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Lerone A. Martin Date

Selling to the Souls of Black Folk:
Atlanta, Reverend J.M. Gates, the Phonograph, and the Transformation of African American Protestantism and Culture, 1910-1945.

By

Lerone A. Martin
Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Division of Religion
American Religious Cultures

_____
Gary Laderman, Ph.D.
Advisor

_____
Wallace D. Best, PhD.
Committee Member

_____
Dianne M. Diakite, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Provost Earl Lewis, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Accepted:

_____
Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

_____
Date

Selling to the Souls of Black Folk: Atlanta, Reverend J.M. Gates, the Phonograph, and the Transformation of African American Protestantism and Culture, 1910-1945

By

Lerone A. Martin,
M.Div., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2005

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

Selling to the Souls of Black Folk:
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By Lerone A. Martin

There is much work in the discipline of American religious history that chronicles the significance of mass mediums such as print, radio, film, television, and the Internet in the practice(s) of Protestant Christianity. However, the field has been slow to recognize the phonograph as an equally vital tool within these traditions. *Selling to the Souls of Black Folk* takes up this neglected task by historically tracing the phenomenon of African American Protestant clergy utilizing the phonograph for the mass transmission of their sermons during the first half of the Twentieth century. This unprecedented use of mass communication and religious commodification enabled black clergy, who were largely marginalized from radio, to become cultural celebrities, alongside popular music artists, within African American communities. Leading record labels recorded these spiritual commodities and advertised them in black newspapers, posters, handbills, department stores, mail-order catalogues, record label shops, and furniture stores. As a result, the placement of these sermons on the market shelf significantly altered the substance and form of black religious practices. This story examines several of the approximately one hundred African American phonograph sermon recorders prior to World War II. However, Atlanta and the city's Reverend J.M. Gates, the most prolific phonograph sermon recorder, are the anchors of this historical study. This conceptual lynchpin allows for a concentrated analysis of how the emergence and popularity of phonograph sermons both reflected and facilitated shifts within African American Protestantism. *Selling to the Souls of Black Folk,* therefore, offers an important historical account that is essential to understanding the major trends and practices that undergird contemporary American Protestantism and religious broadcasting.

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There are few feats in life that one actually accomplishes alone. My doctoral study is a grand example of this maxim. I must begin with my foundation: my parents Larry Alfred and Rose Marie Martin. Dad and mom, I am because you are. Without your countless sacrifices, years of toil in Ohio's industrial factories, support, and love; none of my accomplishments would even be in the realm of possibility. Dad, you have been and continue to be the Dean of the university of hard work. Your example set the bar in our family. From the Usher board to the over time board, I have literally watched you work your fingers down to the bone to support our family. I can only hope you find in these pages a glimmer of that same commitment and work ethic. Mom, you will always be my "rose." Your being epitomizes the flower for which you were named: beauty and grace adorned with thorns. Your graceful pursuit for truth, integrity, equality, and religious piety grounded our family in the joy and awesome responsibility of being human. And your thorns, frankly, kept us in line! While I was completing this project and neck deep in archival materials, your sincere telephone inquiries of "Son, how is your paper coming along?" were a source of joy. The genuineness of your voice helped me to keep a healthy perspective on this project. Mom and Dad, I love you both dearly. As children of urban migrants, I hope the following pages provide you both with a usable past that, perhaps, helps to illuminate our family's present.

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from afar) not just to my project, but also to me as a scholar and human being. You model the integrity and skill set needed to do solid historical analysis. Your skill set is, perhaps, only surpassed by your humanity and humility. In addition to your excitement and guidance on this historical project, I owe you a great deal of gratitude for modeling how one embraces one's faith tradition, and yet lovingly, honestly, and delicately analyzes the same. I am forever in your debt.

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Therefore, I conclude with the hope that I can reflect all that my community of family, friends, and colleagues have invested in me. I pray that each day I can embody more than I did the day before.

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PART TWO

TABLE AND FIGURES

INTRODUCTION: WRITING AFRICAN AMERICANS INTO THE HISTORIES OF AMERICAN MASS MEDIA RELIGION

"It is difficult to explain clearly the present critical stage of Negro religion. We must remember that living as the blacks do in close contact with a great modern nation, and sharing, although imperfectly, the soul-life of that nation, they must necessarily be affected more or less directly by all *the religious and ethical forces that are to-day moving the United States."*[1]
W.E.B. Du Bois, 1903

The New York Times recently featured an article chronicling the phonograph and its storied longevity in American culture. Its survival flies in the face of continuous predictions that the progression of twentieth century sound reproduction technology—radio, eight-track, cassettes, compact discs, and digital—would cause the phonograph to be obsolete. However, for over a decade, sales of vinyl records have increased. In 2009, vinyl sales increased thirty-five percent while compact disc sales dropped twenty percent. The resurgent demand for vinyl records has resulted in a revival of phonograph turntables as well. Large electronic retail chains as Best Buy now feature record players at prices ranging from $85 to $875. Despite being a nineteenth century invention, the phonograph continues to be a popular mass medium of recorded sound.[2]

American historians have provided historical accounts for the endurance of the phonograph. Scholars have noted the importance of the device, particularly as a novel mass medium in American music and public life. Books such as David Suisman's *Selling Sounds*, Karl H. Miller's *Segregating Sound*, and William H. Kenney's *Record*

[1] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk,* Modern Library Edition ed. (New York: The Modern Library, 1903), 202; Italics mine.
[2] "Vinyl Records and Turntables Are Gaining Sales," *The New York Times* (New York Edition), December 7, 2009, A23.

Music in American Life are emblematic of such scholarship.[3] The role of religion in popularizing the phonograph has not been a central concern in these narratives, however.

Accordingly, the phonograph has been largely ignored in the field of American religious history as well. The discipline has thoroughly chronicled how eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century mass mediums have altered Protestantism. The field is particularly strong in assessing how white Protestants used print culture, radio, film, television, and the Internet to transform Protestant practices and identities. The field has been slow to recognize both the phonograph and African Americans as vital sources for understanding mass media religion in American history.[4]

Selling to the Souls of Black Folk takes up this neglected task by displaying how the experience of black phonograph sermon recorders are a historical antecedent of contemporary African American mass media religion. Approximately one hundred black preachers employed the use of the phonograph to commercialize and contextualize black Protestantism for an increasingly urban and modern demographic. From the 1925 recording of Reverend Calvin "Black Billy Sunday" Dixon to the outbreak of World War II, approximately one hundred black preachers recorded sermons for major record labels such as Columbia, Okeh, and Paramount. Over seven hundred and fifty sermons were

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[3] Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound : Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow*, Refiguring American Music(Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2010).; David Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music*(Cambridge, Massachusetts; London,England: Harvard University Press, 2009).; William Howland Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life : The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945*(New York: Oxford University Press, 1999)..

[4] For example of texts that analysis mass mediums in American religious history see, Leonard I. Sweet, *Communication and Change in American Religious History*(Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993)..Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972); Tona J. Hangen, *Redeeming the Dial : Radio, Religion, & Popular Culture in America*(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).; Scott Billingsley, *It's a New Day : Race and Gender in the Modern Charismatic Movement*(Tuscaloosa, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 2008).;Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again : The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism*(New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)..

recorded during this period, many of which outsold popular jazz and blues records. As a result, these preachers expanded their ministries, reaped financial income, became modern celebrities, occupied space in the commercial marketplace, and effected change in American religion and culture—namely by establishing African American Protestant preaching as a commodity and black clergy as commercial celebrities.

Specifically, this project details the process by which leading record labels recorded black clergy and advertised their spiritual commodities in black newspapers, department store catalogues, mail-order companies, record shops, and furniture stores. This unprecedented process of mass communication and commercialization enabled black clergy, who were largely marginalized from radio, to become cultural and commercial celebrities, alongside popular music artists, within African American communities. This project also examines the relationship of race and religious broadcasting, as well as the role of religious commodities in the American marketplace. In all, the project displays how phonograph sermons altered African American Protestantism and provides a vital historical account for understanding the trends and practices that undergird contemporary American Protestantism and religious broadcasting.[5]

I bring to the fore several of the approximately one hundred African American phonograph sermon recorders, including Reverends Leora Ross, J.C. Burnett, and W.A. White, however, Atlanta's Reverend James M. Gates—the most prolific phonograph

[5] Note to reader: This project approaches the phonograph as an electronic medium used for the mass relying of sound. Therefore, I situate preachers who recorded on the phonograph as religious broadcasters according to religion and media scholar Jonathan L. Walton's definition of religious broadcasting as the use of electronic media as a primary tool of proselytization. For Walton's definition see, Jonathan L. Walton, *Watch This! The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism*, Religion, Race, and Ethnicity.(New York: New York University Press, 2009)., 2.

sermon recorder—serves as the anchor of this historical study. Atlanta was not the sole home of the phonograph sermon phenomenon. Nevertheless, highlighting the city and Reverend Gates's experience as an urban migrant and religious broadcaster allows for a concentrated exploration of how urbanization, modernization, and mass communication altered black life and religion during the first half of the twentieth century. James M. Gates was at once a product, as well as an agent, of these modern social and cultural transformations. The rural Georgia native became an upwardly mobile religious celebrity, accounting for over a quarter of all sermons released on the phonograph by black ministers in the first half of the Twentieth century. Therefore, his life and over two-hundred and twenty recorded sermons give voice to how urbanization and the phonograph changed the face of African American religion and culture during the interwar period and helped to establish the contemporary religious practices of broadcasting, advertising, and commodification.

This project grew out of my relocation to the south and my personal connection to the Great Migration. Like many African Americans living in the north, I can trace my roots to the rural south. My grandfather, a Baptist deacon, migrated to Ohio from rural Griffin, Georgia during the interwar period. Driving south to Atlanta put me on the highways and interstates that paralleled the railroad routes my grandfather traveled on his relocation after World War I. The religious billboards and advertisements for spiritual commodities that adorned my route caused me to wonder about the commercial and religious aspects of the journey and life of black migrants like my grandfather. Did black urban migrants witness the presence of African American clergy advertising themselves, religious commodities, and brands of religion during the interwar period? And if so,

what forms of mass media were utilized to sell them black Protestantism? And, finally, did these mass mediums—combined with their migratory experience—alter their religious experience? This project addresses such questions.

Scholars of American religion formerly held the prevailing opinion that American Protestantism was neither visible nor vibrant during the interwar period, but was actually on the decline. These scholarly assessments argued there was a sharp decline in the societal presence, visibility, and influence of Protestantism during the interwar period. This argument was buttressed by a sharp decline in mainline Protestant church attendance, membership, missions, giving, and societal prestige of mainline clergy. In fact, the presidential address of the 1959 meeting of the American Society of Church History was entitled, "The American Religious Depression, 1925-1935." Historian Winthrop S. Hudson summarized that the most striking facet of American religion during the 1920's was "…the astonishing reversal in the position occupied by the churches and the role played by religion in American life." African American historian Gayraud Wilmore saw similar trends in African American religious history. Wilmore maintained that the death of Bishop Henry McNeal Turner in 1915 marked the "Deradicalization of the Black Church." For Wilmore, this process consisted of the decline of the activity and visibility of black Protestant faith communities, particularly in regards to engaging and influencing modern black society. Historian Robert Handy epitomized the scholarly assessments of American religion in the interwar period in the following statement:

> "There was a nationally observable spiritual lethargy evident in the 1920's and 1930's, and because the then clearly dominant religious tradition of the country was in decline …An already depressed Protestantism…was overtaken by the economic crisis. Without inner changes it was unable to deal with the needs of the time in a fresh and creative way.[6]"

[6] Quotes found in Robert T. Handy, "The American Religious Depression, 1925-1935," *Church History* 29,

Beginning in the 1980s, historians began to problematize this prevailing opinion. These scholars, some of them with evangelical, fundamentalist, and Pentecostal backgrounds and commitments, demonstrated the ways in which the institutional growth of their own faith communities challenged the widely accepted notion of the decline of Protestantism during the interwar period. These historical treatments displayed how white evangelicals, fundamentalists, and Pentecostals did not decline in visibility and influence during the interwar period. Conversely, these faith communities utilized mass media to creatively respond to the trends in modern culture and establish an unprecedented visibility. These groups innovatively used radio to establish an enduring influence as religious entrepreneurs, celebrities, and catalysts of religious and social change. Joel Carpenter's scholarship has thoroughly displayed how the commercial religious radio broadcasts of white Protestants enabled factions of Protestantism to prosper and remain influential in American culture via national mass media ministries and institutional networks. George Marsden and Grant Wacker have extensively chronicled similar institutional and numerical growth of white fundamentalism and Pentecostalism, respectively.[7]

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no. 1 (1960).; Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, [1st ed., The C. Eric Lincoln Series on Black Religion(Garden City, N.Y.,: Doubleday, 1972).; There are a host of texts that deal with "the religious depression" of American Protestantism during the interwar period. However, it is most fully developed in texts such as Martin E. Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York, 1970); Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America, Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* (New York, 1971); Paul A. Carter, *The Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1954). Herbert Schneider, *Religion in 20th Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952); Jerald C. Brauer, *Protestantism in America: A Narrative History* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953); Handy, "The American Religious Depression, 1925-1935."; Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*., 915; Winthrop Still Hudson, *American Protestantism*, The Chicago History of American Civilization(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); Winthrop Still Hudson, *Religion in America*(New York: Scribner, 1965).; Robert Moats Miller, *American Protestantism and Social Issues, 1919- 1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958); *Research Memorandum on Religion in the Depression* (New York: Social Science Research Council, Bulletin 33, 1937).

[7] The text that fully develop this argument include, Carpenter, *Revive Us Again : The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism*.; Joel Carpenter, "From Fundamentalism to the New Evangelical Coalition" in

The recovery of the vibrant tradition of mass media religion in American historiography established a more precise picture of American religion in the interwar period. It details the ways in which the aforementioned Protestants used modern mass media as a tool to proselytize and engage modern culture. Unfortunately, the general focus on white Protestants in mass media religion has also helped to establish a historical consensus that the vibrant tradition of religion-based mass media in America was primarily the arena of white Protestants**.** Religion scholar Jonathan L. Walton refers to this as the "racial invisibility" of American religious broadcasting scholarship. [8]

This historical invisibility, has led recent scholars of American religion to deem the contemporary expression of African American mass media religious and spiritual commodities as a new phenomenon.[9] This thesis is limited by its failure to examine the rich tradition of African American Protestants who employed the phonograph as a mass medium to engage modern America.[10] To be sure, the novelty of technological advances

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George M. Marsden, *Evangelicalism and Modern America*(Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1984).; Joel Carpenter, "Fundamentalist Institutions and the Rise of Evangelicals" in Jon Butler and Harry S. Stout, *Religion in American History : A Reader*(New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).; Marsden, *Evangelicalism and Modern America*; George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*(Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991).; George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed.(New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).; Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below : Early Pentecostals and American Culture*(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001)..

[8] While I am primarily concerned with including the phonograph in historical accounts of American religion, Walton is also correct when he attributes the lacuna of African American mass media religion in academic literature as being the result of media theorists and sociologists rendering African American mass media religion as invisible. Moreover, he states that Black Liberation theologians have also aided in this marginalization on account of the "rules of racial respectability" and "A priori assumptions about the form and the function of the Black church" as an elite-lead institution possessing a vibrant voice of political liberation, see the introduction and chapter 1 of Walton, *Watch This! The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism*.

[9] See for example, Billingsley, *It's a New Day : Race and Gender in the Modern Charismatic Movement*.; Heather Hendershot, *Shaking the World for Jesus : Media and Conservative Evangelical Culture*(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004)..

[10] On the history of American religious broadcasting and mass media see, Dennis Voskuil, "Reaching Out: Mainline Protestantism and Media" in William R. Hutchison, ed. *Between the Times : The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960*, Cambridge Studies in Religion and American Public Life (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990). and Sweet, *Communication and Change in American Religious History*.; On African Americans and fundamentalists and evangelical

(television and the Internet) has enabled contemporary black religious broadcasters to enjoy unparalleled reach, influence, success, and celebrity status. The works of Marla Frederick (*Between Sundays),* Shayne Lee (*America's New Preacher*), and Jonathan Walton (*Watch This!),* have thoroughly chronicled how African American clergy such as Bishop T.D. Jakes, Bishop Eddie Long, and Reverend Creflo A Dollar, have become contemporary pop culture icons through their seemingly constant media presence and the marketing of their countless religious commodities. Their ability to utilize twentieth-first century technology to contextualize and sell Christian commodities and, thus, compete in the American consumer marketplace is simultaneously exceptional and increasingly standard in today's American religious culture. However, the historical invisibility of black religious broadcasters in the early twentieth century prevents the field of religious studies from establishing a thorough historical purview of the pantheon of black religious broadcasters and sellers of religious commodities.[11]

In all, *Selling to the Souls of Black Folk* is a historical narrative of mass media religion in America that spotlights the phonograph as both an agent and product of the

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institutions see, A.G. Miller, "The Consruction of a Black Fundamentalist Worldview: The Role of Bible Schools," in *African Americans and the Bible : Sacred Texts and Social Textures*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush and Rosamond C. Rodman(New York: Continuum, 2000).; Several scholars have recently began to help posit a historiographical account of African American mass media religion in the early twentieth century. Most recently Jonathan L. Walton has provided a brief overview of African American mass media religion during the first half of the twentieth century. See Walton, *Watch This! The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism*.; Wallace Best does an excellent job on chronicling the significance of African American religious broadcasting in Chicago during the 1930's. See, Wallace D. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine : Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952*(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).; On the career of African American religious radio figure Elder Solomon Michaux see also, Lillian Ashcraft Webb, *About My Father's Business : The Life of Elder Michaux*, Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies, No. 61(Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981)..

[11] Marie W. Dallam, *Daddy Grace : A Celebrity Preacher and His House of Prayer*, Religion, Race, and Ethnicity(New York: New York University Press, 2007).; Jill Watts, *God, Harlem U.S.A. : The Father Divine Story*(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).; Marla Faye Frederick, *Between Sundays : Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Shayne Lee, *T.D. Jakes : America's New Preacher*(New York: New York University Press, 2005); Walton, *Watch This! The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism*..

urban and modern transformation of black Protestantism. More specifically, it is the story of how African American Protestant faith communities negotiated the role and significance of their institutions and faith alongside mass urbanization and the rise of urban social issues.

Scope of the Project

This project is divided into two parts. Part one examines some of the historical and social forces that contributed to the emergence and subsequent popularity of phonograph sermons. Historian David Suisman has noted, commodification is not an instant process; rather "it is a social and political process, populated by human actors, and one that includes various dimensions and phases."[12] Accordingly, in order to understand how black Protestantism became such a vibrant mass media commodity, it is necessary to examine the social forces and human actors that contributed to the commodification of black Protestantism. Therefore, part one examines the relationship between urban migration, amusement, and African American Protestant religion during the first half of the twentieth century.

In order to trace such change, this project follows a local analysis. To be sure, the social, demographic, and cultural shifts of the Great Migration were experienced throughout the nation, however such transformations are most visible at the local level. Thomas Sugrue argues, "A case study approach allows for a rich description and analysis of the processes that are all too often left in the realm of generalization," such as segregation, racism, and urbanization.[13]

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[12] Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music*., 9.
[13] Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis : Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, Princeton Studies in American Politics(Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).,12.

The field of religious studies has thoroughly chronicled the ways in which African American urban migration transformed local black religious practices in several northern and mid-western cities such as Detroit, New York City, Philadelphia, and Chicago.[14] This focus on local studies in northern cities has led many scholars to believe the term "southern" is synonymous with "rural" while "northern" is a synonym for "urban" in Great Migration studies. This connotative conflation of "rural" and "southern" has obscured that the Great Migration transformed life across all of America's urban cities, including southern cities. Historian Earl Lewis has noted that more African Americans migrated to southern cities like Atlanta, Birmingham, Norfolk, and New Orleans between 1900 and 1920 than to northern cities.[15] These southern cities then offer new insights and data for understanding how urban migration changed America.

Atlanta, the capital of the New South, is a fruitful context for further local analysis of the relationship between urban migration and religious change. The city was a migration magnet following the civil war. Black migration to the city reshaped Atlanta as well as the local religious cultures throughout the twentieth century. Nevertheless, this local narrative of race, religion, and migration has national significance. Atlanta and its black faith communities mirrored and contributed to the modern transformation of African American Protestant religion and culture. Chapter one, then, provides a sketch of

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[14] For example, see: James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora : How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America*(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).; Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land : African American Religion and the Great Migration*, C. Eric Lincoln Series on the Black Experience(Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).; Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*.; Edward Franklin Frazier and C. Eric Lincoln, *The Negro Church in America the Black Church since Frazier*(New York: Schocken Books, 1974, 1963).; Arthur Huff Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North*(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1944)..

[15] Earl Lewis, "Expectations, Economic Opportunities, and Life in the Industrial Age: Black Migration to Norfolk, Virginia 1910-1945.," in *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective : New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender*, ed. Joe William Trotter(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991)., 22; Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests : Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia*(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991)..

how black urban migration to Atlanta precipitated changes in the city's black Protestant faith communities. The chapter is primarily concerned with how black migration to Atlanta aided the rise of black commercial amusements. I draw upon newspapers, scholarly assessments of black life and urban migration at the turn of the century, and personal testimonies to examine how black migration to Atlanta after the Civil War aided the development of black commercial amusements. This proliferation of commercial recreational spaces contributed to the re-conceptualization of Protestantism in black life, what W.E.B. Du Bois would term "The Problem of Amusement," that is, urban amusements replacing black Protestant faith communities as the primary center of African American amusement and entertainment.

Chapter two examines ideologies surrounding black Protestant faith communities in Atlanta and "The Problem of Amusement." This conflict with amusement was not unique to Atlanta. In fact, the phenomenon confronted black urban communities across the nation. However, focusing on the ideals that arose in Atlanta concerning morality and amusement provides a more concentrated analysis. Historian Robert Orsi reminds us that "religious cultures are local and to study religion is to study local worlds." Moreover, religious history is actually the "histories of people working on their worlds in specific ways at specific times and places."[16] Subsequently, this chapter examines how the local black Protestant world of Atlanta reconfigured church work according to urban migration and the development of commercial amusements following the turn of the century. The increasingly populated environment of Atlanta presented a variety of options for public amusement and recreation for African Americans. This abundance of commercial recreation had moral and cultural ramifications. Historian T.H. Breen has argued that

[16] Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005)., 167-168.

recreation allows participants to "transform abstract cultural values into observable behavior."[17] That is, recreational behavior often reflects one's adherence to certain cultural and, in particular, moral values. Given the relationship of recreation to morality, argues Ted Ownby, recreation is closely related to religion, particularly because religion provides the barometer of cultural propriety and morality.[18] As black migrants increasingly patronized commercial amusement outlets, such as dancehalls, dives, cabarets, and theatres, their recreational behavior challenged the social and cultural ethos of black faith communities—what historian Evelyn Higginbotham has called "black politics of respectability."[19] These amusements provided African Americans with new outlets for relaxation, socializing, entertainment, and expression that were not committed to particular notions of black Protestant morals or respectability. The chapter uses early twentieth century scholarly explorations of African American Protestantism, printed sermons, newspapers, autobiography, and the inaugural international Negro Young People's Christian and Educational Congress (NYPCEC) to explore the interplay between urban amusements and African American Protestant faith communities in Atlanta. The chapter pays special attention to the specific ways these faith communities responded to the threat of no longer being the primary purveyor of African American amusement. Atlanta's black Protestant establishment demonized black commercial spaces of amusement and created their own commercial amusements. These alternative amusement practices were guided by what Historian Kevin Gaines describes as the

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[17] T.H. Breen, "Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling Among the Gentry of Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly 34* (April 1977), 243; Quoted in Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan : Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920*, The Fred W. Morrison Series in Southern Studies(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).,3.
[18] Ownby, *Subduing Satan : Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920*., 3.
[19] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent : The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993)..

cultural politics of "racial uplift"—namely, amusements practices that were viewed as replicas and embodiments of white bourgeois assimilation and its associated notions of social purity, respectability, thrift, and chastity.[20]

The phonograph became a significant site of the religious and class conflict of black amusement. By the turn of the twentieth century, the phonograph was the premiere mass medium in America. The phonograph transcended time and space by enabling Americans to hear, for the first time in history, remote events on demand. The phonograph allowed listeners to hear a variety of commercialized music as well as the speeches of such notables as Theodore Roosevelt, Booker T. Washington, and even the Presidential debate of William H. Taft and William Jennings Bryan.[21]

The 1920 release of "race records" (black popular music exclusively recorded by and marketed to black consumers) made the phonograph increasingly central to black amusement. This new form of black commercial amusement enabled the invasion of black popular music and entertainment into the private homes of millions of African Americans in unprecedented ways. Chapter three then, utilizes phonograph trade journals, phonograph catalogues, black newspapers, and letters from phonograph consumers in the 1920s to situate the phonograph as the premiere entertainment medium

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[20] Here I am using David Wills notion of Black Protestant Establishment found in William Hutchison, ed. *Between the Times : The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960*., 170. Moreover, William Hutchinson's defines the white "Protestant Establishment" as a broad church that held together, and exercised whatever cultural authority it did enjoy precisely because it retained the adherence of a broad range of persons. The Protestant establishment was also a personal network of well-known personages. A nation wide web of personal relationships…interconnected with other elite organizations." See, Hutchinson, "Protestantism as Establishment," in Hutchison, ed. *Between the Times : The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960*.. In this regard, the pastors of Atlanta's largest black churches exercised significant cultural authority and were all interconnected through their cooperative leadership positions in elite organizations such as the AME Church, the Negro Exhibit of the Cotton States and International Exhibition, the NYPEC, and the NAACP; Kevin Kelly Gaines, *Uplifting the Race : Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996)., xiv-4,62,76.

