step toward that reinterpretation.

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