[21] Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music*., 5.

in American life. The chapter then displays how the phonograph transformed African American social and religious life. It pays particular attention to the ways in which the release of race records on the phonograph accentuated and privatized the problem of amusement for black Protestant faith communities by expanding black amusement options, broadening the black consumer marketplace, and creating commercial celebrities who challenged the social and cultural authority of black clergy.

Part one of the project concludes with chapter four and an analysis of the rise of phonograph sermons. The rise of race records hastened black clergy to seriously engage the commercial marketplace. Historian Laurence Moore asserts that the rise of commercial amusements in America has a direct correlation with the development of mass media religion and religious commodities. Moore asserts that throughout American history the development of commercial amusement has provoked religious leaders "to descend into the marketplace" to influence consumer choices as well as to compete with secular amusements.[22] Similar to their white Protestant counterparts on the radio, some African American clergy saw the commercial emergence of black cultural expression on the phonograph as not only possessing the potential to erode faith, religion, and morality; but also as an opportunity to employ the commercial marketplace via the phonograph as a medium to increase faith, religious adherence, and morality. The chapter peruses the careers of some of the earliest sermon recorders to display how the confluence of the commercial success of black popular music and the competition of and for black amusement contributed to the advent of recorded phonograph sermons. I use black newspapers and the writings of black clergy to detail the persistent concern regarding the

[22] R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God : American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture*(New York: Oxford University Press, 1994)., 268.

problem of amusement and its relationship to the rise of recorded sermons. The chapter concludes by detailing the ways in which recorded sermons transformed black religious cultures and African American Protestant practices.

The first four chapters, which sketch the social, culture, and religious origins of recorded sermons, lay the groundwork for the biographical chapters that comprise part two of the project. Chapters five through seven center on the life and career of Reverend James M. Gates. The historical experiences of this urban migrant are a focal point, which yield a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between urban migration, amusement, modern media, and black Protestantism. Chapter five chronicles the experience of James M. Gates as an urban migrant and working class pastor. His life reveals how urban migrants reconstituted black Protestant practices. His ministry highlights the ways in which some black clergy re-prioritized church work to address the demands of the city. Newspapers, church records, recorded data, cartography, and scholarly assessments of interwar Atlanta provide a snapshot of how urban migrants and modernization transformed black cultural and religious practices during the interwar period.

Chapter six focuses on the commercial career of Reverend Gates. Gates became the longest and most prolific phonograph sermon recorder with such popular sermons as "Death's Black Train is Comin'," "Dead Cat on the Line," and "Hitler and Hell." I use black newspapers, trade journals of the phonograph industry, phonograph catalogues, and newspaper advertisements to chronicle how Gates used the emerging technology of his day to contextualize and package black Protestantism, popularize recorded sermons, and alter black Protestant practices in the process. The chapter also reveals how recorded sermons helped to establish black clergy as commercial celebrities in the twentieth

century.

Chapter seven uses the methodology of cultural studies to expound upon the interplay of production, advertising, and the commercial marketplace as it relates to Gates's sermons. The chapter peruses some of the themes within the preacher's sermons, but centers on a discussion of his sermon series "Goodbye to Chain Stores." Despite it's recording and re-mastering, the record company never released the sermon series. The chapter raises questions concerning how the marketplace, financing, and organization of the phonograph industry shaped the marketing and religious discourse of recorded sermons. African American preachers like Gates saw phonograph records as a great opportunity to evangelize and compete with the popular amusements of the day. However, similar to their white evangelical religious broadcasting counterparts, the foray into mass media religion opened the door for the hand of the marketplace to significantly influence and massage African American religious expressions and practices.

The project ends by situating Atlanta, Gates, and phonograph sermons as integral components to understanding contemporary American religion and culture. Recent scholarship such as Shayne Lee's *America's New Preacher* and Jonathan Walton's *Watch This* have displayed that the pervasive mass media presence of black Protestant clergy and their spiritual commodities are hallmarks of contemporary American religion. Religion scholar Gary Laderman has indentified mass media religion as a hallmark of Atlanta's religious cultures.[23] The city is currently home to two of the largest, most

[23] Gary Laderman, *Religions of Atlanta: Religious Diversity in the Centennial Olympic City*, The Religions(Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1996)., 3; Scott Thumma credited the Atlanta metro area with being a center of the modern phenomenon of mega church culture and advertising. In 1996 Thumma classified the Atlanta metro area with having at least twenty-three mega churches. See, Scott Thumma, "The Mega Church in Atlanta," in Laderman, *Religions of Atlanta: Religious Diversity in the Centennial Olympic City*., 201.

influential, and lucrative black religious broadcasters in Reverend Creflo A. Dollar and Bishop Eddie Long.

I conclude by displaying that these current-day mass media ministries and accompanying religious celebrities do not constitute a departure from historic black Protestant practices. Rather, contemporary expressions of black religious broadcasting are rooted in the historic experience of urban migration, modernity, phonograph sermons, and religious innovators like Reverend James M. Gates.

CHAPTER ONE*: "AIN'T NO LOVE IN THE HEART OF THE CITY:" MIGRATION, SEGREGATION, AND CONGREGATION IN BLACK ATLANTA, 1890-1920.*

"Ain't no love in the heart of the city. Ain't no love in the heart of town. Ain't no love and its sho' nuff a pity. From the city hall to the county line, that's why I say ain't no love in the heart of the city."[24]
--Bobby "Blue" Bland

Urban migration is a quintessential story in the Twentieth century American experience. The mass movement of both African Americans and whites to cities transformed every aspect of American life in the first half of the twentieth century. Several historians have given academic treatments of the ways in which the Great Migration transformed African American Protestantism. This historiography details how the socio-economic forces of the late nineteenth and early twenty centuries pushed black migrants out of the rural south and pulled them into the urban cities of the north. These social and economic forces contributed to the re-shaping of African American religious expressions and practices in regards to worship, preaching, music, and church architecture. These assessments are particularly strong in analyzing this phenomenon in northern cities such as Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Pittsburgh.[25]

However, these scholars rarely include southern destination cities such as Atlanta,

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[24] Bobby "Blue" Bland, "Ain't No Love in the Heart of the City," written by Michael Price and Dan Walsh, ABC Dunhill Records album *Dreamer,* 1974.

[25]For example see, Gregory, The Southern Diaspora : How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America; James R. Grossman, Land of Hope : Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).; Best, Passionately Human, No Less Divine : Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952.; Sernett, Bound for the Promised Land : African American Religion and the Great Migration.; Albert J. Raboteau, Canaan Land : A Religious History of African Americans(Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).; Edward Franklin Frazier et al., Black Bourgeoisie (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1957); Fauset, Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North; Edward Franklin Frazier and others, Black Bourgeoisie(Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1957)..

New Orleans, and Birmingham in their analyses. To be sure, northern cities deserve great scholarly attention on account of those urban enclaves receiving the majority of black urban migrants after the First World War. However, as historian Earl Lewis has noted, this focus on northern cities has led to the confusion of making rural to urban migration synonymous with migration from the south to the north. This conflation of southern and rural overlooks the established fact that during the Great Migration of the twentieth century, African Americans migrated to not only northern cities but also southern cities as well. In fact, more African Americans migrated to southern cities between 1900 and 1920 than to northern cities. Furthermore, African Americans continued to migrate to southern cities in significant numbers through World War II. Historians Peter Gottlieb and Earl Lewis, for example, have observed that urban migration was not a linear historical story. Rather, America's story of black urban migration was stepwise, meaning urban migration occurred in multiple stages. The urban south of was a part of the urban migration phenomenon.[26]

In addition to a northern focus, classic scholarly assessments of black Protestantism and urban migration have also largely concentrated on how the Great Migration created class and occupational differentiation in black communities. These socio-economic transformations, then, led to religious change largely according to class and occupational stratification.[27] To be sure, the creation of new class strata did

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[26] See, Lewis, "Expectations, Economic Opportunities, and Life in the Industrial Age: Black Migration to Norfolk, Virginia 1910-1945..", 25; Lewis, *In Their Own Interests : Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia*.; Peter Gottlieb, 'Rethinking the Great Migration: A Perspective from Pittsburgh' in in *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective : New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender*, ed. Joe William Trotter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 69-70; Peter Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way : Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916-30*, Blacks in the New World(Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987)..

[27] See for example: Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer, *African-American Religion in the Twentieth Century : Varieties of Protest and Accommodation*, 1st ed.(Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992).;Fauset,

contribute to significant changes in African American life and Protestant religious cultures. However, historian Wallace Best has observed that socio-economic determinism overlooks the role of black agency in the shaping of black Protestantism in the city.[28] Similarly, historian James Gregory has argued that the social and religious changes that occurred during the process of urban migration were not just the result of "abstract economic processes" and class struggles, but that these transformations were the work of actual historical actors.[29]

One aspect of the volition and agency of these black historical actors that has received little attention from recent scholars of black urban migration and religion is the establishment of black commercial amusements and its relationship to black Protestantism. The ways in which black urban migrants created commercial recreational space and how they chose to spend their recreational time played a significant role in reshaping black life in the twentieth century. Forrester B. Washington, the Director of the Atlanta School of Social Work asserted that the accessibility of amusement and recreation was a significant catalyst for urban migration. In his study of the Great Migration, Washington pointed out that many Great Migration studies assessed economics, housing, health, and crime as key causes for urban migration. However, according to Washington, "one of the most important problems has been generally overlooked…*recreation* is at the same time at the root of the migration of the Negro."

Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North; Frazier and Lincoln, *The Negro Church in America the Black Church since Frazier*; Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land : African American Religion and the Great Migration*.;C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience*(Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).; Recently, Wallace Best has displayed the shortcomings of approaching black urban religious life solely from the perspective of socio-economic determinism. See, Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine : Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952*..

[28] Best, Passionately Human, No Less Divine : Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952.,1-34.

[29] Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora : How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America*., 7.

Washington found that many of the respondents in his study had migrated to urban centers like Atlanta on a "quest for happiness," "to have a better time," and "to get more enjoyment out of life" vis-à-vis how they spent their leisure time. The sociologist argued that while increased economic opportunities was indeed a significant factor in black migration, economic opportunities were only a means to an end, namely as a means to enjoy recreation and amusement.[30]

This chapter then, seeks to fill the aforementioned lacunas by analyzing black migration and amusement to Atlanta between 1890-1920. This undertaking is primarily concerned with how black migration to Atlanta and the establishment of commercial amusements precipitated an antagonistic relationship between the city's black Protestant faith communities and commercial amusements.[31]

Black Migration to Atlanta

Atlanta is a southern city that was reshaped by urban migration. After the Civil War, Atlanta began a rebuilding process in an effort to become a beacon of modernity and hope throughout the south. The growth of Atlanta, the city formally known as the railroad hub Terminus, was aided by the continued development of the several rail lines that ran through the city. The city's technological and economic advances as well as its status as a transportation center aided the city in its coronation as the capital of the "new south."

As a transportation hub, the city's population began to explode after the Civil

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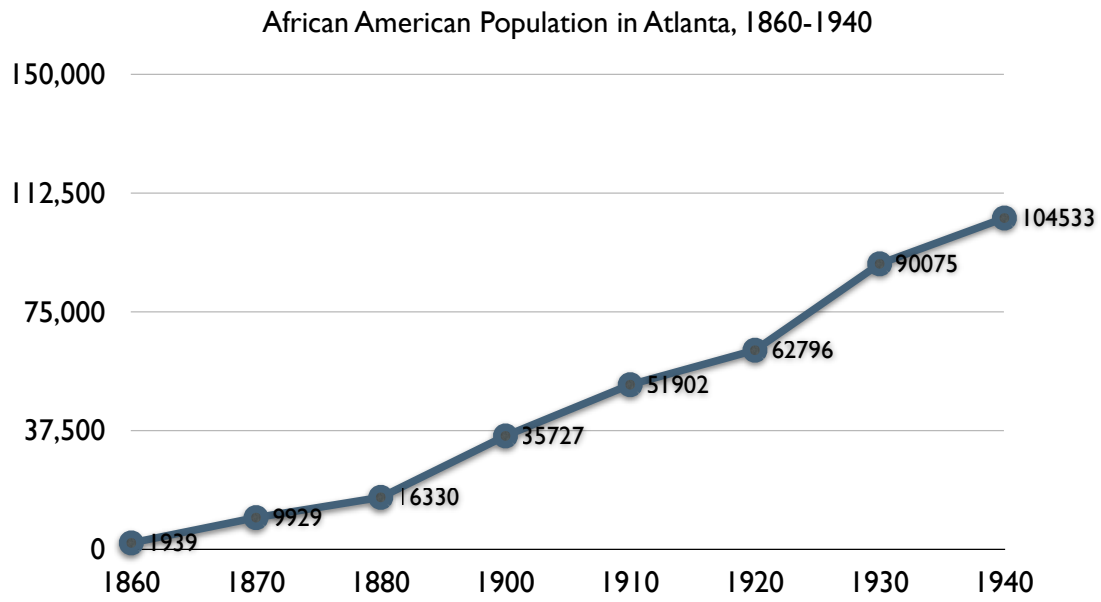
[30] Forrester B. Washington, "Recreational Facilities for the Negro," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 140, no. The American Negro (1928)., 272 (italics mine).

[31] On net numbers of migration to the urban south see: Lewis, *In Their Own Interests : Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia*.; Lewis, "Expectations, Economic Opportunities, and Life in the Industrial Age: Black Migration to Norfolk, Virginia 1910-1945..", 22; Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way : Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916-30*.. To be sure, this stepwise migrant story includes some urban black migrants who stopped temporarily in southern cities on their way to northern cities. However, some migrants, of course, stayed in the new south as black population growth attest to.

War, with the overall population quadrupling between 1880 and 1910. The city's black population tripled during the same period from 16,330 to 51,902.[32]

TABLE



Source: The United States Bureau of the Census, *Eighth- Sixteenth Census,* 1860-1940

In her study of southern black women's lives after the Civil War, historian Tera Hunter observes that modernism and Jim Crow grew to maturity together in the new south. As Atlanta's population grew, so did its commitment to Jim Crow. Between 1860 and 1910, Atlanta's black population increased from 20.3 percent to 42.9 percent of the city's total population. The increase in the city's black population animated white fears about integration and equality. Subsequently, Atlanta's black urban migrants encountered a city that was solidifying its commitment to Jim Crow laws in the modern

[32] Population data found in, The United States Bureau of the Census, *Eighth- Sixteenth Census,* 1860-1940.

era. For example, in 1891, the city legislature issued an ordinance mandating segregation on public transportation. The law regulated that blacks had to sit in designated seats in the rear of streetcars, even if the seats designated for whites were available. The law remained intact until 1959. In addition to such social segregation, the city also passed laws aimed at political marginalization. In 1892, the city passed a law stipulating that primary elections were exclusively for white voters only. Moreover, in 1908 the Georgia state legislature passed a "disenfranchising act" which unfairly administered a literacy test for voting in hopes of decreasing black voter registration.[33]

The explicit nature of Jim Crow in the new south contributed to the city's residential patterns. Black migrants to Atlanta established their own black enclaves. The establishment of these enclaves contrasted with the residential patterns of other southern cities. Atlanta did not follow the residential patterns of New Orleans, Charleston, and other cities in the south where blacks resided in servants' residences in the rear of white homes. Rather, Atlanta's black residents established what sociologist Charles S. Johnson called "urban clusters." These clusters were similar to those that developed in northern cities after World War I, with one major exception. Unlike the inner city configuration of northern urban ghettoes, the residential patterns of Atlanta's black communities were established around the city's periphery, alleys, low-lying areas, and railroad lines.[34] These black urban clusters included neighborhoods such as Summer Hill, Brownsville, Dark

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[33] Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*(Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997)., 99; Dana F. White and Timothy J. Crimmins, "How Atlanta Grew: Cool Heads, Hot Air, and Hard Work," *Atlanta Economic Review* January/February, no. 1 (1978).; Atlanta's streetcar segregation was particularly strictly enforced after the 1906 riot, see: Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, The Fred W. Morrison Series in Southern Studies(Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996)., 5-6, 188; L. Lynn Hogue, *A Brief Overview of Georgia Voting Rights History – Milestones and Millstones: Exploring the Disenfranchisement of Minority Voters*, Prepared for the State Bar of Georgia 2006 Annual Meeting, June 2, 2006.

[34] Dana F. White, "The Black Sides of Atlanta," *The Atlanta Historical Journal* 26, no. 2/3 (1982)., 208.

Town, Shermantown, Buttermilk Bottom, Pittsburgh, Mechanicsville, Jenningstown, and later Reynoldstown and Cabbage Town.[35]

In addition to residential patterns, Atlanta's color line also dictated city services. As late as the 1930's many of Atlanta's black neighborhoods lacked any city services. These cluster communities lacked sewer lines, for example. Additionally, water supplies, transportation, fire services, and trash collection were utterly neglected in black neighborhoods. With no pronounced sense of irony, city officials oversupplied the same neighborhoods with abundant access to trash dispersal. At least five municipal trash dumps were located in African American communities, including two adjacent to Atlanta's black colleges. *The Atlanta Independent*, a black publication of the time, observed during the first decade of the twentieth century, "Atlanta streets, in which white and the rich live, are cleaned daily and the pavement is taken up and re-laid every half dozen years, while the Negroes and poor whites in many instances live in communities seldom cleaned and never paved. There are thousands of Negroes in Atlanta living in alleys more unsanitary and filthy than a Peachtree Street horse stable. The color line is too often drawn in the distribution of public services."[36]

Atlanta's race riot of 1906 further solidified the residential and social color line in the city. The riot put on full display white fears of the encroaching expansion of the city's black population. The riot was sparked by the gubernatorial election between Hoke Smith, "the negrophobic reform candidate," and Clark Howell, the editor of the *Atlanta*

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[35] Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*., 7; Karen Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002)., 24; Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*., 98-129.

[36] Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*., 7; Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*., 24; *The Atlanta Independent,* July 25,1908, quoted in Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*., 103.

Constitution and candidate of the state Democratic Party. Both candidates courted white voters by promising to rescue the city from its rising black population and "Negro domination." In addition, the local newspapers, inspired by competition and not accuracy, fabricated stories detailing that the city was under siege by black rapists seeking innocent and unsuspecting white victims. Adding fuel to the flame, days before the riot, a local theatre featured a performance of Thomas Dixon's celebratory novel of the Ku Klux Klan entitled *The Clansmen.*[37]

The riot began with a white mob descending upon Decatur Street and then on to Atlanta's Central Business District (CBD) where they destroyed successful black businesses and social institutions as well as attacked black owners and black employees. Next, the mob attacked black pedestrians and streetcar passengers at random. Finally, the group of white rioters invaded several black neighborhoods where they vowed to "clean out the niggers." One black mail carrier recalled hearing the mob outside his house yelling, "That's where that nigger mail carrier lives! Let's burn it down! Its too nice for a nigger to live in." Reverend J.W.E. Bowen, president of Atlanta's Gammon Theological Seminary, was severely beaten with the butt of a rifle. After five days of violence, at least twenty-five African Americans were killed, countless injured, and an innumerable amount of destruction was done to black residences and businesses. Such incidents point to white desires for black social, economic, and political disenfranchisement as well as to the significant vulnerability of black residents against the same. Atlanta's race riot was a prototypical expression of Jim Crow—a system bent

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[37] Charles Crowe, "Racial Violence and Social Reform-Origins of the Atlanta Riot of 1906," *The Journal of Negro History* 53, no. 3 (1968).; Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*., 20-21; Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*., 126-136; Gaines, *Uplifting the Race : Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*.,49.

on reinforcing the social, political, and residential exclusion of blacks in America at any cost.[38]

The Parallel City Behind the Veil

Atlanta Constitution editor Henry W. Grady stated in the wake of the race riot, "the whites and blacks most walk in separate paths…as near as may be…these paths should be made equal—but separate they must be now and always."[39] The race riot solidified white supremacy's domination of the cradle of the new south, but the riot and the city's marginalization of African Americans also accelerated the development of black institutions in Atlanta. Historian Earl Lewis notes that the twentieth century is hallmarked by African American communities turning the realities of racial violence and Jim Crow segregation into the constructive foundation of "congregation." That is to say, white supremacy and exploitation encouraged black communities to shift their attention away from white society to the creation of social institutions in their own communities. This establishment of this black social world in Atlanta created what historian Karen Ferguson has called, Atlanta's "parallel city behind the veil."[40]

The establishment of these social, cultural, and residential institutions and networks became important substitutes for the various institutions and services that exploited black labor and denied blacks equal access. Moreover, the concentrated development of such black institutions became a survival and protective strategy to insulate black communities from the violent and oppressive hands of Jim Crow. The

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[38] Crowe, "Racial Violence and Social Reform-Origins of the Atlanta Riot of 1906."; Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*., 20-21; Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*., 126-136; Gaines, *Uplifting the Race : Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*.,50, 60.

[39] Grady quoted in, Dana White, "The Black Sides of Atlanta.", 212.

[40] For the significance of the concept of "Congregation" to migration, see: Lewis, *In Their Own Interests : Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia*., 90-96; Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta,* 15.

early twentieth century in Atlanta witnessed the concentration and growth of such black institutions.[41]

The city's racial violence accelerated the mass exodus of black operated institutions away from the heart of the city. Atlanta's CBD, centered at the intersection of Big Five Points, was the financial, commercial, and social center of the city. Racial violence and segregation provoked the city's black citizens to largely abandon the CBD, and establish the Negro Business District or the Eastern Business District (EBD). The commercial and social district was centered on Auburn Avenue, bounded by Courtland Street to the east, Boulevard to the west, the railroad to the south, and Forest (now Ralph McGill) to the north. Similar to the city's white CBD and Peachtree Road, the EDB and Auburn Avenue became the commercial center of black life with its array of businesses and social institutions, including the Negro Chamber of Commerce, insurance offices, restaurants, banks, barbershops, and other commercial establishments.[42]

Racial discrimination forced blacks to create and establish their own spaces of commercial amusement and entertainment as well. Atlanta's black residents established their own black baseball team, the Atlanta Black Crackers. Named after the city's white team, The Crackers, the Black Crackers were mostly comprised of black college students. The team primarily played at the historical black colleges of Morehouse or Morris Brown. Barred equal access and seating at Cracker games, the creation of the Black Crackers allowed blacks to congregate and enjoy the amusement of baseball free from

[41] Hunter, To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War., 136.Ferguson, Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta.
[42] Grady quoted in, Dana White, "The Black Sides of Atlanta.", 212.

white exploitation and discrimination.[43]

Atlanta's African Americans also established their own theatres as well. Most of Atlanta's theatres prohibited black attendance. When the city's famed Fox Theatre did permit black attendance, it did so under a strict policy of segregation. Former Butler Street YMCA Director Warren Cochrane recalled his only visit to the Fox Theatre during the inter-war period. His experience reveals why attending one of Atlanta's major commercial venues was undesirable to many of Atlanta's African Americans. Cochrane recalled that he and his wife went to the Fox, "to see a picture that we wanted to see. And we went upstairs. You had to climb an enormous flight of stairs on the outside to get to the black balcony upstairs. We sat down, but we were so uncomfortable we left. We just felt ashamed. Similarly, Atlanta's Municipal Auditorium was completely off limits to African Americans, save a few service positions.[44]

Therefore, for a theatre, musical, or cinematic experience, blacks established several theatres. The 81 Theatre on Decatur Street was a very popular space of amusement in Atlanta. The theatre featured all-black vaudeville shows, concerts, and movies. Atlanta newcomers filled the theatre to hear the latest music, see the newest race celebrity, participate in dance-offs, as well as signing contests.[45] The Odd Fellows Auditorium/Royal Theatre provided an elite space on Auburn Avenue for more refined commercial amusement. The opulent theatre opened in 1914 and had a total seating capacity of 1,292. The sophisticated venue was advertised in the *Atlanta Independent* as

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[43] Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*., 15; For studies on how urban migrants created similar parallel cities and commerce see, Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal : Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*(Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).; Grossman, *Land of Hope : Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration*.; Clliford M. Kuhn, Harlon E. Joye, and E. Bernard Wes, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*(University of Georgia Press, 2005)., 268.

[44] Kuhn, Joye, and Wes, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*., 285, 302.

[45] Kuhn, Joye, and Wes, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*., 302.

providing, “the first opportunity the Negroes of Atlanta have had to patronize a show in their own play house, where there will be no discrimination or color line.” For a price between $0.10 and $1.00, The Odd Fellows Auditorium Theatre featured race films such as Oscar Micheaux’s *The Homesteader*, *Within Our Gates*, *The Dungeon*, and *Birthright*.[46]

Blacks also established amusement parks such as Sunset Park since Atlanta’s “public” amusement parks, Lakewood Park and Ponce De Leon Park, were open to African Americans only once per year. Sunset Park served as the black amusement park with such attractions as mechanical rides and a dance hall. The park catered to blacks across the class spectrum, reinforcing the power of race and underscoring the importance of congregation.[47]

The large number of black cash wage earners supported this independent world of black commerce and commercial leisure. In their respective studies of black urban migration, historians James Grossman and Peter Gotlieb observed that cash wages were the material basis of the social world black migrants created in the city. Urban migrants from rural and agrarian economies based on credit had little experience with cash wages. So the opportunity to receive and spend cash wages presented urban migrants with a new tangible experience of freedom, autonomy, and improved standard of living.[48] Atlanta’s black population was concentrated in wage labor. Near the turn of the century approximately 50% of the city’s black men were employed as unskilled wage laborers

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[46] “What Sam Of Auburn Avenue Says**,”** *Atlanta Daily World,* Jul 14, 1932, pg6; Quotes from the *Atlanta Independent* found in Dana F. White, ""A Landmark in Negro Progress" The Auditorium Theatre, 1914-1925," *Marquee: The Journal of the Theatre Historical Soceity of America* 34, no. 4 (2002)..
[47] Washington, "Recreational Facilities for the Negro.", 277;
[48] Grossman, *Land of Hope : Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration*., 261; Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way : Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916-30*., 5.

and 92% of black women worked in domestic and personal service. Cash wages provided black Atlantans with a measure of unprecedented freedom in the consumer marketplace that was unavailable in the credit system of sharecropping. The cash wages of the black proletariat provided the means to spend cash on black entertainment and amusement. The regulated work schedule of urban industrial labor also afforded urban newcomers more time for leisure and recreation.[49]

These spaces of commercial congregation and amusement played three important roles in the life of black migrants in Atlanta. First, gathering in black spaces of commercial amusement aided in the preservation of respective cultural practices. Commercial amusements enabled newly displaced migrants to freely practice and nurture the cultural practices of their former rural environs. In black communities across America's cities, African Americans embraced commercial places of gathering such as migration clubs, barbershops, juke joints, and dance halls; all of which enabled blacks to retain their respective rural cultural practices such as dancing, singing, vernacular expression, diet, and clothing styles.[50]

Second, these commercialized spaces of amusement aided in the acculturation to new surroundings and the establishment of citizenry. Black migrants collectively exercised autonomy and established specific social, residential, and commercial enclaves. Within these commercial and residential spaces of congregation, Atlanta's black wage earners freely participated in consumer culture apart from white exploitation. John Giggie points out, participation in the urban marketplace became a way for blacks to

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[49] Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*., 8-10; On the importance of cash wages to urban migrants see, Grossman, *Land of Hope : Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration*.
[50] On the importance of barbershops and migration clubs to migration see, Grossman, *Land of Hope : Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration*.

become accustomed to city life as well as to demonstrate black emancipation and progress.[51]

Moreover, these commercial establishments provided space for the re-creation of cultural practices. Migrants arrived in urban areas and forged new cultural practices such as dances, jazz and blues music, movie viewing, and new commercial spaces such as theatres, migration clubs, and educational institutions. These practices and spaces enabled Atlanta's urban newcomers to negotiate a new urban identity.[52]

In addition to reshaping black cultural practices and identities, the development of black commercial spaces of urban amusement also helped to reshape black Protestantism and church work. Historian Kevin Gaines has displayed that after Reconstruction, middle class black ministers embraced an ideology of "racial uplift" that was encased in cultural politics. These clergy, along with a host of black elites, aimed to rehabilitate the image of African Americans through an embodiment of Western bourgeois assimilation and associated notions of social purity, respectability, thrift, and chastity. Jesse Max Barber, editor of Atlanta's black magazine the *Voice of the Negro*, summed up black elite attitudes towards uplift when he stated, "Negro loafers are the only block to our advance…There is no fight between the intelligent white man and the intelligent Negro." Gaines notes that this cultural credo was "infused with an ethic of religious piety," which, "provided the moral criteria for uplift's cultural aesthetic."[53] Proponents of such racial uplift, particularly black ministers believed there was a direct relationship between such

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[51] John Michael Giggie, "Preachers and Peedlers of God: Ex-Slaves and the Selling of African American Religion in the American South," in *Commodifying Everything: Relationships of the Market* ed. Susan Strasser(New York City: Routledge, 2003)., 169-172.
[52] Lewis, In Their Own Interests : Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia., 90-96.
[53] Gaines, *Uplifting the Race : Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*.,xiv-4, 62, J. Max Barber quote found on page 76.

notions of cultural propriety and morality and recreational activity and behavior. Therefore, the desire and expectation of black Protestantism to guide and maintain the moral and cultural standards of black life, particularly for black urban migrants, necessitated an engagement with the multitude of urban commercial amusements that emerged during the migration period. In many ways, this engagement with urban commercial amusements re-prioritized ministerial activities and the work of black Protestant churches in the city.

CHAPTER TWO: "OH DEATH WHERE IS THY STING?:" AFRICAN AMERICAN PROTESTANT RELIGION AND THE "PROBLEM OF AMUSEMENT" IN ATLANTA

Parson Brown, one Sunday was giving good advice.
He warned his congregation to refrain from sin and vice
He drew a fire-y picture 'bout the devil down below
and said fo'ks quit your sinnin, or here you're bound to go
Hell is full of vampire wimmin, whiskey, gin, and dice
Satan, tell em to get thee and prepare thou for paradise

Mose Jackson jumped up from his chair and said
"Father is that true?
If hell is full of what you said, well then let me say to you:
If what you said is the positive truth,
Oh Death Where is thy Sting"?

"Oh Death Where is Thy Sting"
--Clarence Stout[54]

The affects of urban migration and amusement on black Protestantism was at the heart of W.E.B Du Bois' first public articulation and analysis of "The Negro Church." In a speech titled *The Problem of Amusement,* at the Hampton Institute (now Hampton University) in July 1897, Du Bois predicted that as the twentieth century approached, the question of amusement was bound to become an important issue in the welfare of black life and black Protestantism. Du Bois firmly believed that amusement revealed one's morality, aspirations, and welfare. His address sketched the history of the Negro Church as antedating the black family as the central and comprehensive social and cultural

[54]The Paul Oliver Collection of African American Music and Related Traditions, University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham, UK, Box 1; For the background on the lyrics of this song see: Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America*(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006)., 163.

organism in black communities. Du Bois asserted that black churches were first social institutions of amusement and recreation and second religious institutions. He cited his fieldwork from *The Philadelphia Negro,* the first sociological study of African American urban life, to argue the extent to which the Negro Church had been successful at being the central purveyor of African American amusement. Du Bois recounted that of the ten thousand black participants whom he asked, "Where do you get your amusements?" three-fourths or roughly seventy-five hundred responded, "from the churches." [55]

Du Bois asserted that one way black urban migrants experienced the freedoms of their urban milieus was through engagement with commercial amusements such as theatre shows, cabarets, dance halls, and gambling. Moreover, these black recreational spaces became significant cultural centers of gathering. As a result, according to Du Bois, urban amusements precipitated a decrease in church attendance and thus challenged the cultural relevance and preeminence of the "Negro Church" as the center of black social and cultural life. The rise in the popularity of urban commercial amusements among urban migrants also signaled the declining ability of black Protestantism to define the moral propriety of urban migrants. Subsequently, Du Bois pronounced that black Protestantism must transform its role and social activities in the twentieth century in light of urban migration and commercial amusement.[56]

Du Bois' speech amounted to a prognostication for African American Protestantism in the twentieth century. The address pinpointed how urban migration and commercial

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[55] W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Problem of Amusement," in *W.E.B. Du Bois on Sociology and the Black Community*, ed. Dan S. Green and Edwin D. Driver(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980)., 229; See: W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro : A Social Study*, The Oxford W.E.B. Du Bois(New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007).; W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Modern Library Edition ed.(New York: The Modern Library, 1903).

[56] Du Bois, "The Problem of Amusement.", 234.

amusement was going to alter black culture and black Protestant institutions in the city. Du Bois' words were more than just an observation. It was a clarion call to black religious institutions to change how they operated and to adjust their priorities. His speech challenged black Protestant leaders to recreate their ministerial and social priorities and activities. He insisted, "the time has come when the activities of the Negro church must become differentiated and when it must surrender to the school and the home, and social organizations, those functions which in a day of organic poverty it so heroically sought to bear."[57] In short, Du Bois posited that urban migration would create a new urban religious culture; one that no longer required black religious institutions to bear all the responsibilities of black communities. Rather, as de-centralized organizations, black religious institutions were freed to operate a more circumscribed, but focused program of spiritual enlightenment.

Du Bois was not alone in recognizing how urban migration and commercial amusement were affecting black Protestant churches. Richard R. Wright, Jr., a special Fellow in Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, conducted a study on social work and the influence of African American Churches in 1907. Wright asserted that urban migration challenged the social control of African American Protestant churches. Wright noted urban commercial amusements challenged the churches' monopoly on amusement through superior resources such as "larger and finer auditoriums and better music." Instead of enjoying a comprehensive monopoly of black social life, black churches were forced by the urban environment to "compete with theatres, skating rinks, baseball games, saloons, pool rooms, race tracks and amusement gardens, as well as with Sunday

[57]Du Bois, "The Problem of Amusement.", 234.

labor and Sunday picnics and society functions."[58]

Wright asserted that new urban black residents quickly join churches and bolster church attendance rolls. However as these new city residents become accustomed to city life and all its possibilities, "they begin to fall away from the Church" as "the dance halls and the pool rooms become far more popular than the Sunday school" and "the church concert, which is so popular in small towns, is not attractive when compared with the cheap theater" in the city. Furthermore, urban spaces of commercial amusement began to provide the personal services and social interactions that urban migrants used to receive from their churches. Wright observed, for example, that saloons were continually open to provide "music, lunch, reading matter, tables, toilet, telephone, pen and ink and many conveniences." Similar to Du Bois, Wright advised black churches to scale back their respective attempts of developing amusements. He admonished black religious institutions to not go into "the dance hall, pool room, gymnasium, employment bureau, trade school, night school, and bath house businesses." Not only did Wright suggest that black religious institutions change their priorities, he also encouragement black Protestant leaders to recognize that it was imperative to "revise its teaching regarding amusements and adopt not merely a negative but a positive position."[59] For Wright, urban migration and amusement not only precipitated a change in the programmatic focus of black Protestantism, but also a transformation in ideology and theology.

The effects of urban migration and amusement upon black Protestantism were also a repeated theme in the trailblazing *Atlanta University Conferences for the Study of Urban Negro Problems*. Under Du Bois' editorial leadership, the conference conducted

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[58] Richard R. Wright, Jr., "Social Work and Influence of the Negro Church," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 30, no. Social Work of the Church (1907).,87.
[59] Wright, "Social Work and Influence of the Negro Church.",92.

unprecedented extensive research into the various aspects of black life.[60] In the fourth volume, Du Bois identifies the "Negro Church" as the supplier of "the larger part of social intercourse and entertainment for the masses." The findings identified that as an increasingly black urban demographic encountered the expanding array of black commercial amusements, black churches would struggle to remain central to black life. Therefore, the displacement of black Protestant faith communities as the primary purveyor of amusement meant that black Protestant churches were not only decreasing in attendance, but were therefore losing the ability to influence the behavioral and moral propriety of black urban migrants.[61]

While the topic of black Christianity remained significant in all the conferences, "The Negro Church" was the specific topic of the 1903 conference. One field study concluded that the contention between the church and popular amusements was so intense that the Negro church was increasingly being viewed solely "as a bureau whose object is to provide amusement."[62] Here the conference testified to the ways in which urban migration and commercial amusement were reshaping the ministerial activities of black Protestantism as well as what black Protestants expected from their churches.

The Negro Church was examined again at the 1913 conference. The findings from this final study were published under the title of "Morals and Manners among Negro Americans." With the close relationship of recreation and moral commitments, the conference completed a study on "Negro Amusement" and its relationship to black

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[60] Ernest Kaiser, 'Introduction' in W.E.B Du Bois, ed., *The Atlanta University Publications* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968), iii.
[61] W.E.B DuBois, ed., "The Negro in Business", *Atlanta University Publications 4* (Atlanta: The Atlanta University Press, 1899 reprint New York: Arno Press, 1968), 15.
[62] W.E. B. DuBois, ed. *The Negro Church*, Report of a Social Study Made under the Direction of Atlanta University; Together with the Proceedings of the 8th Conference for the Study of Negro Problems, Held at Atlanta University (Atlanta; New York: Atlanta University Press; Altamira Press, 1903; reprint, 2003)., 59.

churches. Several field reports were conducted across the country. These reports revealed that black churches throughout the nation were increasingly wrestling with how to compete with the new forms of urban amusement and entertainment such as theatres, race films, and amusement parks. The Alabama state report concluded, "The lack of wholesome amusement among our people is having its unwholesome effect upon the church." In Arkansas black amusements were found "in churches only" and the "unwholesome" venue of the theatre was the main amusement attraction outside of the church. The YMCA and Negro churches in Connecticut, in their effort to compete with the theatre and dance halls, attempted to furnish African Americans with "wholesome amusement, but the masses were not attracted." In Florida, the field report concluded that the Black churches there were faltering on their responsibility to provide alternative amusements. However, some of black Protestant communities in Florida did find success in bolstering church attendance when they "sanctified" and utilized some of the popular music of the day and "joined the rag time amusements."[63]

The field reports explicitly revealed how commitments to particular cultural and moral values played a role in recreational behavior. The D.C. report, for example, concluded that "the better classes" of blacks enjoyed wholesome amusements, while "among the lower classes the amusements are not wholesome." The Virginia report commented that the "Moving picture shows and vaudeville shows" appealed to many, "but the better class of our people are religiously inclined."[64]

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[63] WEB Du Bois, editor, "Morals and Manners among Negro Americans", *Atlanta University Publications 18* (Atlanta: The Atlanta University Press, 1914 reprint New York: Arno Press, 1968), 90-97.
[64]W.E.B. DuBois, ed., "Morals and Manners among Negro Americans," *Atlanta University Publications 18* (Atlanta: The Atlanta University Press, 1914 reprint New York: Arno Press, 1968), 90-97.

The general outlook on Negro amusement in Georgia was that there was very little effort being put toward establishing "wholesome amusements." The state field report concluded that "proper" amusement—church-related—was "not being furnished as it should be." Subsequently, the black masses were therefore amusing "themselves with things that destroy them." The report noted: "the manner of dancing and playing cards has misled many."[65] Despite, or perhaps because of, the field report's praising of church related amusements, the conference condemned the "puritanic (sic) training" of black churches against "worldly amusements," and commercial amusements that took place outside of the church.[66]

The resolution of the conference stated that the Negro Church was showing "signs of awakening to new duties and larger responsibilities." However, the study chastised the majority of Negro Churches for being mired in "catering to a doubtful round of semi-social activities" in attempts to remain the central institution in black social life. The survival of the Negro Church, the study warned, depended on the willingness of African American churches to "adopt a new attitude towards rational amusement." The conference believed that black Protestantism should concentrate on inspiration and education and cease fighting a losing battle with the more attractive commercial amusements of urban America.[67]

An examination of the positions adopted by Atlanta's black Protestant leaders regarding black commercial amusement, religious devotion, and cultural propriety

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[65] W.E.B. DuBois, ed., "Morals and Manners Among Negro Americans," *Atlanta University Publications 18* (Atlanta: The Atlanta University Press, 1914 reprint New York: Arno Press, 1968), 93.
[66] W.E.B. DuBois, ed., "Morals and Manners Among Negro Americans", *Atlanta University Publications 18* (Atlanta: The Atlanta University Press, 1914 reprint New York: Arno Press, 1968), 90.
[67] W.E.B. DuBois, ed., "Morals and Manners Among Negro Americans", *Atlanta University Publications 18* (Atlanta: The Atlanta University Press, 1914 reprint New York: Arno Press, 1968), 7.

between 1900 and 1920 allows for a concentrated analysis of how urban migration and commercial amusement influenced black Protestantism. Du Bois' 1897 prognostication of the problem of amusement warned black Protestant leaders of the dangers of hypocrisy in "preaching against amusement," yet "straining every nerve to amuse." Nevertheless, Atlanta's black clergy did just that; they demonized and opposed commercial amusements and simultaneously attempted to offer corresponding forms of "respectable" amusements. These Protestant leaders deemed commercial amusement as respectable and wholesome only if the recreational behavior corresponded with Victorian sensibilities and middle class decorum. Black Protestant churches in Atlanta attempted to guide the morality of the influx of urban migrants by organizing and endorsing recreational behavior that reflected an embodiment of middle class urban etiquette and morality.[68]

The Negro Young People's Christian and Educational Congress

In 1902, black Protestant leaders from across the nation gathered at the inaugural Negro Young People's Christian and Educational Congress (NYPCEC) in Atlanta to discuss the pressing problems facing African American faith communities. The international affair set out to gather some of the most influential black Christians to draft an unprecedented plan for "negro progress, self-development, and self-elevation." The NYPCEC was the brainchild of Professor I. Garland Penn, the Chief Commissioner of the 1895 Negro Exhibit of the Cotton States and International Exhibition (the site of Booker T. Washington's infamous "Atlanta Compromise Speech" endorsing racial social segregation). From August 6th through the 11th, over 12,000 thousand black and white ministers, politicians, journalist, and race leaders from across the country and Africa

[68] For detailed information on the role of African American Protestant Communities in preserving these Victorian middle class sensibilities see: Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent : The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*., quote is from pg.187.

gathered at Atlanta's Piedmont Park Auditorium for the landmark NYPCEC meeting.[69] Atlanta's black Protestant establishment led the meeting. AME Bishop Reverend Wesley J. Gaines of Atlanta served as President of the NYPCEC and Yale educated pastor Reverend H.H. Proctor of First Congregational served as the recording secretary. The interdenominational event was heralded as the first, largest, and most prestigious gathering of its kind.[70]

The NYPCEC featured some of the nation's most recognized black leaders including Nannie Helen Burroughs and Booker T. Washington. The leaders of the congress also sought the presence of President Roosevelt. On January 17, 1902, seven months before the congress, Atlanta pastors Wesley Gaines, Henry H. Proctor, Peter Bryant, Edward Carter, John Rush, Professor I. Garland Penn, Gammon Theological Seminary's Dr. J.W.E Bowen, and Booker T. Washington boarded a special Southern Railroad Pullman car for the nation's capitol to personally invite President Roosevelt to the NYPCEC. During their private audience with President Roosevelt, the delegation insisted that the President's presence would "increase the influence and power" of the educational and moral efforts of the first NYPCEC. The delegation further encouraged

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[69] Wide Scope of Negro Meeting," *The Atlanta Constitution,* Jan 15, 1902, p. 7; I. Garland Penn and others, *The United Negro : His Problems and His Progress : Containing the Addresses and Proceedings the Negro Young People's Christian and Educational Congress, Held August 6-11, 1902*(Atlanta, Ga.: D.E. Luther Pub. Co., 1902).,11; White and Crimmins, "How Atlanta Grew: Cool Heads, Hot Air, and Hard Work.".

[70] "Wide Scope of Negro Meeting," *The Atlanta Constitution,* Jan 15, 1902, p. 7; Penn and others, *The United Negro : His Problems and His Progress : Containing the Addresses and Proceedings the Negro Young People's Christian and Educational Congress, Held August 6-11, 1902*.,11. Here I am using William Hutchinson's definition of Protestant Establishment to refer to the existence of a black Protestant establishment in Atlanta. Hutchinson defines the white Protestant establishment "as a broad church that held together, and exercised whatever cultural authority it did enjoy precisely because it retained the adherence of a broad range of persons. The Protestant establishment was also a personal network of well-known personages. A nation wide web of personal relationships…interconnected with other elite organizations." See, Hutchinson, "Protestantism as Establishment," in Hutchison, ed. *Between the Times : The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960*.. In this regard, the pastors of Atlanta's largest churches exercised significant cultural authority and were all interconnected through their cooperative leadership positions in elite organizations such as the AME Church, the Negro Exhibit of the Cotton States and International Exhibition, and the NYPEC conference.

President Roosevelt to attend by issuing a statement to the national press reminded him that the NYPCEC was "the first large delegation of Negroes who have called upon the President without asking for rights or public office." President Roosevelt elected not to attend. However, he did offer a commendation letter, which was read on August 6 alongside the commendation letters of Kentucky Governor J.C.W. Beckham and Kansas Governor W.E. Stanley. In addition, Georgia Governor A.D. Candler and Atlanta Mayor Livingston Mims offered welcome addresses.[71]

Antagonism between African American Protestantism and commercial amusement was a consistent theme throughout the NYPCEC. Several speeches and addresses at the international conference positioned urban amusement as a growing vice in black life. Bishop Isaac W. Joyce President of the Epworth League, the young adult association of the Methodist Episcopal Church, unveiled the group's pledge at the Congress. The pledge demanded complete abstinence "from all those forms of worldly amusements," including billiards tournaments, public dance halls, and saloons.[72]

The opposition against commercial amusements was not only for students, but also for teachers. In an address to teachers entitled, "The Relation of the Public School Teacher to the Moral and Social Elevation of the Race," Dr. W.S. Scarborough of Wilberforce University reiterated the connection of recreation to black morality. The scholar admonished all black teachers to stay away from frequenting "questionable"

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[71] *The Atlanta Constitution*, 'Will Invite the President,' Jan 3, 1902, 7; 'Negroes Go to Washington,' Jan 17, 1902, 5; 'Negroes Saw Roosevelt,' Jan 19, 1902,7. Penn and others, *The United Negro : His Problems and His Progress : Containing the Addresses and Proceedings the Negro Young People's Christian and Educational Congress, Held August 6-11, 1902*., xiii-43.

[72] Penn and others, *The United Negro : His Problems and His Progress : Containing the Addresses and Proceedings the Negro Young People's Christian and Educational Congress, Held August 6-11, 1902*.,84-85.

places of urban amusements. Scarborough asserted that such behavior frustrated black efforts of social betterment.[73]

Reverend Alexander C. Garner of Washington D.C. delivered an address entitled, "The True and the False In the Revival Methods of the Race." Reverend Garner believed that the influence of black Protestantism was on the decline because of an increasing number of African Americans embracing commercial amusements. The D.C. pastor insisted that revival was a necessity "for a cold, factitious, murmuring, *amusement-loving* church."[74]

Two addresses during the NYPCEC women's day specifically addressed the concern for black morality and its relationship to urban amusement. Mrs. Mattie Ford, the AME Secretary of the Atlanta branch of Foreign Missions concentrated her speech on why women should be concerned about the buying and selling of alcohol. She concluded her speech by pinpointed "public places of amusements" as a persistent enemy of the stable black home.[75] Mrs. Julia Mason Layton, state Vice President of The National John Brown Memorial Association of Women and member of the National Association of Colored Women, pleaded with women to provide home amusement for their children so that they would not be so apt to engage in the moral and cultural decadence of public commercial amusements.[76]

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[73] Penn and others, *The United Negro : His Problems and His Progress : Containing the Addresses and Proceedings the Negro Young People's Christian and Educational Congress, Held August 6-11, 1902*., 390.
[74] The United Negro : His Problems and His Progress : Containing the Addresses and Proceedings the Negro Young People's Christian and Educational Congress, Held August 6-11, 1902, 108 (Italics mine).
[75] Penn and others, *The United Negro : His Problems and His Progress : Containing the Addresses and Proceedings the Negro Young People's Christian and Educational Congress, Held August 6-11, 1902*.,457 (Italics mine).
[76]Penn and others, *The United Negro : His Problems and His Progress : Containing the Addresses and Proceedings the Negro Young People's Christian and Educational Congress, Held August 6-11, 1902*.,441-442.

In addition to identifying commercial amusements as the cause of vice, conference leaders credited these recreational spaces with lower church attendance as well. Atlanta's black Protestant establishment believed that it was the obligation of black churches to address the social challenge of urban amusement by providing alternative forms of amusement for urban migrants. At the NYPCEC men's day, Reverend Silas Floyd of Atlanta discussed "The Duty of the Church to Young Men." Floyd, the district secretary of the American Baptist Publication Society, bemoaned the decrease in black male church attendance across the country. Reverend Floyd insisted that on any given day in the nation's large cities young black men shunned the church in favor of commercial public amusements like pool halls, theatres, and saloons. Silas advised conference delegates that it was the church's duty to face this problem "boldly" by providing alternative amusements.[77]

Nannie Helen Burroughs the prominent clubwoman, educator, and Corresponding Secretary of the Women's Auxiliary to the National Baptist Convention was one of the NYPCEC keynote speakers. The *Atlanta Constitution* credited her address with making the strongest impression at the conference.[78] In her address, titled "The Colored Woman and Her Relation to the Domestic Problem," Burroughs admonished educated women to cease scorning black female laborers. Instead, Burroughs proclaimed that black communities must recognize the importance of all labor, regardless of its nature. She maintained that labor could be dignified by investing in the education of black women workers in the fields of domestic science and thrift. Burroughs believed that churches

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[77] Penn and others, *The United Negro : His Problems and His Progress : Containing the Addresses and Proceedings the Negro Young People's Christian and Educational Congress, Held August 6-11, 1902*.,465-467.

should shoulder the responsibility for the wholistic improvement of the lives of working class black women. She criticized many of the black women's clubs as well as black churches for neglecting the social needs of working class black women. Burroughs contended that such neglect left black women laborers no choice but to attend public amusements like dance halls and theatres for social interaction and relaxation. She pleaded with African American churches to "throw open their doors" to working class black women and provide them with amusement alternatives during the few spare hours they have away from work. Burroughs contended that this would provide an option for working class black women that was "better than to have them in the dance hall and parlor socials." [79]

The consensus of the inaugural congress was clear, urban commercial amusements posed a moral danger to black life and uplift, contributed to the decline of religious devotion, and was the primary source of competition for black Protestant faith communities. Subsequently, it was imperative for black Protestant institutions of the twentieth century to attempt to entertain and amuse its increasingly urban demographic.

Commercial Amusements, Religion, and Morality in Atlanta

In black Atlanta, two streets embodied opposing ends on the spectrum of respectable and immoral cultural and recreational behavior. The city's Auburn Avenue came to signify sophistication, wholesome amusement, and piety. Conversely, the city's Decatur Street was known as the antithesis of Auburn Avenue in regards to socio-economic status as well as appropriate recreational behavior. Benjamin Davis, the editor

[79]'Nannie Burrough (sic) Talks of the Domestic Problem' *The Atlanta Constitution* Aug 10, 1902, p.12; Penn and others, *The United Negro : His Problems and His Progress : Containing the Addresses and Proceedings the Negro Young People's Christian and Educational Congress, Held August 6-11, 1902*.,324-329.

of the *Atlanta Independent* and a member of the Odd Fellows reflected this sentiment, positing that black Atlanta possessed two types of African Americans: the "Auburn Avenue Negro" and the "Decatur Street Negro." Davis defined the "Auburn Avenue Negro" as "industrious and thrifty," while he defined the "Decatur Street Negro" as "shiftless and fun-loving."[80]

Auburn Avenue, affectionately known simply as " The Ave" was home to the elite institutions such as The Odd Fellows, as well as their Auditorium Theatre, which featured race films and a rooftop gathering space for formal dances and social club gatherings. Auburn Avenue was also home to the city's black newspaper the *Atlanta Independent* as well as elite churches such as Ebenezer Baptist, Wheat Street Baptist, and Big Bethel AME.

Decatur Street, commonly referred to as "The Street" was home to several commercial amusements such the 81 Theatre, which hosted headlining black comedians, musicians, and vaudeville artists. Decatur Street was also home to a host of dives, saloons, and public dance halls. The presence of the aforementioned amusements led many Protestant leaders to view the street as a sanctuary of lewd and immoral behavior that ran afoul of black respectability. Many of Atlanta's new arrivals and black working class residents did not patronize the public commercial amusements and businesses on Auburn Avenue. The masses of black migrants found the public recreational and commercial spaces on the respectable Auburn Avenue restrictive due to monetary limitations, class divisions, and behavioral expectations. Rather, the host of commercial establishments that developed along Atlanta's Decatur Street during the early twentieth

[80] Quoted in Hunter, To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War., 153.

century became the central amusement district for Atlanta's black migrants and working class residents.

Decatur Street was a popular street beginning in the late nineteenth century when Atlanta was the small railroad hub town of Terminus. The tracks for the Georgia Railroad ran parallel to Decatur Street making it an ideal location for hotels and businesses for train travelers and migrant workers. The street was dotted with an array of shops, markets, lunchrooms, clubs, saloons, barbershops, dance halls, and theatres. From sunup to sundown on Decatur Street, the sounds of popular black music emanated from the dance halls and saloons and competing with the calls of street hustlers, merchants, and revivalists. The sights and sounds of Decatur Street helped the central amusement district to garner the nickname the "Negro Play Ground".[81]

The entertainment district on Decatur Street possessed a monopoly for popular black entertainment and amusement in the city. The amusement spaces reflected the rural vernacular and practices of the city's migrants. Decatur Street was home to Louis T. Swords' Nickelodeon motion picture theatre, one of the first African American theaters in the South. The theatre featured the black popular entertainment and vernacular of the day such as minstrelsy films, vaudeville pictures, and comedic acts as opposed to the respectable race films of Auburn Avenue. Opening in 1915, Decatur Street's 81 Theatre was the main attraction for black talent and popular amusement in Atlanta. Located a few blocks south of Atlanta's central business district, the "81" was a place of constant activity with shows and performances that began in the afternoon and ran until at least 11pm. The 81 hosted all of the prominent black popular entertainment headliners. For a

[81] Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*., 151-153; Harvey K. Newman, "Decatur Street: Atanta's African American Paradise Lost," *Atlanta History* XLIV, no. Summer (2000)., 5; "Saturday Night Preaching" *The Atlanta Constitution,* July 29, 1904, pg.9.

cover charge between twenty-five and fifty cents, black residents of Atlanta could pile into the 1,500-seat auditorium and enjoy the talents of black popular musicians such as Thomas Dorsey, Bessie Smith, Ethel Waters, Ma Rainey, and Bert Williams.[82]

Decatur Street was also a busy shopping district in the early twentieth century, a less threatening form of amusement, but one that still reflected one's moral commitments and class aspirations. Most working class blacks eschewed the established shops along Auburn Avenue and elected to go to Decatur Street to have their shopping needs met instead. The crowded sidewalks filled with black laborers, domestic workers, and farmers all looking to bargain with pawnshop owners, second hand clothing merchants, and sidewalk food marketers. These local clothing and open market food suppliers on Decatur Street enabled working class blacks to purchase goods at cheaper rates. One reporter observed that the cost of red snapper on Decatur Street was only $.35 cents a pound. This price was below the national average price for pork chops and bacon, which were $.39 and $.50 per pound respectively.[83] The shopping on Decatur Street further reflected the contentious terrain surrounding amusement and public decorum. Historian Earl Lewis points out in that public actions such as consumer purchases further exemplifies commitments to classed notions of propriety. How and where one chooses to engage in commerce denotes one's commitments to class, morality, and religious piety. In this regard, embracing the working class commerce on Decatur Street functioned as an

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[82] Randy Gue, "Nickel Madness: Atlanta's Storefront Movie Theatres, 1906-1911," *Atlanta History* XLIII, no. Summer (1999).,37; Kuhn, Joye, and Wes, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*., 301-302.

[83] Unidentified Author, *Journal Magazine* May 18, 1913 quoted in Franklin M. Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of its People and Events, Vol.2,* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1954), 607-609; Kuhn, Joye, and Wes, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*., 254; United States. Bureau of the Census., Zellmer R. Pettet, and Charles Edward Hall, *Negroes in the United States, 1920-32*(Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1935)., 520; Department of Labor United States, *100 Years of U.S. Consumer Spending: Data for the Nation, New York City, and Boston*2006. 991.,10.

act of noncompliance to black Protestant notions of propriety and uplift.[84]

Decatur Street not only reflected black rural life in expression and commerce, but also in transportation. Rural migrants and their mule drawn wagons and prairie schooners shared the crowded streets with the few privileged owners of automobiles. Decatur Street also provided cover against prohibition as parked wagon owners held "private" alley auctions for their fresh "moonshine" and "mountain dew."[85]

This atmosphere garnered "The Street" a reputation as a place of crime and immorality. The 81 Theatre had a reputation as a place of lowbrow amusement reflective of poor moral standards. Atlanta resident Pauline Minniefield recalled, "Decent people were not supposed to go down there. There were certain classes of people who were not supposed to go down to the 81." Similarly, musician Edwin Driskell remembered, "there are some who are better educated, or have better jobs…and those are the type of people who wouldn't go to a show.[86]

Pioneering African American blues songwriter and musician Perry Bradford evoked an image of Decatur Street as a place of violence. He recalls, "It was a tame Saturday night in the notorious Decatur Street section if there were only six razor operations performed, or if only four persons were found in the morgue on Sunday

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[84] On the multivalent meanings of black consumer practices see, Lewis, *In Their Own Interests : Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia*.,95; Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes : Modernity, the Great Migration, & Black Urban Life*(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007)..

[85] Unidentified Author, *Journal Magazine* May 18, 1913 quoted in Franklin M. Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of its People and Events, Vol.2,* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1954), 607-609; Kuhn, Joye, and Wes, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*., 254; United States. Bureau of the Census., Pettet, and Hall, *Negroes in the United States, 1920-32*., 520; United States, *100 Years of U.S. Consumer Spending: Data for the Nation, New York City, and Boston*.,10.

[86]Kuhn, Joye, and Wes, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*., 302-303.

morning."[87] Musician Edwin Driskell recalled that "The Street" was "a really tough street…the implication I got then was that you found prostitutes or lower life-elements there. And as youngsters, we would never be caught going down Decatur Street." Fourth Ward resident Alice Adams recalled that when she moved to Atlanta she was warned, "'Stay off Decatur Street!'" She remembered the street as a "rough place, we just didn't hang out over there." Instead, Adams and her friends looked to the more respectable and appropriate Auburn Avenue for their recreation.[88]

Protestant clergy in Atlanta held similar views of Decatur Street. The black Protestant establishment considered "The Street" as nothing more than a haven for uncensored public immorality, a distraction from religious devotion, and an impediment to black respectability. Black elites viewed Decatur Street and its predominantly black working class proprietors and amusements as the rancid antithesis of the respectability of Auburn Avenue and the piety of black Protestant practice. The city's black Protestant establishment, led by Reverend Henry H. Proctor, created their own amusements as well as waged an oppositional campaign against the city's public commercial amusements.

Proctor served as the pastor of First Congregational Church of Atlanta from 1894-1919 and during his twenty-five years of service, the African American minister was a focal activist in confronting the black Protestant establishment's problem of amusement. Born and raised in rural Tennessee, Proctor was no stranger to urban migration. In his autobiography, Proctor recalls the "thrills and excitement" he experienced as he transitioned from the monotony of rural Tennessee to the urban exhilaration of trains, paved streets, city society, and amusements. His experience of urban migration and the

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[87] Perry Bradford, *Born with the Blues*(New York: Oak Publications, 1964)., 18; quoted in Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*.,162.
[88] Kuhn, Joye, and Wes, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*.,37.

development of Atlanta's black commercial amusement venues solidified his belief that African American churches should assist black migrants in their acculturation to the city. For the urban migrant preacher this particularly meant guiding the recreational behaviors of migrants. The Fisk and Yale educated minister testified:

> "For ten years, I had sat on my porch near the church and seen the people of my race go by the church down to the dive, (saloon, public dance hall, etc.) into the prison, up to the gallows. While the dive was wide open, illuminated, and attractive…God helping me, I will open my church and make it as attractive as the dive."[89]

Atlanta's commercial amusements convinced the pastor that it was imperative for black Protestant congregations to re-imagine ministry and alter church work accordingly.

To make his church as "attractive" as the Decatur Street amusement district, Proctor expanded the church's physical structure transforming the church into a multi-faceted institution that was concerned with more than just worship. Shortly after making his vow, Proctor led a campaign to construct a new church. The commodious structure was finished in 1908 on the corner of Courtland Avenue and Houston Street at the cost of $50,000 (approximately ten million dollars today). The state of the art three-story facility featured a host of amenities that reflected the church's new ideology of ministry, including Sunday School rooms, a library, reading rooms, a kindergarten, model kitchen, an interracial employment bureau, a home for working class women, a prison mission, a gymnasium, showers, lavatories, a one thousand seat auditorium, offices, ladies parlor, galleries, and the city's first water fountain. The impressive structure was visited and praised by both Presidents Taft and Theodore Roosevelt.[90]

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[89] Henry Hugh Proctor, *Between Black and White: Autobiographical Sketches* (Freeport, N.Y: Books for Libraries Press, 1971, reprint of the 1925 ed.), 15-22, 99, 133.

[90] Ralph Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White : American Racial Reform, 1885-1912*(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Henry Hugh Proctor, *Between Black and White:*

Proctor used the new facility in creative ways to provide ministry to the city's growing black population. The inventive use of the church exemplifies the ways in which black Protestantism re-configured church work in response to urban migration and amusements. For example, in one sermon Proctor petitioned his congregation to initiate the public use of the church's water fountain (the city's first public water fountain). At the cost of one hundred dollars to the church, the pastor assured his congregation that the extra provision would "take away from some the excuse for going to the saloon to get a cold drink."[91] This action was a first for the church. The pastor's appeal to the church reveals that such outreach aimed at contending with commercial spaces of amusement was a departure from the church's previous plan of church activities. The church was attempting to respond to the growth of the city's black population and commercial culture.

Proctor also used his church as a commercial amusement venue. First Congregational established and hosted an annual secular music festival and occasional classical and opera concerts (the church continues to host the musical festival to this today). The annual music festival and the concerts were advertised as wholesome alternatives to the public commercial amusement establishments "in the city that tend to drag down the colored servant." The church advertised that "for a popular rate of admission" both black and white residents of Atlanta could come and enjoy the annual Jubilee Music Festival. The annual festival featured famous acts such as The Fisk Jubilee Singers and famed African American tenor and former Fisk singer Roland Hayes, as well

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Autobiographical Sketches(Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971).,190; 'Proctor Celebrates 20 Years In Atlanta' *The Atlanta Constitution,* Aug 2, 1914, pg.A4; A.B. Caldwell, ed. *History of the American Negro and His Institutions*, Georgia ed. (Atlanta: A.B. Caldwell Publishing Co., 1917)., 136. The picture of the church is taken from Proctor's autobiography.

[91] 'Use of Water Urged for Negroes of City' *The Atlanta Constitution,* Jun 23, 1913, pg.6

as sopranos Anita Patti Brown and Sylvia Ward Olden. The annual weekend long event also featured plays and drama to compete with Atlanta's vaudeville theatres. Throughout the year, amusement seekers could also enjoy classical music concerts in the First Congregational Auditorium for an admission price of .25 cents.[92] As the operatic concerts reveal, the church's amusement offerings were aimed at competing with the city's commercial amusements, while fostering racial uplift and religious devotion.

The city's black Protestant establishment also assisted in developing "respectable" commercial amusement venues. In April 1913, Big Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church held a dedication service for The Odd Fellows' new movie theatre on Auburn Avenue. The Protestant establishment advertised their Auditorium Theatre as the "only place for the better class of self –respecting Negro to see" morally appropriate talking pictures. The *Atlanta Independent* stated that the theater was doing "so much for innocent and instructive amusement," by featuring "clean" vaudeville acts and the race films of Oscar Micheaux, Richard Norman, and Spencer Williams—all of which highlighted black middle class life, Victorian values, and the degrading nature of saloons, dives, and public dance halls.[93] The city's black Protestant churches were reconfiguring

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[92] Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War.The Atlanta Constitution,* 'Proctor Makes Statement,' Aug 17, 1902, pg.12; 'Bars Ragtime Music,' Jun 30, 1913, pg.5; 'Music and Morals Related, Declares Colored Pastor In Opposing "Ragtime",' Jul 6, 1914, pg.3; 'Last Concert Proves the Best Of Colored Musical Festival,' Jul 11, 1914, pg.7.

[93] "What Sam Of Auburn Avenue Says**,"** *Atlanta Daily World,* Jul 14, 1932, pg6; Quotes from the *Atlanta Independent* found in White, ""A Landmark in Negro Progress" The Auditorium Theatre, 1914-1925."; Washington, "Recreational Facilities for the Negro.", 280-281; August and David Lewis Meier, "History of the Negro Upper Class in Atlanta, Georgia, 1890-1958," in *Atlanta, Georgia, 1960-1961: Sit-Ins and Student Activism*, ed. David Garrow(Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Company, 1989).; Kuhn, Joye, and Wes, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*.,285; *The Atlanta Independent*, April 25, 1914, quoted in White, ""A Landmark in Negro Progress" The Auditorium Theatre, 1914-1925."; Matthew H. Bernstein and Dana F. White, "Imitation of Life in a Segregated Atlanta: Its Promotion, Distribution and Reception," *Film History* 19, no. 2 (2007).; For more information on the role of race films and religion see, Judith Weisenfeld, *Hollywood Be Thy Name : African American Religion in American Film, 1929-1949*, The George Gund Foundation Imprint in African American Studies(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).; Judith Weisenfeld, 'Saturday Sinners and Sunday Saints": The Nightclub as Moral Menace

church ministry according to the city's growing black population. Providing decorous commercial amusement was a cornerstone in this new conception of church work.

In addition to transforming his church structure and ministry, Proctor avidly mobilized against public commercial amusements. The preacher frequently attacked these spaces in his sermons. Proctor labeled any public commercial amusement that eschewed Victorian values as an enemy to religious devotion and racial progress. With sermon titles like, "The Redemption of Decatur Street," Proctor attacked public dance halls as well as black popular music. On the Sunday before Christmas in 1902, the preacher departed from the seasonal Christmas sermon, opting to preach "The Black Battle of Atlanta." The sermon text was Ephesians 6:11 "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." Proctor used the scriptural text to pinpoint that the flourishing of the city's black commercial amusements was a scheme of the devil to perpetuate black debasement, inequality, crime, and poverty. During the sermon, the preacher blamed such spaces for vice in black communities. "The cause of this sad condition is not far to seek," Proctor stated. "There are in this city almost one hundred saloons, in the most the blacks congregate in portion to the whites ten to one."[94] The preacher was unwavering in his crusade against saloons.

Similarly, in a sermon on black popular music, Reverend Proctor asserted that Ragtime music, popularized by black pianist Scott Joplin, made "ragtime character." Playing on the word "rag" he continued: "No more should one clothe the sentiments of his soul in rags than he should his body. I urge you to eliminate it from your music." In

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in 1940s Race Movies, in John Michael Giggie and Diane H. Winston, eds., *Faith in the Market : Religion and the Rise of Urban Commercial Culture* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002)..

[94] 'Black Battle of Atlanta' *The Atlanta Constitution,* Dec 22, 1902, pg.9; Bible verse found in the New American Standard Bible, The Lockman Foundation, 1995.

another sermon on black musical expression, Proctor opposed ragtime music on the account of the perceived lack of morals in the popular musical genre. He proclaimed one Sunday morning "There is a close relationship between music and morals…Ragtime music makes ragtime character, just as noble music makes noble character."[95]

Other members of the city's black Protestant establishment joined Proctor in the campaign against commercial amusements. These prominent black religious leaders identified all of the public amusements on Decatur Street with lower church attendance, immorality, sloth, and other behaviors detrimental to black claims of equality. Beginning in the summer of 1904, Ms. Caddle Whitman—state president of an unnamed women's religious auxiliary—organized a series of outdoor revival services on Decatur Street. Under the direction of Ms. Whitman, the revivals featured prominent clergy of the city's black Protestant establishment and the leaders of the NYPEC including: Reverend C.C. Cargile of Atlanta's Big Bethel AME Church (the birthplace of Morris Brown College), Reverend Peter J. Bryant of the 4,000 member Wheat Street Baptist Church, Reverend Edward R. Carter of Atlanta's Friendship Baptist Church—the oldest independent black church in Atlanta and the birth place of Spelmen College as well as the first Atlanta home of Morehouse College. The revivals also featured Reverend John A. Rush of Central United Methodist Church. The *Atlanta Constitution* heralded the events as an outreach by the "pastors of leading Negro Churches" in the city.[96]

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[95] *The Atlanta Constitution,* 'Bars Ragtime Music,' Jun 30, 1913, pg.5; 'Music and Morals Related, Declares Colored Pastor In Opposing "Ragtime",' Jul 6, 1914, pg.3;

[96] "Saturday Night Preaching" *The Atlanta Constitution,* July 29, 1904,9; "To Clean Decatur Street" *The Atlanta Constitution,* Aug 4, 1904,8; *Atlanta City Directory,* 1904. The newspaper article "Saturday Night Preaching" lists the last names of Reverend Cargille, Reverend Bryant, Reverend Carter, and Reverend Rush (identified incorrectly as Reverend Rusch) as pastors of the "leading Negro churches in the city." The Atlanta City Directory lists two Reverend Bryant. Revs. Peter J. Bryant and Alonzo W. Bryant are both listed as pastors. However, Peter J Bryant is listed in the 1904 directory as pastor of Wheat Street, but the directory does not list the name of the church where Reverend Alonzo W. Bryant was the pastor. Given

The Decatur Street revivals were aimed at reforming those on "The Street" as well as bolstering church membership rosters. Preachers extended "the right hand of fellowship" to the convicted hearts and souls on Decatur Street. The services—which consisted of preaching, exhortation, music, and signing—received the blessing of the local Police departments as well as the endorsement of several white organizations. Not surprisingly, the revival services were held on Saturday nights, the busiest time on Decatur Street. These outdoor church worship services took church and wholesome amusement to the vibrant commercial district in an effort to attract members of the city's growing black population. The black Protestant establishment was altering church work according to the development of black popular amusements.[97]

In addition to revivals, the city's black clergy campaigned against Atlanta's black commercial amusements on Decatur Street. Led by Proctor, the city's black clergy campaigned for a citywide ban on public dancing establishments (private elite dances such as those held by black private clubs, institutions, and spaces such as the Negro Driving club, The Odd Fellows, and various black fraternities and sororities were not considered a problem). Proctor consistently lamented over the existence of public dance halls and their negative effect upon black people. He used his pulpit and the local newspapers to proclaim: "Remove these things [dance hall and dives] that are ruining the character of our young men and stealing away the virtue of our young women."

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that the reporter stated that the pastors present at the street revivals were the pastors of "leading" black congregations in Atlanta and the prominence of Wheat Street Baptist Church, it is likely that the Reverend Bryant named in the article is Reverend Peter J. Bryant of Wheat Street Baptist Church. For a brief history of black churches in Atlanta see: Roswell F. Jackson and Rosalyn M. Patterson, "A Brief History of Selected Black Churches in Atlanta, Georgia," *The Journal of Negro History* 74, no. No. 1/4 Winter - Autumn (1989)..

[97] "Saturday Night Preaching" *The Atlanta Constitution,* July 29, 1904,9; "To Clean Decatur Street" *The Atlanta Constitution,* Aug 4, 1904,8; *Atlanta City Directory,* 1904; Patterson, "A Brief History of Selected Black Churches in Atlanta, Georgia.".

Responding to the complaints of Proctor and other ministers, the Atlanta City Council imposed a $200 assessment fee on black dance halls in an effort to close them in 1903. Proctor continued to petition the city council to not just fine such establishments, but to abolish them all. In 1905, the preacher led a group of clergy in issuing a petition to the city council surmising their opposition to commercial amusements. The appeal succinctly declared the feelings of the petitioners: "We resent the statement that there is a demand on the part of the better element of our people for those places. The better element does not want them, and the worst element should not be permitted to have them."[98] The black Protestant establishment was clear—church work in the midst of black urban migration must vie for the amusement passions of the increasingly urbanized black populace.

Conclusion:

At the turn of twentieth century, Du Bois' asserted that black Protestant churches provided the social and institutional life that African Americans were excluded from in American society due to racial discrimination.[99] However, urban migration began to challenge the social and institutional role of black churches. Mass urban migration and the proliferation of urban spaces of black congregation enabled African Americans to experience unprecedented avenues for social interaction outside the purview and control of black Protestant churches. Moreover, urban migrants from sharecropping economies encountered the regulated workday of industrial labor, which provided Atlanta's black migrants with the opportunity to pursue a host of tangible freedoms. Furthermore, cash

[98] Proctor, *Between Black and White: Autobiographical Sketches*., 97; *Atlanta Constitution,* 'Meetings of Citizens to Suppress Crime, Sep 1, 1906; 'Dive Defined By Committee, Sep 13, 1906; 'Saloon Crusade and It's Results', Oct 6, 1906; Newman, "Decatur Street: Atanta's African American Paradise Lost.",7.
[99] "Of the Faith of the Fathers" in Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*., 195.

wages provided the resources to engage in a host of urban commercial amusements emerging in the early twentieth century—dance halls, theatres, dives, and baseball games—all of which provided a locus of social interaction. In these spaces blacks could spend money, recreational time, and be entertained with various forms of African American cultural expressions and practices, all outside of black Protestant churches.[100]

These social and demographic shifts placed new demands upon black faith communities across the country. Urban migration and amusement began to erase the de facto status of black attendance and patronage of church fellowship and social activities. Subsequently, African American churches in Atlanta responded to these shifts by re-prioritizing their ministerial activities, particularly in regards to supplying commercial amusements and demonizing the same. Atlanta's black Protestant establishment strongly believed that the establishment of church supported amusements that demonstrated strong commitments to middle class respectability and opposition towards those that did not would enable black Protestant institutions to guide the morality of black urban life as well as remain the central institutions in black life.[101]

However, after WW I, the "problem of amusement" would increasingly move from the suppression of the public sins of dancing, theatres, and motion pictures to the marketplace of black consumer culture. The 1920's brought about an unprecedented number of mass-produced commodities for black amusement. The unprecedented release of race records on the phonograph would become a prominent space for black clergy to

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[100] On importance of regulated work day and cash wages see, Grossman, *Land of Hope : Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration*.,13-31; Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way : Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916-30*..

[101] On the changing nature of black communities and their social activities see: Benjamin E. Mays and Joseph William Nicholson, *The Negro's Church*(New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1933)., 119ff.

attempt to guide the recreational and moral behaviors of African Americans.

CHAPTER THREE: THE COLOR OF THE PHONOGRAPH: THE PHONOGRAPH INDUSTRY, RACE RECORDS, AND AFRICAN AMERICAN PROTESTANTISM

At the turn of the century, the phonograph was the primary commercial amusement medium in American life. White artists and consumers dominated the early years of the American phonograph. The industry refused to direct its production or marketing activities to African American consumers until 1920. The recording of black vaudeville singer Mamie Smith marked the commodification of black popular music. This commercialization of African American popular music, known as race records, was one of the earliest black recreational practices to be packaged and sold to African American audiences.[102] The records, ranging in price from seventy-five cents to one dollar, had unprecedented sales volume.

For black Protestant leaders, the popularity of race records accentuated the problem of amusement. As discussed in the previous chapter, leaders of the black Protestant establishment avidly contested recreation that did not reflect black middle class decorum. Historian Evelyn Higginbotham has noted that race record content often ran counter to

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[102] Phonograph records exclusively marketed to blacks were known by the term "Race Records". Several record executives and A&R representatives credit themselves with creating the term. Frank Walker claims credit for the term see, Mike Seeger, '"Who Chose These Records" : Interview with Frank Walker on June 19,1962.' In *Anthology of American Folk Music*, ed. Josh Dunson et al. (New York: Oak Publications, 1973): 8-17; Scholars Paul Oliver and Ronald Foreman credit the term "race records" to Okeh Executive Ralph Peer see, Paul Oliver, *Songsters and Saints : Vocal Traditions on Race Records* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press,1984), 1,8; Black recording artist before 1920, including Bert Williams and the Fisk Jubilee Singers, were not marketed to black audiences. Further attention is given to this later in the chapter. African American Films, known as Race Films, appeared around the same time as Race Records. Black author and film mogul Oscar Micheaux's 1919 film *The Homesteader* is recognized as the first black feature length film. On race films, religion, and morality see, Judith Weisenfeld, "Saturday Sinners and Sunday Saints: the nightclub as moral menace in 1940s race movies," in Giggie and Winston, eds., *Faith in the Market : Religion and the Rise of Urban Commercial Culture*.; Weisenfeld, *Hollywood Be Thy Name : African American Religion in American Film, 1929-1949*..

acceptable notions of black middle class decorum and black Protestant morality.[103] In practical terms, this meant that the highly contested amusement practices of Decatur Street and Atlanta's 81 Theatre, for example, were commodified and popularized. Race record artists, in turn, became celebrities and, for some, wealthy through the public and commercial celebration of the very amusement and cultural practices—black popular music and dancing—that black clergy vehemently desired to ameliorate. In this regard, the popularity and purchase of race records was more than just commerce, rather according to historian Earl Lewis, public actions such as concert attendance and consumer purchases also exemplified commitments to classed notions of propriety. As race records expressed counter-hegemonic discourses and actions concerning black middle class Protestant notions of cultural propriety, morality, and racial progress, the overwhelming acceptance of race records then functioned as an act of noncompliance to black Protestant hegemony.[104] As a result, the phonograph specifically and black popular culture more broadly, became a vital sphere in which the contestation of cultural propriety took place. Examining the relationship between the development of the phonograph as a mass medium in American life, race records, and black Protestantism provides insight into the social and cultural forces and historical actors that contributed to the process of commodifying black Protestant sermons.

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[103] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "Rethinking Vernacular Culture," in *African American Religious Thought: An Athology*, ed. Cornel West and Eddie S. Glaude Jr.(Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

[104] On the multivalent meanings of black consumer practices see, Lewis, *In Their Own Interests : Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia*.,95; Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes : Modernity, the Great Migration, & Black Urban Life*.; Higginbotham, "Rethinking Vernacular Culture.", 980; Ownby, *Subduing Satan : Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920*., 3;

The Phonograph in American Life

At the turn of the century the phonograph was the premier mass medium of commercial amusement. Thomas Edison invented the phonograph in 1877. The commercial career of Edison's Phonograph "began as a slot-machine amusement in bars, railroad stations, nickelodeons, and penny arcades."[105] Owners of hardware stores, toy stores, bicycle shops, and sewing machine agencies could own this novelty of public amusement for around forty dollars. For a small fee, patrons of such commercial establishments could hear the instrument's round wax cylinders squeak out a musical or comedic rendition through a pair of small rubber tubes. Around the turn of the century, the National Gramophone Company (Columbia) and Edison began exclusively marketing their phonographs, $15 to $45 respectively, for home entertainment.[106]

FIGURE 1

Source: 1902 Gramophone advertisement from *The Atlanta Constitution,* Jan 15, 1902, pg.7.

[105] Dane Yorke, "The Rise and Fall of the Phonograph," *The American Mercury* XXVII, no. 105 (1932)..
[106] Yorke, "The Rise and Fall of the Phonograph.".

In 1906, The Victor Talking Machine Company solidified the phonograph's place as an instrument of home entertainment when the company introduced the Victrola. With its enclosed parts and speakers, the Victrola was at once a phonograph and a piece of exclusive home décor. Its oak or mahogany finishes easily fit into existing home furnishings. In addition, the cabinet provided shelf space for storing a music library (see FIGURE 2). The novelty of the Victrola inspired further adaptations of record players. Phonograph companies designed their players to look like small grand pianos, overnight bags, suitcases, leather purses, handbags, and eventually small players to be concealed behind walls and ceiling tiles (see below for picture of the Victrola in 1910).[107]

[107] Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life : The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945*., xii, 52; "Nation-Wide Survey of Phonographs and Radios in Homes," *The Talking Machine World* XXIII, no. (1927).; Victrola advertisement from *The Atlanta Constitution*, Jan 20, 1910, pg.5

FIGURE 2

Source: Victrola advertisement from *The Atlanta Constitution,* Jan 20, 1910, pg.5

The home phonograph became the hallmark of the modern home. Sales of this modern necessity ignited unprecedented financial success for phonograph companies and select musical artists. Through the first two decades of the twentieth century, phonograph prices ranged from $10 to $900. Aided by a 1902 agreement to pool their competing patents, Victor and Columbia established an industry duopoly and garnered much of the financial revenues. The Victor Talking Machine Company, which was founded in 1901 became the industry leader. The company amassed an earned surplus of

almost three million dollars at the close of 1906. For its tenth anniversary in 1911, the company boasted eight million dollars in total assets. Towards the end of World War I, the company's assets ballooned to thirty three million. One exclusive Victor artist, Enrico Caruso, earned approximately $8,000 in 1906 and $90,000 in 1912 for his Victor recording activities.[108]

High levels of consumer demand contributed to a surge in phonograph manufactures and companies. In 1914, there were eighteen established phonograph companies. Collectively, they sold 500,000 phonographs and produced 25 million records. Near the end of the World War I, the number of phonograph manufactures rose from 18 to 200, and their combined phonograph production climbed from a half million to 2.2 million phonographs. In all, between 1910 and 1920 approximately ten million phonographs were manufactured in the United States, a country with only twenty-four million households. Demand was so high for the medium, in 1918 Victor phonographs prices ranged from $22.50-$900 (see FIGURES 3 and 4), when the average annual American family income was approximately $1,500. The phonograph had become a staple in early twentieth century American life.[109]

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[108] Yorke, "The Rise and Fall of the Phonograph.", 7,10; Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life : The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945*., 59; Alex van der Tuuk, *Paramount's Rise and Fall: A History of the Wisconsin Chair Company and Its Recording Activities*(Denver: Mainspring Press, 2003)., 20; Roland Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph, from Tin Foil to High Fidelity*, [1st ed.(Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1955).,142.

[109] Tuuk, *Paramount's Rise and Fall: A History of the Wisconsin Chair Company and Its Recording Activities*., 21; Yorke, "The Rise and Fall of the Phonograph.",8; Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life : The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945*.,14, 54; Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph, from Tin Foil to High Fidelity*., 208-212; David Suisman, "Co-Workers in the Kingdom of Culture: Black Swan Records and the Political Economy of African American Music," *The Journal of American History* 90, no. 4 (2004)., 1300; Tim Brooks, ""Might Take One Disc of This Trash as a Novelty": Early Recordings by the Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Popularization Of "Negro Folk Music"," *American Music* 18, no. 3 (2000).,298; "Nation-Wide Survey of Phonographs and Radios in Homes.", 10-11; For average income in America see, United States, *100 Years of U.S. Consumer Spending: Data for the Nation, New York City, and Boston*.; Phonograph prices found in 1918 Victor advertisement in *The Atlanta Constitution*, Dec 24, 1918, pg.7.

FIGURE 3

Source: 1910 Victor Phonograph advertisement found in *The Atlanta Constitution,* Dec 10, 1910, pg.7

FIGURE 4

Source: 1918 Victor advertisement in *The Atlanta Constitution,* Dec 24, 1918, pg.7

In addition to mass production and lucrative sales, responses to the 1921 Thomas A. Edison Phonograph Surveys also illuminate the popularity and novelty of the entertainment medium. W.E. Slocum of Saginaw, Michigan stated, "I find more real satisfaction and pleasure and amusement in my Edison than all other pleasures and amusements combined."[110] Other survey respondents expressed similar excitement regarding the phonograph. Coupled with his fifteen tropical fish, Marcus Mullen, a mechanical engineer in Chicago, credited his phonograph with providing him with "more pleasure than you can imagine."[111] A Minnesota customer excitedly reported, "I have bought everything that goes to make a home, from baby shoes to an electric washer, but nothing has given me more pleasure and delight than my Edison."[112] Mrs. Mary Kelly, a widow with five children in Providence, Rhode Island, stated that her phonograph purchase not only provided enjoyment, but increased the significance of her entire existence. "I have had my life made worth living since [the Edison phonograph] came into my home," she wrote. "I got your small Edison on thirty-day trial and believe me it gave me such pleasure that I managed to get a larger one and only wish I could own the very most elaborate one as there is no case too grand for such a glorious machine."[113]

The Edison surveys also shed light on how the phonograph changed amusement in

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[110] Letter from W.E. Slocum Saginaw, MI, March 16,1921 to Thomas Edison. Thomas A. Edison Inc., "A Special Request to a Selected List of Edison Owners: Thomas A. Edison Phonograph Surveys," ed. Special Collections: Music Library(Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1921).. A very special thanks to Charles Reynolds and the library staff for their invaluable assistance during my research at the University of Michigan Music Library.

[111] Marcus Mullen Chicago, March 25,1921 to Thomas Edison Inc., Inc., "A Special Request to a Selected List of Edison Owners: Thomas A. Edison Phonograph Surveys."

[112] Letter from St. Peter, Minn 3/9/1921 to Thomas Edison Inc., "A Special Request to a Selected List of Edison Owners: Thomas A. Edison Phonograph Surveys."Special Collections: University of Michigan Music Library.

[113] Letter from Mrs. Mary Kelly- Providence, Rhode Island, Jan, 12,1921 to Thomas Edison Inc., "A Special Request to a Selected List of Edison Owners: Thomas A. Edison Phonograph Surveys.".

America. First, the phonograph made it possible to hear popular cultural expressions at home. Mrs. A.B Castator of Richmond, Indiana reflected the value of this home novelty when she wrote to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., "I can't tell you how much good you have done to make it possible for people to hear good music in their own homes."[114] One Minnesota customer stated that his phonograph changed his house into a music "conservatory" and provided him with a musical education.[115]

Second, phonograph recordings enabled consumers to enjoy a variety of cultural expressions that they otherwise would not have heard in their own communities due to social, economic, and geographical limitations. In 1921, L.F. Hill of Birmingham, Alabama wrote that his phonograph was teaching him to "enjoy classical music more and more, opening the door of a wonderful treasure house" that was otherwise inaccessible. The phonograph enabled couples like Mr. and Mrs. Ira K. Harris of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to hear a variety of concerts regardless of their proximity to the concert venue. "When there is a concert we wish to hear, we pool the price of our admittance, leaf through our catalogues—Victor, Columbia, and Edison—and purchase the program," stated Harris, "and we listen to that same concert many times." Rural couples like Mr. and Mrs. Frank Eaton of Lima, OH enjoyed their phonograph "because we have no other way of hearing the Opera."[116]

In addition to adjusting amusement practices, the phonograph also modified the practice of memory by functioning as technological aid of recollection. This was

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[114]Letter from Mrs. A.B. Castator no date to Thomas Edison Inc., "A Special Request to a Selected List of Edison Owners: Thomas A. Edison Phonograph Surveys."

[115] Letter from St. Peter, Minn 3/9/1921 to Thomas Edison Inc., "A Special Request to a Selected List of Edison Owners: Thomas A. Edison Phonograph Surveys."Special Collections: University of Michigan Music Library.

[116] Letter from L.F. Hill of Birmingham, AL Feb.17, 1921, Letter from Ira K. Harris of Pittsburgh, PA, and Mrs. Frank A Eaton Lima, OH Jan 23, 1921 to Thomas Edison, Inc., 'A Special Request to a Selected List of Edison Owners: Thomas A. Edison Phonograph Surveys'

particularly true for the host of foreign-born white immigrants. Records became aids to connecting with their former homes and cultural practices, particularly through ethnic music expressions. Phonograph companies produced records in at least twenty-nine foreign languages, allowing foreign-born residents to utilize phonograph records as a tool of cultural continuity. A critical mass of the approximate two-thousand survey respondents recalled that their respective ethnic recordings provided them with vivid memories of "home," including family members, and departed loved one's.[117] The record service department of the Edison Phonograph Company reported that they received such a high demand for these ethnic recordings after the First World War that their facilities were "taxed to the utmost to produce sufficient quantities…to meet the requirements of the public."[118] The phonograph enabled America's growing immigrant populations to enjoy the familiar sounds of their respective homelands in their new and unfamiliar surroundings.

The phonograph also reorganized how Americans conceived of space and time. The medium's ability to bring remote events into private homes miles away closed the distance of space and time in American life. Lawrence Dreger of Pittsburgh enjoyed his phonograph because of the medium's ability to seemingly bring "the artists to your very home and a little imagination makes you think that they are standing in your very midst. You think you see them in person." Similarly, Frank Burns of Pennsylvania declared that his phonograph records "bring the artist-singer or player to your home." The phonograph

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[117] Thomas Edison, Inc., 'A Special Request to a Selected List of Edison Owners: Thomas A. Edison Phonograph Surveys; Kenney, Recorded Music in American Life : The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945, xvii-xviii, 5-8.

[118] Letter from Thomas Edison, Inc to Lawrence Dreger of Pittsburgh February 10,1921, Thomas A. Edison, Inc, *A Special Request to a Selected List of Edison Owners: Thomas A. Edison Phonograph Surveys* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1921).; Ira De A. Reid, "Race Records," *Ira De A. Reid Papers , The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture* Box 1 Folder 17, no.. A very special thanks to Dr. Wallace Best for providing me with this insightful article.

made events timeless and spaceless by enabling listeners to have an immediate experience of a remote event and/or performance.[119]

Subsequently, phonograph records also reconfigured how Americans experienced current events. As a mass medium, the phonograph transmitted information. In 1920, the nation was experiencing high illiteracy rates with close to half of America's population still living in rural areas with populations below two thousand five hundred. These areas often lacked access to daily newspapers, suffered from irregular radio broadcast, and lacked transportation to urban centers of knowledge and information.[120] Therefore, phonograph records were important for relaying information to the nation, particularly rural residents, and the large number of illiterate Americans. Several important speeches and events were made available to the public through the phonograph. For example, famous speeches by Theodore Roosevelt and Booker T. Washington were recorded and sold. Even the Presidential debate of William H. Taft and William Jennings Bryan was recorded and sold.[121]

Record companies also produced event records to recount and interpret historical and contemporary events. Event records like *The Sinking of the Titanic* were big sellers. Columbia records even produced a record covering the *Scopes v. the State of Tennessee* trial (more commonly referred to as "The Scopes Monkey Trial"), one of the biggest

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[119] Letter from Lawrence Dreger of Pittsburgh Jan. 23,1921 and Letter from Frank M Burns of Pitcairm, PA Jan. 24,1921 to Thomas Edison, Inc., Edison, *A Special Request to a Selected List of Edison Owners: Thomas A. Edison Phonograph Surveys*.

[120] Literacy rates from, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970; and Current Population Reports, Series P-23, Ancestry and Language in the United States: November 1979; and United States. Bureau of the Census., Pettet, and Hall, *Negroes in the United States, 1920-32*., 229-252. The census bureau defined illiterate as any person ten years old or older who is not able to read and write either in English or in some other language. This was determined by responses to the question "Whether able to read and write?" However, the ability to write one's name was not sufficient evidence of literacy;

[121] Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music*., 5.

national events of the early twentieth century. The trial became the embodiment of the Fundamentalist-Modernist cultural war that was waging in America's Protestant faith communities and institutions of higher learning. The 1925 trail convicted John Scopes of teaching evolution in the classroom. While Chicago's WGN radio station broadcasted the trail, Columbia produced and recorded event-based songs retelling the events of the trial. Columbia employee Frank Walker recalled that over 60,000 of the records were sold on the Dayton, TN courthouse steps. "There were thousands of buyers of phonograph records that had no other means of communication," Walker reported. Subsequently, the phonograph offered a medium of communication and interpretation that complimented, rivaled, and in some cases, replaced that of newspapers, theologians, and preachers.[122]

The phonograph also proved to be a useful educational tool. The superintendent of the Indianapolis Institute for the Deaf and Mute found that the phonograph had the potential to aid in teaching his students. Superintendent Johnson found that the phonograph produced sounds that most of his students, who were otherwise unable to hear, could distinguish. *The New York Times* reported that Johnson tested fifty-six hearing impaired and mute students at his institute. All but three of his students were able to hear sound from the phonograph. He hoped that the phonograph would help his students learn to use "their voices….whose inability to speak is due to the fact that they never heard speech."[123]

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[122] For reports on the Scopes phonograph record see, Mike Seeger, ""Who Chose These Records" : Interview with Frank Walker on June 19,1962," in *Anthology of American Folk Music*, ed. Josh Dunson et al.(New York: Oak Publications, 1973).,8.

[123] "Possibilities of the Phonograph," *The New York Times,* December 13,1891.

Beyond the phonograph's more specialized teaching applications, Victor and Columbia made it a practice to produce educational and school records to aid in education and learning. Both companies placed their phonographs and records in schools across the country to help with pedagogy and the dispersal of information and new knowledge. Victor ran advertisements such as "Victrolas for the Kiddies," and included educational records that featured games, children's songs, and stories in their catalog. Children's records were so popular that Edison Phonograph customers complained to Edison, Inc. concerning the company's lack of similar products. [124]

The centrality of the phonograph as a primary medium of American music, commercial amusement, information, and education caused pioneering radio executives to use the phonograph as their marketing and technological benchmark. As early as 1916, David Sarnoff, the eventual president of the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) recognized the phonograph's technology as the medium to contend with in order for new technology to immerge. "I have in mind a plan of development," Sarnoff states, "which would make radio a household utility in the sense as the phonograph."[125] Before radio even began its rise to prominence, the phonograph was established as the primary technological medium in American life.

The Phonograph in Black: Race Records

By the end of World War I, the music industry had produced more than 335 million dollars worth of goods.[126] Music suppliers marketed records to various American

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[124] *The Atlanta Constitution,* Dec 15, 1918, pg.4; Letter from CE Barrett from Entiat, Washington to Thomas Edison, Inc., Edison, *A Special Request to a Selected List of Edison Owners: Thomas A. Edison Phonograph Surveys*.
[125] Ken Burns, "Empire of the Air: The Men Who Made Radio," in *Ken Burns' America Collection*, ed. Ken Burns(USA: PBS, 1991)..
[126] Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music*.,207.

immigrant groups and recorded hundreds of titles in at least twenty-nine different languages including Czech, French, Italian, Arabic, and Chinese.[127] However, the gatekeepers of the entertainment medium refused to record African American cultural expression for African American consumers. One record executive recalled the following: "We had records by all foreign groups—German records, Swedish records, Polish records; but we were afraid to advertise Negro records."[128]

J.A. Sieber, an advertising manager for a large record company stated that for the most part the phonograph industry was convinced that "colored people were…mighty poor record buyers, and cash visits by colored customers were rare and far between." [129] As a result, Prior to 1920, recordings of African American artists reflected "the same old stories of black deviance and pathology," and inferiority. These recordings were primarily done in dialect speech and featured minstrel and/or comedy acts that reflected and reinforced the degrading stereotypes of the "Sambo," "Coon," and "Pickaninny." The few African American recordings that did not reflect white public opinion of African Americans were subjected to the control of white prerogatives and exclusively advertised to white consumers.[130]

For example, in 1892 George W. Johnson made the first recordings by an African American. Johnson, billed and advertised as "The Whistling Coon," recorded a "Laughing" song for Edison's phonograph company. The song, which featured Johnson laughing to a syncopated cadence, was advertised to white consumers in the genre of

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[127] For a complete listing of the twenty nine languages see, Ira De A. Reid, "Race Records", 1, Ira De A. Reid Papers, Box 1, Folder 17, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.
[128] Bradford, *Born with the Blues*., 29-128; Kyle Crichton, "Thar's Gold in Them Hillbillies," *Collier's* April 30 (1938).
[129] Quote found in, Ronald C. Foreman, JR, "Jazz and Race Records, 1920-1932: Their Origins and Their Significance for the Record Industry and Society" (Ph.D, University of Illinois, 1968)., 129.
[130] Gaines, Uplifting the Race : Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century.,16.

"Coon Songs." Minstrelsy and vaudeville star Bert Williams recorded minstrelsy skits such as "Reverend Eatmore's Sermon" for the Universal Phonograph Company in 1897 and Victor beginning in 1901.[131]

The recording activities of nationally renowned Tenor and former Fisk Jubilee Singer, Roland Hayes was limited because of race. The classical tenor, under the auspices of the Roland Hayes Phonographic Club, distributed his own classical music records and made personal appearances and record sales at concert halls and churches throughout the country. Hayes performed at Atlanta's First Congressional Church and at Atlanta's Municipal Auditorium, sponsored by the city's Committee on Interracial Cooperation. All of Hayes' concerts were well attended. At Baltimore's Bethel AME Church, Hayes drew a crowd of 1,600. Despite substantial sales and popularity, established phonograph companies refused to sign Hayes as a classical signer. Hayes recalled that Columbia, Victor, and Edison continually told him that because of "their agreements with tenors of the opera and otherwise, they were not in a position to consider" him as a classical recording artist, but would sign him as a coon song artist.[132]

On the slight chance that African American artists were offered a recording contract for non-dialect and/or comedy acts, the recordings and artists were exclusively marketed to white consumers. The recordings of the Fisk Jubilee Singers of Fisk University are an example. The Fisk Singers began successfully touring the country in 1871 among predominantly white audiences in an effort to raise funds for the university.

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[131] See, Kenney, Recorded Music in American Life : The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945.,111.

[132] Foreman, "Jazz and Race Records, 1920-1932: Their Origins and Their Significance for the Record Industry and Society"., 37-38; United States, *100 Years of U.S. Consumer Spending: Data for the Nation, New York City, and Boston*.,10; *Baltimore Afro-American,* Nov 8, 1918, p.4, col.3; Kuhn, Joye, and Wes, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*.,285.

In their first national tour the group raised $20,000. Victor Records offered the group an exclusive contract and recorded them at the company's Camden, NJ studio in December 1909. The Fisk records were issued in February of 1910. Despite consistently changing members due to educational matriculation, the group enjoyed success and recorded for both Victor and rival Columbia. The group's 1916 Columbia record "Sweet Low"/"Shout All Over" was one of their most popular records, shipping 108,144 copies.[133]

The group's classical renderings of Negro Spirituals were marketed to white consumers through a stereotypical racial advertisement strategy. Their recordings were advertised as "old plantation songs that give humorous, yet touching voice to quaint old darky religious passions" and "superstitions." Another advertisement stated, "Through all the vicissitudes of the Negro race their music still brings to us echoes of distant barbaric melody." The Fisk recordings did not aurally subscribe to the racist coon songs and comedic minstrelsy acts. However, their advertising did.[134]

The James Europe Society Orchestra is another example of racism in the phonograph industry. In 1915, Europe's Orchestra recorded on Victor, the first for an African American orchestra. The orchestra was not advertised using derogatory terms; however, while Europe was the writer and conductor of the successful recordings, he and his group were advertised as being the conduit of white artists. Victor exclusively marketed the recordings as being under the "direction" and "approval" of the nationally

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[133] Brooks, '"Might Take One Disc of This Trash as a Novelty": Early Recordings by the Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Popularization Of "Negro Folk Music"; Fisk Jubilee Singers in Robert M. W. Dixon and others, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*, 4th ed.(Oxford [England]; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1997)..

[134] Brooks, ""Might Take One Disc of This Trash as a Novelty": Early Recordings by the Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Popularization Of "Negro Folk Music"."; Guido Van Rijn, *Roosevelt's Blues : African-American Blues and Gospel Songs on Fdr*, American Made Music Series(Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997).,33.

renowned white ballroom dance instructors Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Castle. African American composers received similar treatment.[135]

The continued success of acts such as the Fisk Singers and James Europe began to spark an interest among leading phonograph companies regarding the commercialization of black music. In 1913, *The Talking Machine World*, the premiere phonograph industry journal, advised phonograph dealers that if they widened their "business sphere" to African American consumers they would see a significant increase in profits. After hiring a black salesmen and permitting black patronage, one white record storeowner said of his increased profits:

> "The black man is greatly misunderstood. He is not nearly so ignorant and unappreciative as the world in general would have us believe…[there are] a goodly number of not only intelligent but cultured negroes…*it will pay every dealer to give at least some attention to the negro trade [consumer] of his city."*[136]

On October 21, 1916 the editor of *The Chicago Defender*, one of the largest nationally circulated black newspapers, noted that "the record companies are seeking to find out how many Victrolas are owned by" African Americans. The editor's office requested that every "member of the race" who owned a Victrola send his or her name and address to the editor's office "at once." The office of the editor promised to collect and furnish the data to the phonograph companies, promising that once the data was submitted to phonograph companies "records of the Race's great artist will be placed on the market." The request for phonograph ownership appeared in the weekly paper for

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[135] David Suisman, 'Co-Workers in the Kingdom of Culture: Black Swan Records and the Political Economy of African American Music', *The Journal of American History* 90 (2004),1296; Foreman, "Jazz and Race Records, 1920-1932: Their Origins and Their Significance for the Record Industry and Society"., 15-38; *The Chicago Defender Big Weekend Edition, "*Perpetuate Europe Music in Victor Records, Mar 7, 1914, pg.6.

[136] Howard Taylor Middleton, "Concerning the Black Race and Blue Records," *The Talking Machine World* IX, no. 9 (1913)., Italics mine.

almost a year.[137]

Along with the potential profit of black artists, black consumer activism was also a significant factor that contributed to the phonograph industry re-imagining their commitment to Jim Crow. Encouraged by urban black newspapers, African American consumers began to engage in campaigns to demand that phonograph companies begin directing their production and marketing activities to black consumers. *The Chicago Defender* took aim at the industry leader Victor Record Company, pointing out that while the company had made it a practice to record a host of musical compositions by black composers, they refused to respond to black consumer desires. "Our plea now," *The Defender* proclaimed, "is that such big artists as Anita Patti-Brown…Roland Hayes…and other celebrities should be heard on Victor records." The newspaper rallied its readership to contact "the Victor Record Company asking that these noted artist be heard, giving reason that it would be a paying proposition to have them…Do it now!"[138]

In another article in 1916, *The Defender* once again encouraged its readers to campaign for greater participation in the phonograph industry. In the article, "If Race Makes Demand for our Singers to be Heard, Edison and Victrola People will be Eager to Employ Them," the author lamented over African Americans spending "$250 for a Victrola and pay seven to eight dollars" for records of white artists, only to be denied the opportunity to hear black artists. The article concluded that the lack of recorded black artists, particularly accomplished black artists, was due to the fact that African Americans "make no demand for them." The article instructed its readers to go to the their local record store and ask for "our artists and be indignantly surprised because they do not

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[137] *The Chicago Defender,"* Victor Records Made By Race Artist In Sight," Oct 21, 1916, pg.5.
[138] "Race Artists To Sing For Victrolas," *The Chicago Defender* (Big Weekend Edition), Jan 8, 1916, pg.3.

have them."[139] The desires of African American phonograph customers were clear.

In addition to black consumer activism, expiring patents also challenged the profitability of the phonograph industry's commitment to Jim Crow. During World War I, Victor and Columbia's pooled patents for lateral-cut records (able to be played on any phonograph) began to expire, thus ending their monopoly of the phonograph industry. Subsequently, a host of new labels and manufactures entered the phonograph industry. Armed with the legal right to produce lateral-cut records for all phonographs, new companies such Gennet, Brunswick, Paramount, Vocalion, and Okeh emerged and sought to monopolize genre segments that Edison, Columbia, and Victor had neglected.[140]

The Okeh record label pioneered the untapped niche market of black popular music. Perry Bradford, a well-known vaudeville musician, minstrel performer, and composer shopped around the idea of recorded black popular music with several record companies. Bradford, who migrated to Atlanta from rural Alabama in 1901, thought the success of his vaudeville and minstrel shows and compositions were evidence of the profitability of black popular music. Columbia responded to his business venture by stating that they "wouldn't think of recording a colored" popular artist. Victor recorded one of his popular artists, Mamie Smith, but didn't release the recordings for fear that recording a black artist would risk the company's prestige among white consumers.[141]

Okeh records, in search of monopolizing its own genre, decided to take Perry Bradford up on his offer. Despite receiving countless racist letters and threats of impending boycotts, Okeh recording manager Fred Hager recorded and issued black

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[139] "Demands Records Of Our Artist," *The Chicago Defender* (Big Weekend Edition), Nov 11, 1916, pg.4.
[140] Tuuk, *Paramount's Rise and Fall: A History of the Wisconsin Chair Company and Its Recording Activities*., 21; Yorke, "The Rise and Fall of the Phonograph.",8; Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life : The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945*.,14, 113-114;
[141] Bradford, *Born with the Blues*., 29-128; Crichton, "Thar's Gold in Them Hillbillies."

vaudeville singer Mamie Smith singing Perry Bradford's "That Thing Called Love" and "You Cant keep a Good Man Down," on February 14, 1920. Smith, a former cleaning woman in a theater, became the first black vocal artist to record black popular music that was exclusively marketed to black consumers. The record was placed on the market in July and sold 75,000 copies in the first month. Reporter Tony Langston of the *Chicago Defender* lauded the release:

> "Well, you've heard the famous stars of the white race chirping their own stuff on the different makes of phonograph records…but we have never—up to now—been able to hear one of our own ladies deliver the canned goods. Now we have the pleasure of being able to say that at last they [phonograph companies] have recognized the fact that we [African Americans] are here for their service; the Okeh Phonograph Company has initiated the idea by engaging…Mamie Smith…and apparently [she is] destined to be one of that company's biggest hits."[142]

After the overwhelming success of her first release, Smith returned to Okeh's New York City studio. Her follow up, "Crazy Blues" was recorded on August 10, 1920 and was released in November of the same year. The record sold one million copies in six months. Okeh records boasted that record production could not keep up with demand. With the unprecedented success, Bradford received fifty-three thousand dollars in royalties. Touring also proved lucrative for Bradford and Mamie Smith. In January of 1921, Mamie Smith, with the accompaniment of her "Jazz Hounds," played to a purported crowd of eighteen thousand at Billy Sunday's Tabernacle in Norfolk, VA. The concert admission price was one dollar per ticket. Mamie was paid two thousand dollars for the performance. After the concert, ten thousand records were sold, also at one dollar

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[142] *Encyclopedia of Recorded Sound in the United States* (New York: Garland, 1993), s.v. "Mamie Smith.", 629; Bradford, *Born with the Blues*.29-128; Crichton, "Thar's Gold in Them Hillbillies."; Tony Langston quoted in Foreman, "Jazz and Race Records, 1920-1932: Their Origins and Their Significance for the Record Industry and Society".,56-57; *The Chicago Defender (National edition),* July 21, 1923; pg.6; "The Golden Age of Blues-Recording," *Record Research* 2, no. 11 (1957)., 3.

each. The one-dollar record price was more than twice the average hourly wage of African American wage earners in 1920. By May of the following year Mamie's minimum individual appearance fee stood at an astounding one thousand dollars, two-thirds of the average annual family income.[143]

Smith's success helped to alter the business practices of the entire phonograph industry in two complementary ways. First, her success contributed to a rise in race record artists. Within one year of Mamie Smith's profitable release, leading phonograph companies released their own black artists. Many of these artists gained a considerable amount of wealth from the commercialization of their talents. Columbia recorded Mary Stafford covering Smith's "Crazy Blues" making her the first African American woman to record for Columbia.[144] Later Columbia recorded Bessie Smith, who became one of the most successful and lucrative race record artists. In 1919, Smith was commanding a weekly performance salary of seventy-five dollars (twice the average weekly salary of all black wage earners) at Atlanta's 81 Theatre. However, after signing with Columbia, "the empress of the blues" received $125 to $200 per song and $1500 to $2400 a year. Smith's 1923 recording "Downhearted Blues" sold 800,000 copies in six months and two million for the year.[145]

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[143] *Norfolk Journal and Guide,* Jan 22, 1921, pg. 8; Perry Bradford claims that the crowd in Norfolk was a record 18,000. See, Bradford, *Born with the Blues*., 29-128; Foreman, "Jazz and Race Records, 1920-1932: Their Origins and Their Significance for the Record Industry and Society"., 61; Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life : The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945*.,114; *The Chicago Defender (National edition),* July 21, 1923; pg.6; For stats on the average wages earned by black workers see, United States. Dept. of Labor. Division of Negro Economics., *The Negro at Work During the World War and During Reconstruction; Statistics, Problems, and Policies Relating to the Greater Inclusion of Negro Wage Earners in American Industry and Agriculture*(Washington: Govt. Print. Off., 1921).; On US family income see, United States, *100 Years of U.S. Consumer Spending: Data for the Nation, New York City, and Boston*.

[144] "The Golden Age of Blues-Recording.", 8.

[145] Seeger, ""Who Chose These Records" : Interview with Frank Walker on June 19,1962.";Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life : The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945*.,110, 119-121; Paul Oliver, *Bessie Smith*, Kings of Jazz(London: Cassel, 1959).,8-17; United States. Dept. of Labor. Division of Negro Economics., *The Negro at Work During the World War and During Reconstruction; Statistics,*

Smaller labels also joined the race record business within a year of Mamie's "Crazy Blues." By June 1921, Cardinal Records recorded future international celebrity Josephine Baker, as well as Blues legend Ethel Waters. Like Smith, Waters also considerably increased her income when she became a race record artist. Before recording, she received a weekly performance salary of thirty-five dollars. After agreeing to record with Black Swan, she received one hundred dollars a record. Pathe records introduced Lavinia Turner and Gennett recorded Daisy Martin. Such success stories contributed to the explosion of race record production. In 1921, there were roughly fifty race records. By 1927, the three leading race record producers, Okeh, Paramount, and Columbia, released 1,305 race records.[146] In all, from 1920-1942 approximately 1,200 African American artists were issued on 5,500 blues and 1,250 gospel recordings.[147] This influx of race record artists and earnings solidified the profitability of producing phonograph records aimed at African American consumers—a key factor in the subsequent commodification of black sermons.

Second, the success of race record artists changed advertising in the phonograph industry. This augmentation aided in making race record artists (and later black clergy) commercial celebrities. Communications scholar Sut Jhally identifies the 1920s as a watershed moment in national advertising. She argues that after the Civil War, national advertising focused on the product in a celebratory manner using text to make claims

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Problems, and Policies Relating to the Greater Inclusion of Negro Wage Earners in American Industry and Agriculture.; Tuuk, *Paramount's Rise and Fall: A History of the Wisconsin Chair Company and Its Recording Activities*.,64-68; Foreman, "Jazz and Race Records, 1920-1932: Their Origins and Their Significance for the Record Industry and Society".

[146] On recording totals see, Foreman, "Jazz and Race Records, 1920-1932: Their Origins and Their Significance for the Record Industry and Society".,92, 95, 99,134; On black recording artists, see "The Golden Age of Blues-Recording.", 8.

[147] Kenney, Recorded Music in American Life : The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945., 110-129.

about the product. However, the 1920s witnessed a "progressive integration of people (via visual representation)" into advertising messages. The advertising industry thus turned to using print media and utilizing images of people who possessed and represented happiness, authority, and the reigning social values of the day to advertise their respective products. Advertisers skillfully displayed the connection between the accomplished status of their images and the particular advertised product.[148]

Race record artists became media celebrities through the usage of such print media and image-based advertising. These commercial icons represented accomplishment and wealth. Prior to the 1920s, advertising in the phonograph industry was often haphazard and was not considered an industry necessity for sales. *The Talking Machine World* criticized the phonograph industry for approaching advertising as "a matter of mood rather than sound business practice." The trade journal pleaded with the phonograph industry to recognize the "fundamental truth…that advertising is the greatest possible factor in achieving business success to-day."[149] To advertise their new fleet of race artists, phonograph companies published the images of black artists in black newspapers, trade journal ads, banners, streamers, hangers, posters, photographs, record and furniture store window displays, lantern slides in theatres, and promotional folders. Okeh was the first phonograph company to advertise in a black newspaper, first in the *Chicago Defender* and then the *Indianapolis Freemen*. In 1922, Okeh records placed at least one advertisement in every issue of the *Chicago Defender* for the year. Columbia followed

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[148]Sut Jhally, Image-Based Culture: Advertising and Popular Culture. In *Gender, Race and Class in Media: A Text Reader*, edited by G. D. J. M. Humez. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1995), 78; T.J. Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930," in *The Culture of Consumption in America: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*, edited by R. W. Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 19.

[149] "Persistent Advertising Necessary to-Day," *The Talking Machine World* March (March 1922).,8.

suit in 1924. Companies even began purchasing full-page newspaper advertisements for their race record artists. These full-page advertisements were unprecedented in the nationally circulated *Chicago Defender* (See FIGURE 5).[150]

FIGURE 5

Source: *Chicago Defender,* May 05, 1923, p.6, col.1.

[150] Foreman, "Jazz and Race Records, 1920-1932: Their Origins and Their Significance for the Record Industry and Society".,102,106,133; Bradford, *Born with the Blues*.,29.

Such image advertisements aided in the celebrity of black phonograph artists. Black newspapers were one of the major mediums of news, local and national happenings, and current events in black communities. The pictures of black phonograph artists in nationally circulated black newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*, for example, made former local performances into nationally known celebrities.

These advertisements also aided in the mass distribution of race records. Advertisements informed consumers where race records could be purchased throughout the country. Advertisements often listed the addresses of stores that sold the records in cities like Chicago, New York, Nashville, Detroit, Cleveland, and Baltimore. Advertisements also made race record purchasing easier for consumers who did not reside in urban areas. In 1923, Okeh records issued a catalog of all their race record artists. The race catalog was "the first ever published in the history of the business." The advertisements and catalogs enabled mail-ordering purchasing of race records, and the expansion of the US postal service aided race record distribution. From 1900 to 1920, the number of free rural US Postal delivery routes expanded from 1,259 to 43,445. With these established routes, companies such as Sears Roebuck and Company in Chicago were able to deliver an assortment of "selections by Negro artists" across the country. Similarly, Montgomery Ward, a department store also based in Chicago, offered a small race record selection in their mail order catalogue. A Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania retailer opened "The Race Mail Order House," assuring customers that despite their location, their favorite race records were "as near to your home as your mailbox." Together, the phonograph industry, chain stores, and mail order catalogs made certain that race records

could be purchased and enjoyed regardless of location.[151]

The Phonograph, African American Amusement, and Religion

Race records altered black life and amusement. Similar to the ways in which ethnic recordings aided European immigrants in remaining connected to aspects of their native land, black phonograph records helped the cultural continuity of black urban migrants. According to African American historian Evelyn Higginbotham, the barrage of black vernacular recordings acted as a technology aid in helping black urban migrants remain connected to specific regional and classed forms of expression, particularly rural vernacular.[152] Similarly, historians John Giggie and Diane Winston argue that for minority urban dwellers, aspects of commercial culture were valuable resources for publicly sustaining cultural practices.[153] In addition, the commodification of black popular music afforded African Americans the ability to enjoy black cultural expressions and practices that they otherwise would not have heard in their own communities due to religious, cultural, and/or geographical limitations. These commodified expressions gave African Americans the ability to encounter a plethora of entertainment and amusement options that transcended space and time.

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[151] Crichton, "Thar's Gold in Them Hillbillies."; Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life : The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945*.,137; Ira De A. Reid, "Race Records", 11, Ira De A. Reid Papers, Box 1, Folder 17, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce United States Department of Commerce., *Statistical Abstract of the United States:1926*1927. Vol. No. 49.,342; Some chain stores avoided conspicuous delivery of their goods on account of several chain store boycotts in the south, see, Carl G. Ryant, "The South and the Movement against Chain Stores," *The Journal of Southern History* 39, no. 2 (1973).; For several testimonies of racism in department store commerce in Atlanta see, Kuhn, Joye, and Wes, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*., 98.

[152] Ira De A. Reid, "Race Records", 1,Ira De A. Reid Papers, Box 1, Folder 17, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; On the importance of black vernacular expression during black urban migration see, Higginbotham, "Rethinking Vernacular Culture."; Paul Oliver, *Songsters and Saints : Vocal Traditions on Race Records*(Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984)..

[153] Giggie and Winston, eds., *Faith in the Market : Religion and the Rise of Urban Commercial Culture*.,5.

However, the phonograph had an impact on black life that went beyond that of white Americans. America's racial climate made African American Protestant churches, according to Du Bois, "broader, deeper, and more comprehensive organisms than the churches of white Americans."[154] As discussed in the previous chapter, Jim Crow situated black churches as one of the primary suppliers of black amusement as well as the barometer of black social and cultural propriety. Before the advent of race records; vaudeville shows, dives, and saloons were the major amusement rivals of Black Protestant communities. These commercial amusements rivaled church amusements and were declared sanctuaries of vice and immorality. Forrester Washington, Director of the Atlanta School of Social Work also identified race records as immoral. The educated sociologist proclaimed that race records were " a degraded form of leisure…immoral in their title and context" with "suggestive and obscene" advertisements.[155] Nevertheless, race records made the phonograph specifically, and black amusement culture more broadly, another sphere that competed for the recreational and cultural allegiance of African Americans.

In particular, the popularity of race records and their artists challenged black elite notions of cultural aesthetics and morality. The iconic success of race record artists presented a public challenge to the cultural and social authority of the black Protestant establishment.[156] The public sphere was vital in shaping black life and popular conceptions of African Americans. Harry S. Pace, a founding member of Atlanta's NAACP chapter, also served as president of the racial uplift music label Black Swan.

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[154] Du Bois, "The Problem of Amusement.", 228.
[155] Washington, "Recreational Facilities for the Negro.", 278;
[156] On cultural and social authority of black clergy and their relationship to race records see, Jonathan L. Walton, "The Preachers' Blues: Religious Race Records and Claims of Authority on Wax," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 20, no. 2 (2010).

Pace and company board member W.E.B. Du Bois established the label in 1921 in an effort to showcase "high-class" black musical expressions such as opera and classical music. Fraught with poor profits, the company lasted just two years. In a 1921 speech, "Public Opinion and the Negro," Pace articulated the concern of black Protestant establishment leaders and middle class elites regarding the public sphere, black cultural production, and black respectability. "Unless we take hold vigorously of this matter of creating and shaping public opinion itself," Pace argued, "all other efforts we may put forth in any line will be useless."[157] For Pace and other black elite leaders, religious piety and ideologies of uplift should rigorously dictate the aesthetics and behaviors of black cultural production and amusement. Amusement activities were only acceptable if they were morally uplifting and told of idealized and heroic representations of the race.

However, race record artists publically denounced such ideologies, with particular attention to black clergy. The commodified black vernacular and tales of black working class life offered on race records frustrated efforts of black respectability and progress. Artists such as Victoria Spivey were selling one hundred fifty thousand records per month and appearing in all the major black newspapers throughout the country. Such media fanfare made for a large following. Often times race record concerts attracted, what Angela Davis describes as "large audiences at revival-like gatherings."[158] At these large "revivals," black artists publically used black vernacular to address aspects of morality outside the purview of the church as well as to criticize the social authority of

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[157] Quoted in Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music*., 215. Black Swan, which set out to feature high-class black music, was short lived. The company made records from May 1921 to 1923 when Paramount bought the company's masters. See, Suisman, "Co-Workers in the Kingdom of Culture: Black Swan Records and the Political Economy of African American Music.".

[158] Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism : Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*(New York: Pantheon Books, 1998)., 9, quoted in Walton, "The Preachers' Blues: Religious Race Records and Claims of Authority on Wax." 222.

black clergy. On his record "You Shall," Frank Stokes criticized the moral depravity of those clergy who proclaimed to be the stalwarts of propriety. He sang, "Well, some folk say that a preacher won't steal/ I caught about eleven in a watermelon field."[159] In their song, "Preachers Blues," the married team of Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie emphasized how the duplicitous actions of black clergy, not race record artists, frustrated black efforts of progress and morality. The couple recorded, "I been trying so hard to save my life/ to keep that preacher from my wife."[160] Such commercialized expressions challenged the authority of black clergy as well as "the middle class ideology of racial uplift as pronounced by educated religious leaders."[161] Subsequently, for many black consumers, Angela Davis observed, race record artists were "secular counterparts to Christian ministers, recognized by their constituencies as no less important authorities."[162]

As these artists utilized vernacular discourse to address black audiences and social life, they were held as authoritative interpreters of the black American narrative. Jazz scholar Ben Sidran describes a post-emancipation challenge to the role of black Protestant preachers as community "truth-tellers" and interpreters of the black human condition by prominent black musicians.[163] Famed guitarist B.B. King, for example, recalled that the race records that emanated from the crank-up Victrola in his aunt's sharecropper cabin were important authorities of truth. For the King family, the recordings of Mamie Smith and the host of race record artists that followed her, did not represent vice or primitive tinges of black life. Rather, King's Delta community regarded

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[159] Walton, "The Preachers' Blues: Religious Race Records and Claims of Authority on Wax." 222.
[160] Walton, "The Preachers' Blues: Religious Race Records and Claims of Authority on Wax." 222.
[161] Higginbotham, "Rethinking Vernacular Culture."980.
[162] Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism : Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*.,124.
[163] Ben Sidran, *Black Talk* (New York: Da Capo, 1981), 24.

both race records and black sermons in similar fashion—as black expressions that communicated, "hope, excitement, [and] pure emotion."[164]

The commercialization of black popular music and subsequent fame and wealth of race record artists further solidified their status as authentic sages of black life. The race record credo then, was a public counter-hegemonic proclamation to the black clergy's gospel of cultural capital, morality, and decorum.

Conclusion

Historian Laurence Moore has observed that American religion, regardless of context, becomes culturally central only if it learns to work with other central aspects of culture.[165] The popularity of race records made the phonograph, specifically, and black amusement culture, more broadly, increasingly central to African American life. While many middle class black clergy opposed race records, it could not be denied that the phonograph was increasingly central to black life and black amusement. Between 1925 and 1941, roughly one hundred black preachers attempted to engaged this arena by teaming up with leading record labels to record and sell phonograph sermons.

[164] B.B. King quote found in, Nick Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land : C.L. Franklin, the Black Church, and the Transformation of America*, 1st ed.(New York: Little, Brown, 2005)., 29.
[165] Moore, Selling God : American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture., 9.

CHAPTER FOUR: SANCTIFYING THE PHONOGRAPH: THE ADVENT OF RECORDED SERMONS

In the early twentieth century, Booker T. Washington prognosticated "the progress of the Negro will be in proportion as they learn to get the material things of this world, consecrate them, and weave them into the service of our Heavenly Father."[166] Both white and African American Protestants have followed Washington's notion of progress by weaving a host of items into the service of religion. Historians John Giggie and Diane Winston have observed that the vitality of urban religious movements is directly related to a movement's ability to establish religious practices based on popular entertainment.[167] For leaders of white religious groups this integration of popular entertainment and religion meant radio broadcasting. Radio had its first non-experimental commercial broadcast on November 1, 1920 when Pittsburgh station KDKA announced that Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge had defeated James M. Cox and Franklin Roosevelt in a one-sided Presidential election. Two months later, on Sunday January 2,1921 the station accomplished another first when it broadcasted Calvary Episcopal Church's worship service. The broadcast was the first live religious service to air on radio.[168]

After KDKA's successful religious broadcasts, white religious entrepreneurs weaved broadcasting into their ministries by following the format of popular amusements and radio programming. In 1922 Chicago's Paul Rader, pastor of Moody Memorial

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[166] Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois, *The Negro in the South: His Economic Progress in Relation to His Moral and Religious Development*, William Levi Bull Lectures(Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs and Co., 1907)., 75.
[167] Giggie and Winston, eds., *Faith in the Market : Religion and the Rise of Urban Commercial Culture*., 5.
[168] Hal Erickson, *Religious Radio and Television in the United States, 1921-1991 : The Programs and Personalities*(Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1992)., 1-3; Dennis Voskuil, "Reaching Out: Mainline Protestantism and Media," in Hutchison, ed. *Between the Times : The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960*., 81-84.

Church, was personally invited by Chicago Mayor Bill Thompson to broadcast from a radio station in Chicago's city hall. Rader eventually set up his own station WJBT (Where Jesus Blesses Thousands) complete with a variety show. Rader would go on to become the first minister to preach over network radio. National evangelist and former baseball celebrity Billy Sunday used baseball and radio to attract a national following. The sanctuary of Los Angeles pastor Aimee Semple McPherson mimicked the theatres of early Hollywood. McPherson used the theatre-styled sanctuary to perform her sermons complete with props and costumes. McPherson also became the first female religious broadcaster and the first woman to own and operate her own station when "her twenty-five-thousand dollar, top of the line, five hundred watt, Western Electric Station," Kall[ing] Four Square Gospel (KFSG), became the third station to sign on the air in Los Angeles in February 1924. Similar to McPherson, Torrey Johnson, the president of the international evangelical movement Youth for Christ, copied popular entertainment programming for his revivals and radio broadcasts. Johnson's Hollywood entertaining style was so developed, one reporter even described Johnson as the "religious counterpart of Frank Sinatra."[169]

Accordingly, black clergy desiring to integrate aspects of popular entertainment into their ministries during the interwar period were faced with engaging the black culture's most popular medium: the phonograph. These enterprising clergy used the phonograph to record their sermons and, in the process, replicated the recording formats

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[169] Some records state McPherson went on the air in 1923. I have chosen to use Matthew Sutton's record of 1924. See, Erickson, *Religious Radio and Television in the United States, 1921-1991 : The Programs and Personalities*., 1-3,32,126,148; Matthew Avery Sutton, *Aimee Semple Mcpherson and the Resurrection of Christian America*(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007)., 79. Dennis Voskuil, "Reaching Out: Mainline Protestantism and Media," in Hutchison, ed. *Between the Times : The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960*., 81-84; see also Hangen, *Redeeming the Dial : Radio, Religion, & Popular Culture in America*.; On Johnson see, Carpenter, *Revive Us Again : The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism*.,165.

of popular race record artists. Throughout American history, there is a direct correlation between the emergence of new forms of commercial amusement and the development of similar forms of religious practices. Historian Laurence Moore argues that the development of new forms of commercial amusement has provoked religious leaders "to descend into the marketplace" to compete with secular amusements and influence consumer choices.[170] The establishment of black commercial amusement on the phonograph contributed to the production of recorded sermons as black preachers attempted to compete with the entertainment medium as well as weave it into African American religious practices.

Following the success of Mamie Smith, phonograph companies flooded the marketplace with black artists. In an attempt to increase their market share of black consumers, record labels expanded their race record catalogues to incorporate not only blues music, but also other genres including jazz, gospel, and recorded sermons.

The confluence of these two forces then— the continued competition between black clergy and commercial amusements and the desires of leading phonograph companies to increase sales among black consumers—were imperative in the advent of phonograph sermons. Beginning in 1925 until 1941, race record labels recorded sermons by approximately one hundred black Protestant ministers. These ministers joined the same record labels as their secular phonograph rivals in an attempt to sanctify and guide the phonograph, black consumers, and the marketplace into the service of God.[171]

Recorded Sermons on the Phonograph

Phonograph sermons developed similarly to radio sermons. Comparable to the

[170] Moore, Selling God : American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture., 268.
[171] For a longer discussion of religious race records as an attempt to solidify the cultural authority of black clergy see, Walton, "The Preachers' Blues: Religious Race Records and Claims of Authority on Wax.".

beginning of religious radio occurring in a mainline Protestant church, black phonograph sermons also began with the clergy of an established mainline denomination. These preachers continued the tradition of copying and sanctifying popular commercial amusements. In January 1925, African Methodist Episcopal (AME) pastor, Reverend Calvin P. Dixon recorded sermons with Columbia Records, making him the first African American clergy to record a commercial phonograph sermon. The Rome, Georgia clergyman adopted the recording name "Black Billy Sunday," after revivalist and religious celebrity Billy Sunday. Reflecting his established denominational background, the pioneering black religious broadcaster recorded ten didactic sermons over the course of three consecutive days in Columbia's New York City studio.[172]

The first sermon released, "As an Eagle Stirreth Up Her Nests," was a reserved address based on the text Deuteronomy 32:11 which relates God's care for Jacob to an eagle and her eaglets. The verse reads: "As an eagle that stirreth up her nest, that fluttereth over her young, He spread abroad his wings, he took them, He bare them on his pinions." The AME preacher's didactic sermon instructs listeners to not murmur nor complain during the tragedies of life; but rather, that Christians should recognize such events are the work of God who, like a mother eagle, shakes the nest in an effort to propel "His" children to greater things. He closed the sermon by encouraging listeners that once they recognized God as an eagle, "You would cease to feel sorry and you would be lifted above your circumstances and you would have an inspiration that would be more than a

[172] It is likely that Columbia "discovered" Calvin Dixon during one of their field trips to the south. Columbia made a field trip to Atlanta and surrounding areas in January 1925. Recordings from Atlanta's Wheat Street Baptist as well Reverend C.D. Montgomery resulted from this January 1925 field trip. Field trip data in Dixon and others, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*.,xxvii-xxix. Calvin Dixon found in the 1920 Census. However, Dixon does not appear in the 1930 census. See, United States. Bureau of the Census and Enumerator Mrs. Joline W. Bale, *Fourtenth Census of the United States:1920 Floyd County, Georgia*1920. Sheet Number 5B.; After Dixon, other phonograph sermon recorders also took the name Black Billy Sunday.

match for the troubles of the world! The sight of God's infinite wings spread around you will make you forget about the carings (sic) of the old ugly nests!" Dixon proclaimed a providential God that was actively involved in the daily events of humanity.[173]

"The Prodigal Son," the other sermon featured on Black Billy Sunday's first release, was based on Luke 15:18. The undemonstrative recording was based on the biblical parable of a son who requests his inheritance from his living father, only to spend it on wayward living. Upon finding himself destitute and working as a hired hand among pigs, he proclaims, "I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight.'" Dixon used the scripture to warn his listeners of the dangers of sin regardless of race or class. The preacher proclaims, "Many of the educated, rich, honorable, and hopeful as you, have assumed and possessed much and yield to temptation and lost all! Let sin alone! Sin has no respect of person; sin will make its attack on the black as well as the white, the rich as well as the poor! The high as well as the lower!" The moralistic sermon was addressed to all, not just African Americans.[174]

In his last recording session, Black Billy Sunday preached from Genesis 26:18: "Then Isaac dug again the wells of water which had been dug in the days of his father Abraham, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham." He titled the sermon, "Clean Out Your Wells, Your Water is Muddy." Dixon used the scripture as a metaphor for the hearts of humankind. Again the preacher makes comments on the rich, He states, "Abraham was the richest man of his day, he was not like the rich folks of our day, he made provisions for the weary traveler." The preacher closed the sermon by

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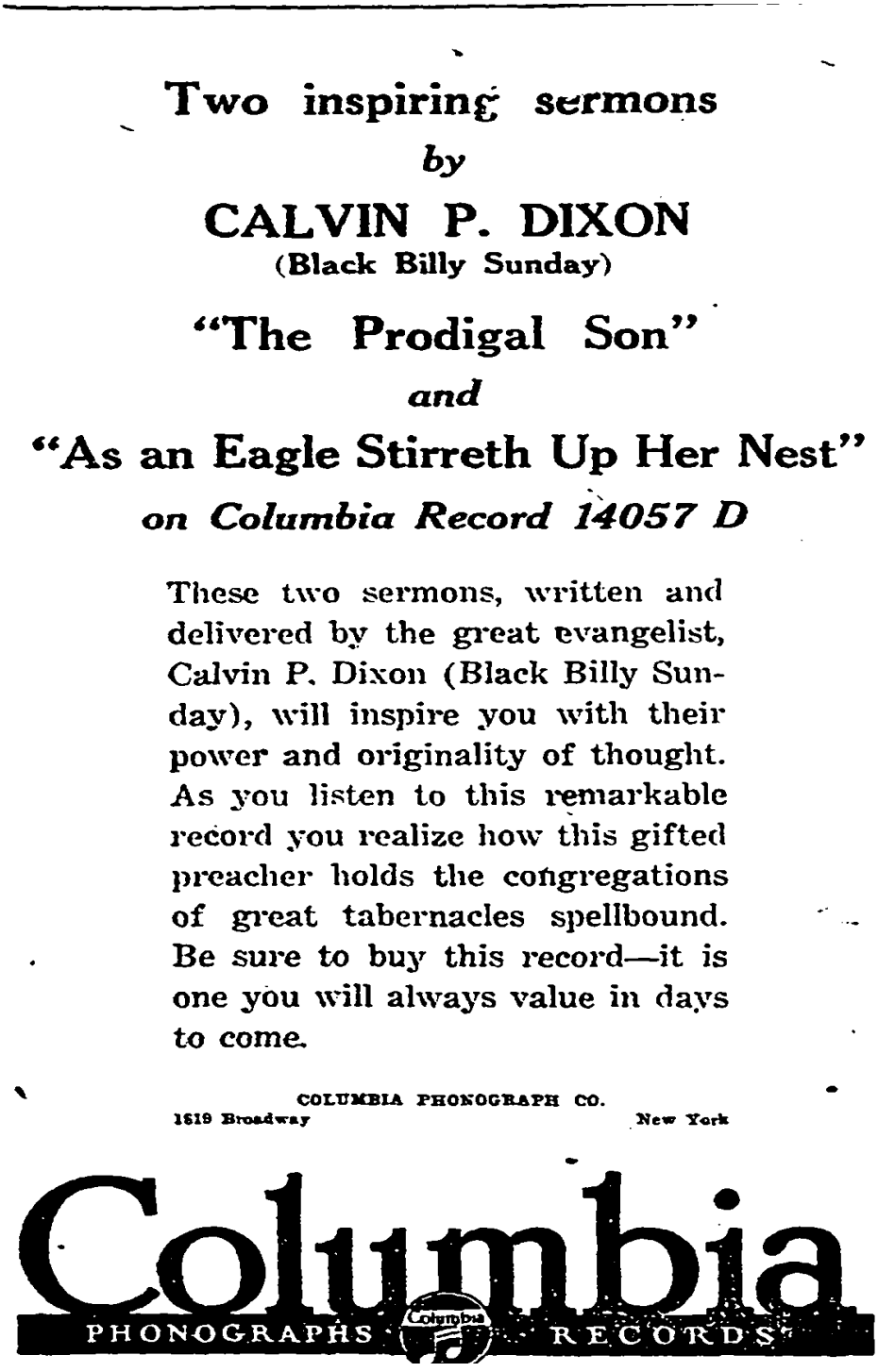
[173] Dixon and others, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*., 219; Sermon catalogue number Co 14057-D.
[174] New American Standard Bible; Sermon from Co 14057-D

warning his audience of the vices that clogged up their hearts. He shouts, "Some of your hearts are filled up with selfishness, malice, prejudice, hatred, and strife! Have your wells cleaned out!"

The groundbreaking sermons were advertised in Columbia's mail order catalogue as well as the nationally circulated black newspaper *The Chicago Defender*. The first newspaper advertisement for the sermons appeared on March 7, 1925. Similar to the secular race record advertisements, the commercial announcement boasted of Dixon's celebrity, declaring that the preacher was known to "hold the congregations of great tabernacles spellbound" (see FIGURE 6).[175]

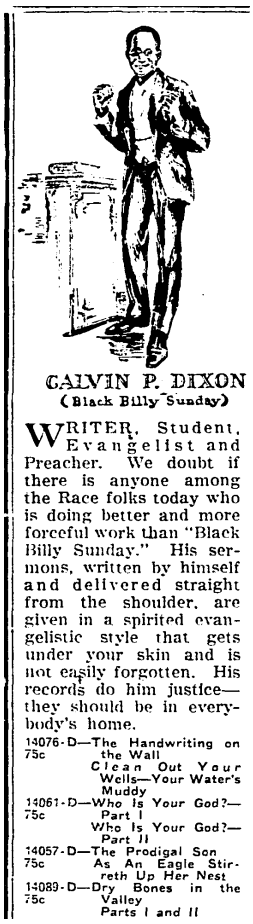
[175] Dixon and others, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*., 219; Bible verse taken from American Standard Version of the Bible.

FIGURE 6



Source: *Chicago Defender,* Mar 07, 1925, p.2, col.1

FIGURE 7



CALVIN P. DIXON
(Black Billy Sunday)

WRITER, Student, Evangelist and Preacher. We doubt if there is anyone among the Race folks today who is doing better and more forceful work than "Black Billy Sunday." His sermons, written by himself and delivered straight from the shoulder, are given in a spirited evangelistic style that gets under your skin and is not easily forgotten. His records do him justice—they should be in everybody's home.

14076-D—The Handwriting on the Wall
75c Clean Out Your Wells—Your Water's Muddy

14061-D—Who Is Your God?—Part I
75c Who Is Your God?—Part II

14057-D—The Prodigal Son
75c As An Eagle Stirreth Up Her Nest

14089-D—Dry Bones in the Valley
75c Parts I and II

Source: *The Chicago Defender,* January 30, 1926, Part 1 pg.7.

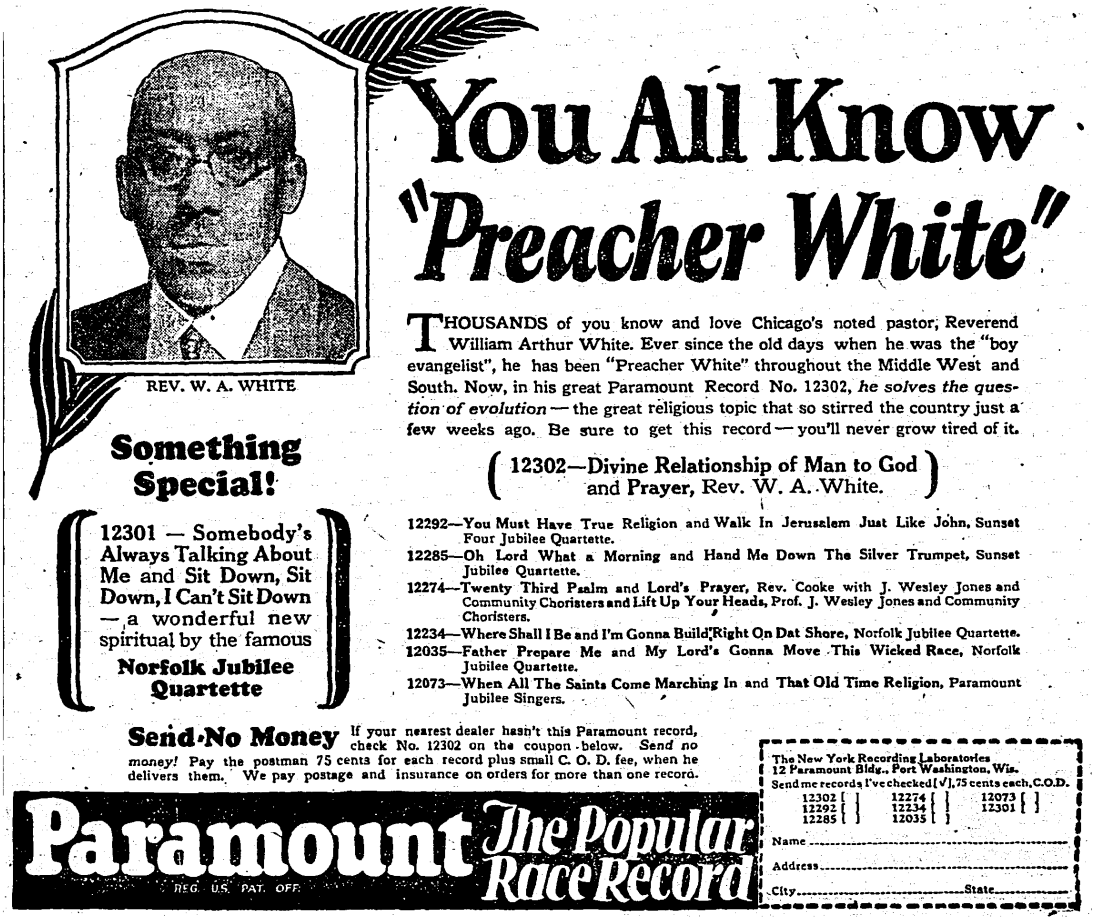
The recording of Black Billy Sunday was a watershed moment in African American Protestantism and culture. His phonograph sermons marked the commercialization of African American clergy and the preaching experience. Packaging and selling black preachers and their sermons provided black clergy with a venue through which to descend into the marketplace and compete with the commercial celebrity of race record artists. Moreover, phonograph sermons offered black preachers the unprecedented opportunity to electronically transmit their sermons to the masses like their white radio

counterparts. Black Billy Sunday authored a new form of black religious commodity and paved the way for black clergy to become commercial celebrities.

The phonograph sermons that followed Black Billy Sunday paralleled Protestant radio broadcasts in several ways. First, recorded sermons addressed pressing social, cultural, and religious events. Chicago pastor Reverend W.A. White was the first phonograph sermon recorder to use a current event as his sermon topic. Seven months after Columbia recorded Black Billy Sunday, Paramount records recorded White in Chicago in August 1925. Reverend White's first release, "Divine Relationship of Man to God," focused on the pressing question of evolution. In a lecture style sermon, White attempts to address the issues that had risen from the Scopes "Monkey" Trial decision the previous month. "In these days of Evolution that we read so much about," White begins, "the thought comes to us: Has God not ordained that man should be in His own likeness and His own image? There should not be any evolution in our minds at this hour." An advertisement promoting the record boasts that White's sermon "solves the question of evolution—the great religious topic that so stirred the country just a few weeks ago" (see FIGURE 8). Like many Protestant religious broadcasters of the day, White's sermon vehemently opposed evolution and championed ex nihilo creation.[176]

[176] Dixon and others, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*., 1025.

FIGURE 8

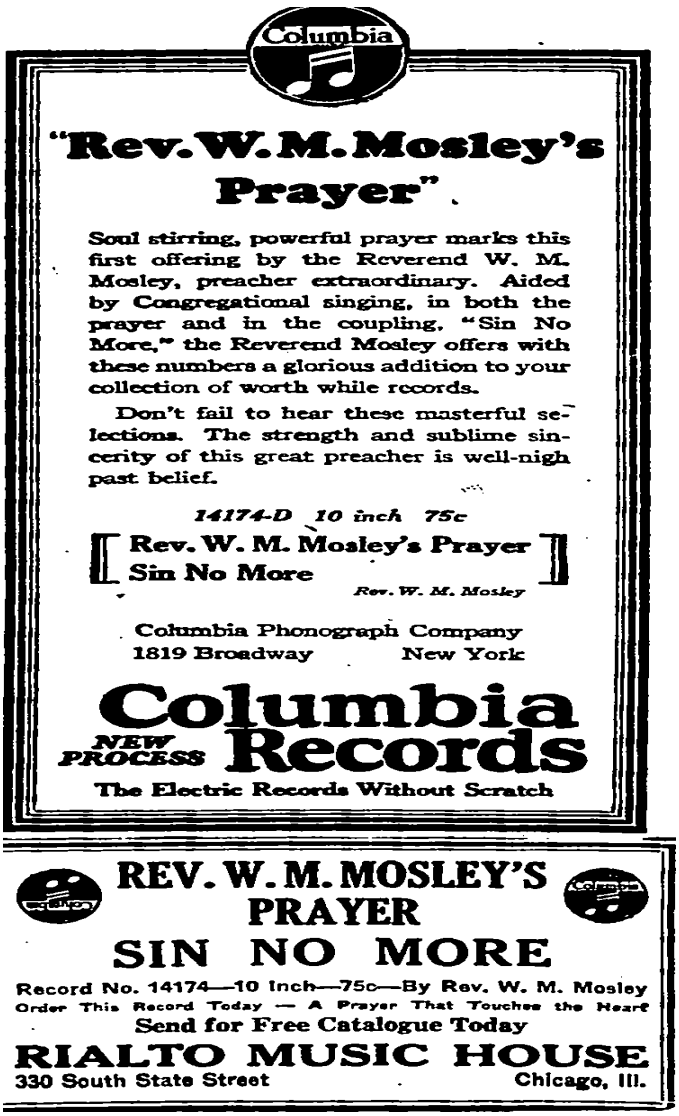


Source: Reverend W.A. White advertisement found in *Chicago Defender,* Sep 26, 1925, p.7, col.4.

Similar to successful Protestant radio broadcast, recorded sermons also replicated Protestant worship services by incorporating various aspects of worship. Recorded sermons utilized prayers and congregational signing to recreate aspects of black Protestant worship. Georgia preacher Reverend W.M. Mosley was the first to record a chanted prayer. On Thursday November 4, 1926 the preacher recorded "Reverend W.M. Mosley's Prayer" for Columbia records. The title featured the pastor leading a chanted style prayer as well as vocal accompaniment by his congregation. The preacher's black vernacular prayer was advertised as a "soul stirring, powerful prayer" that "touches the

heart." His recording was very popular, surpassing the average race record sales of 5,000 copies with a total order of 33,075 copies.[178]

FIGURE 9



Source: Reverend Mosley advertisement found in*, The Chicago Defender* Jan 01, 1927, p.6, col.3.

[178] Dixon and others, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*., 665f; Order numbers found in Dan Mahony, *The Columbia 13/14000-D Series: A Numerical Listing*, 2 ed.(Highland Park, NJ: Walter C. Allen, 1973).,35. Several searches for Reverend Mosley in the Atlanta City Directory yielded no results. It is likely that Mosley served as a pastor/evangelist in a nearby city and traveled to Atlanta to record.

Kansas City pastor Reverend JC Burnett's "The Downfall of Nebuchadnezzar," was the highest selling sermon during the interwar period. The sermon is another example of the popular combining of preaching and singing in sermon recordings. Burnett first recorded in the middle of 1926 in Kansas City for Merritt Records, a small local independent black label established by Kansas City music storeowner Winston M.W. Holmes in 1925. After hearing the record, Columbia brought Reverend Burnett to their New York studio to record on October 6,1926. Reverend Burnett recorded fourteen titles for Columbia in 1926, including "The Downfall of Nebuchadnezzar" once again. The recording, featuring congregational singing and an antiphonal sermon recording, was released in January 1927 with an initial order of 66,750 records and a supplementary order of 20,000, totaling 86,750 copies making the record a trailblazing success, even according to contemporary standards. Reverend Burnett's second release with Columbia, "Drive and Go Forward/ Go Wash in Jordan Seven Times," had a total order of 67, 575 copies outselling several of Columbia's leading jazz and blues artists.[179]

Though male clergy dominated both radio and phonograph sermons during the 1920s, a few women clergy became successful mass media religion pioneers during the decade. The aforementioned Aimee McPherson quickly capitalized on the new technology of commercial radio to become the first woman to have a regular religious broadcast in 1923. Similarly, black women clergy established themselves as viable sermon recorders during the genre's nascent stages. Reverend Leora Ross of Chicago

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[179]*Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943,* xxxvii,123-125; Foreman, "Jazz and Race Records, 1920-1932: Their Origins and Their Significance for the Record Industry and Society".,176; Sale numbers found in, Mahony, *The Columbia 13/14000-D Series: A Numerical Listing*.; On Meritt Records and owner Holmes see, Walton, "The Preachers' Blues: Religious Race Records and Claims of Authority on Wax."; Special thanks to Lance Ledbetter of Dust to Digital for supplying me with data on the advertisement frequency of race record artists in the *Chicago Defender*.

first recorded in 1927, two years after the first recorded sermon. Like McPherson, Ross did not belong to a traditional mainline denomination. Ross's "Church of the Living God" was part of the Pentecostal, Sanctified, and Holiness faith traditions that permitted female leadership and clergy. Together with her Church of the Living God Jubilee Singers, Ross made her first recordings for Okeh records in Chicago on Wednesday, May 4,1927. In her first session, Ross recorded "Dry Bones in The Valley." Ross and her singers opened with a song, followed by Ross's chanted sermon. A newspaper announcement proclaimed the novelty of the recorded Pentecostal sermon stating: "This record is as clear and powerful as if you were face to face with the preacher. A great sermon—worth hearing many times." In December of the same year, Reverend Ross returned to Okeh's Chicago studio and recorded six more titles including "God's Mercy to Colonel Lindbergh." Using Job 5:19— "From six troubles He will deliver you, Even in seven, evil will not touch you,"—Ross declares that God's mercy enabled Charles Lindbergh to complete his historic non-stop trans-Atlantic flight. Encouraged by the shouts of her Living God Jubilee Singers, the preacher encourages "the church" to remember that they pray to the same God that "carried him across the ocean."[180]

In addition to cracking the gendered ceiling of sermon recording, Ross's recordings also represented a theological shift in recorded sermons. Until Ross, Baptist and Methodist clergy dominated sermon recording. However, Ross and subsequent recorders from Sanctified and Pentecostal traditions preached their versions of the Gospel that

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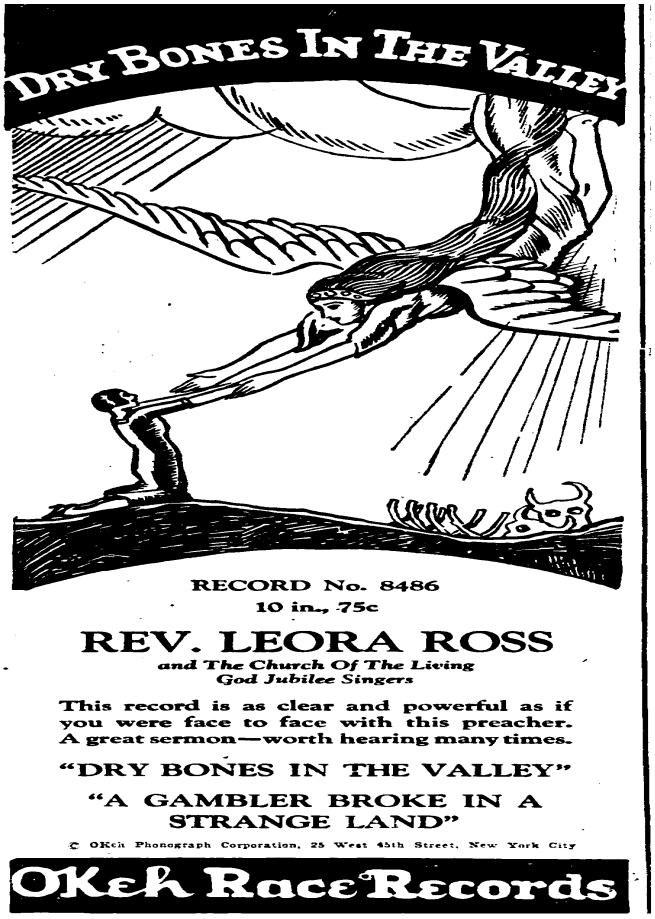
[180] Sutton, *Aimee Semple Mcpherson and the Resurrection of Christian America*.; Dixon and others, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*., 773; Oliver, *Songsters and Saints : Vocal Traditions on Race Records*., 183; On the first live radio broadcast of a Protestant worship service see, Erickson, *Religious Radio and Television in the United States, 1921-1991 : The Programs and Personalities*.; Dennis Voskuil, "Reaching out: Mainline Protestantism and Media," in Hutchison, ed. *Between the Times : The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960*.; Reverend Leora Ross advertisement found in, *Chicago Defender*, Aug 27, 1927, p.3, col.6; New American Standard Bible.

emphasized chanted sermons, spiritual ecstasy, divine gifts including healing and speaking in tongues, as well as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. While Ross did not record sermons specifically on gender, her status as a woman and Pentecostal clergy made her a forerunner for a host of black Pentecostal broadcasters, specifically women such as fellow Chicago Pentecostal leader Elder Lucy Smith who became the first black preacher in Chicago to broadcast live worship over radio in 1933.[181]

FIGURE 10



Source: Reverend Leora Ross advertisement found in, *Chicago Defender*, Aug 27, 1927, p.3, col.6

[181] Dixon and others, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*., 773; On Elder Lucy Smith and the role of women in reshaping black Protestantism in Chicago see, Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine : Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952*., 178

Recorded sermons also mimicked religious radio's utilization of popular entertainment. Religious historian Joel Carpenter observed that successful radio evangelists constructed their program formats after the popular "radio variety shows and patriotic musical revues" of the day.[182] Bishop Reverend D.C. Rice is an example of one of the first sermon recorders to use popular music in his sermon recordings. Born in 1888 in rural Barbour County Alabama, Rice migrated to Chicago where he departed from his Baptist faith after being "saved" at a local "Church of the Living God, Pentecostal" congregation. The preacher recounted that upon hearing several phonograph sermons; he decided that he "could make recordings just as good." In April 1928, Rice and ten members of his church's praise band recorded for Vocalion Records on the fifteenth floor of the same building that housed the nationally circulated newspaper *The Chicago Defender*. His recordings included piano, trumpet, string bass, trombone, tambourine, and drums playing "secular" melodies. Rice's use of such musical accompaniment was aimed at capitalizing off the growing popularity of black jazz and blues music, as Thomas Dorsey would later do with the creation of "gospel music."[183]

Recorded Sermons and Twentieth Century Protestantism.

Chronicling phonograph sermon recordings during the interwar period broadens the field of American mass media religion in the early twentieth century beyond radio. Beginning with the first radio broadcast of a live worship service in January 1921, countless Protestants took to the airwaves in an effort to utilize the new technology as a

[182] Carpenter, *Revive Us Again : The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism*., 165-168.
[183] Gayle D. Wardlow, "Rev. D.C. Rice: Gospel Singer," *Storyville* No. 23 (1969).; Dixon and others, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*., 773; Oliver, *Songsters and Saints : Vocal Traditions on Race Records*., 183.

means of evangelism. However, as the approximate eight hundred phonograph sermons reveal, radio does not fully account for the growing popularity of electronic religious broadcasting in the 1920s and 1930s. Phonograph sermons contributed to the growth and familiarity of incorporating electronic media into Protestant practice.

Phonograph sermons illuminate new ways in which black Protestant clergy implored media to engage the shifting mores of the twentieth century. These audible artifacts are another example of Protestantism taking the form of popular commercial entertainment to influence and compete in the commercial marketplace. Alongside radio broadcasters, these innovative preachers used sound reproduction, commercial advertisements, nationwide commercial distribution, and popular amusements to make Protestantism an attractive market commodity. In this regard, phonograph sermons provide another historical avenue for understanding contemporary religious mass media, particularly African American religious broadcasting. Religion and media scholar Jonathan Walton has observed that phonograph preachers established the hallmarks of black televangelism, namely the use of popular media and incorporation of entertainment. In this regard, phonograph sermons, in particular, provide new data for understanding the historic relationship between black Protestantism and mass media throughout the twentieth century.[184]

In addition to the study of mass media religion, sermon recordings also created and recreated aspects of twentieth century Protestantism and culture. First, these black spiritual commodities helped to sacralize the market. Since emancipation, African Americans infused the ability to participate in American consumer culture as an aspect of freedom. Black clergy played an integral part in the development of this black

[184] See, Walton, *Watch This! The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism*., 33-41.

consumerism. Baptist and Methodist clergyman served as salesmen to newly freed slaves on behalf of white corporations and manufactures. For example, Reverend Joseph A. Booker, president of the Arkansas Baptist College, sold writing and printing utensils, musical instruments, clothing, and home décor among other items for white manufacturing companies. An 1894 edition of the *Baptist Vanguard* featured a Reverend M.E. Bell endorsing the miracle healing power of Dr. Miles Medical Company. North Carolina preacher Reverend F.M. Jacobs advertised the healing liniment of Lyon Manufacturing. The ad featured the preacher positing that the product was "indispensable for the eradication of pains, bruises, and especially neuralgia."[185] In this regard, black clergy served as vessels of spiritual and material progress. Image-based advertising helped entrepreneurs of commercial culture perpetuate the myth that consumerism and the market were the means to increase the quality of life. The selling of these black sacred commodities imbued an otherwise secular marketplace with sacred transcendence and authenticity. Sermon recorders created another commercial commodity that helped to expand and sacralize black consumer culture.[186]

Second, recorded sermons created and re-created black Protestant practices. French Communications scholar Pierre Babin has argued that the communication of the Christian message via different media, "has introduced not just a new way of transmitting a message but a new form of Christian existence and new form of church."[187] Accordingly, utilizing the phonograph to relay sermons altered the relationship between Protestant religious practices and the home. Colleen McDannell's analysis of material Christianity

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[185] Giggie, "Preachers and Peedlers of God: Ex-Slaves and the Selling of African American Religion in the American South."; John Michael Giggie, *After Redemption : Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta, 1875-1915*(Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).,131-135.
[186] Moore, Selling God : American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture.268.
[187] Quoted in Sweet, *Communication and Change in American Religious History*., 2.

displays the ways in which the proliferation of Christian "artifacts" significantly contributed to the rise of the "home" as the sanctum of spirituality rather than churches. Mrs. Eaton of Lima, Ohio, an Edison Phonograph survey respondent, admitted that her religious records often "take the place of church." This statement indicates the degree to which listening to record sermons contributed to the shifting space of worship in the twentieth century. Phonograph sermons were audible Christian artifacts that provided African American religious practitioners with the opportunity to engage in religious life in new spaces, particularly their own home as opposed to the public space of church. In this respect, phonograph sermons sacrilized the home by relaying the familiar sounds, images, and practices of black Protestant worship into private homes.[188]

Conclusion:

WEB Du Bois believed that a "New Negro Church" would emerge after World War I. He posited that this church would cease to demonize commercial amusement in favor of embracing a "*sane attitude toward amusement*s."[189] Phonograph sermons were barometers of this change in African American Protestantism. Christianity in urban America has thrived not by avoiding the hallmarks of urban life and commercial entertainment, "but by selectively appropriating aspects of it and nurturing a range of new spiritual identities."[190] Black Protestantism adapted to growing urban black populations and black commercial amusements by packaging and selling the gospel in the marketplace. This commercialization of religion gave black clergy a new presence in the marketplace during a time in which new forms of commercial amusement outside the

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[188] Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity : Religion and Popular Culture in America*(New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995)..
[189]WEB DuBois, "The New Negro Church," in *Againist Racism: Unpublished Essays, Papers, Address, 1887-1961*, ed. Herbert Aptheker(Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1985).. Italics mine
[190] Giggie and Winston, eds., *Faith in the Market : Religion and the Rise of Urban Commercial Culture*.1.

church, as described in pervious chapters, were increasing in popularity and influence. This sacred presence in the marketplace nurtured the mythology of consumerism, as well as cultivated the emerging religious practices of selling black religion and new ways of having church.

Despite their novelty, recorded sermons did not have the same initial commercial success of Mamie Smith's race record release in 1920. Unlike the countless race records that preceded them, the pioneering sermons of Black Billy Sunday, C.D. Montgomery, and W.A. White lacked cadence, musicality, as well as black vernacular in their delivery. These studio sermons lacked the antiphony associated with rural black Protestant sermons. Moreover, the pioneering sermons contained very little music and were not geared towards inducing what Du Bois called "the frenzy" or ecstatic worship. All three early sermon recorders only recorded once for their respective labels.[191]

Unlike their Baptist counterparts, Preachers from black Sanctified church traditions such as Revs. Leora Ross and D.C. Rice incorporated call and response, ecstatic worship, as well music in their recordings. These non-establishment church leaders recorded on several occasions for their labels, though both enjoyed relatively short broadcasting careers. Although Ross recorded ten titles, it is conceivable that her stint as a religious broadcaster was not viable due to her gender. In the early twentieth century, black women pastors were rare and not commonly accepted—even in some Sanctified church traditions. In addition, Okeh Records did not aggressive publicize Ross. Her lone advertisement appeared in the *Defender* just once in August 1927.[192] Similarly D.C. Rice's recordings featured the hallmarks of sanctified worship, and his records were

[191] Oliver, *Songsters and Saints : Vocal Traditions on Race Records*., 140; Recording sessions catalogued in Dixon and others, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*.
[192] Dixon and others, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*., 773.

advertised just twice, both in the *Chicago Defender*, once on June 23, 1928 and again on September 29, 1928. After briefly trying his hand at live radio broadcasting in Chicago, Rice returned to Alabama to pastor around 1930, never to record again.[193]

It was not until the releases of Reverend James M. Gates that recorded sermons began to have significant commercial success. The urban migrant combined several aspects of his recorded sermons predecessors, as well as race record artists, to become the most prolific and accomplished sermon recorder. The preacher utilized his rural working-class background to appeal to the black urban diaspora. Using black vernacular, Gates preached sermons that drew upon current events as well as popular entertainment. Additionally, his ability to deliver his recordings in a chanted sermon style while incorporating an appeal to logic gave him broad appeal. Like secular race record artists, the commercial preacher offered a diverse portfolio of recordings. Gates' recording corpus extended beyond sermons, to include worship, signing, prayers, church meetings, and even parodies of various church activities. James used his recordings to reproduce every aspect of black Protestant worship. Part two, then, will examine the life and prolific career of Reverend J.M Gates in order to reveal a closer analysis of how urban migration and the popularity of recorded sermons altered black Protestantism and transformed the urban migrant into a religious celebrity in the process.

[193]Wardlow, "Rev. D.C. Rice: Gospel Singer.".

PART TWO:

CHAPTER FIVE: A MIGRANT'S STORY OF THE CITY: REVEREND J.M. GATES AND THE EMERGENCE OF AN URBAN MINISTRY

The life of Reverend James M. Gates provides a more focused analysis of the relationship between urban migration, modernity, and black Protestantism. This rural migrant arrived in Atlanta as the city was continuing its ascendency as the capital of the "New South." The modern progression of the city, particularly demographic shifts and racial politics, shaped the preacher's personal life as well as his ministerial practices. His life sheds light on the ways in which black migrants refashioned southern cities and black Protestantism in ways that were indicative of both black rural life and the demands of urban life.[194]

James M. Gates was born July 14, 1884. The grandson of an African slave, he was raised in the small railroad community of Hogansville, Georgia. James and his wife Nellie were among the masses of black rural residents who migrated to southern cities in the early twentieth century. They departed Hogansville and arrived in Atlanta in the latter part of 1913. For African Americans, urban migration was more than just relocation; rather, it was an expression of freedom as well. "Blacks," writes religious historian Wallace Best, "have long connected their freedom to the ability to move, to change place or spatial direction." Urban migration represented freedom as well as access to better jobs, education, and quality of life. For the Gates, migrating to Atlanta was an opportunity to change their quality of life.[195]

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[194] Best, Passionately Human, No Less Divine : Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952., 2.
[195] On Gates' birth see: Guido Van Rijn, "Praying for the Pastor: The Life of Rev. Jm Gates," *Living Blues* 152 (2000).; Gates first appears in the city directory in 1914. However, the directory was issued on

The migrant couple settled in the predominately black working class neighborhood of Summer Hill. Like many black migrant communities, Summer Hill was established near a train station. James and Nellie settled at 344 Martin Street, a few blocks away from the train platforms and general offices of the Atlanta and West Point Railroad, Western Railroad of Alabama, and the Georgia Rail yard.[196] The couple shared a single-family residence with another family. Their home was typical of most of the homes in Summer Hill. In addition to having a dirt floor, the shared home lacked running water. Most Summer Hill inhabitants collected water from outdoor wells, springs, and watering holes. Residents shared community outhouses for bathroom facilities as well. Once a week community members would empty the outhouse of their communal human waste. This complete lack of sewage and adequate drainage often filled the air with a malodorous stench and posed a great danger to the community's water supply. Moreover, homes that were built on low and uneven foundations were exposed to flooding. Most of the streets in Gates' new neighborhood were not paved. The outflow of the outhouse wastes saturated the ground, making it difficult to build and maintain paved streets upon the soiled foundation. The few streets that were paved in Summer Hill were covered in a patchwork of granite block and broken stone, referred to as macadam, and typically bound with tar or bitumen making it difficult for automotive

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12/15/1913. Hence it appears that Gates would have arrived in Atlanta in the latter part of 1913. See, *Atlanta City Directory, 1914;* Gates offer some biographical information on "Somebody's Been Stealin"- 41917-3Vi 21281" and "President Roosevelt is Everybody's Friend"- 82876-BB, Rev. J.M. Gates, 2005. *Rev. J.M. Gates: Complete Recorded Works in Chronological Order*, Document Records. Audio.; Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine : Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952*.,1.

[196] On the location of his residence see, ProQuest Information and Learning Company. and Sanborn Map Company., "Digital Sanborn Maps, 1867-1970. Georgia," ([Ann Arbor, Mich.]: ProQuest Information and Learning Company, 2001)., Vol.3, 1932 Sheet #314, Vol. 1, 1931 Sheet #325.

travel.[197]

James and Nellie's new surroundings were culturally reminiscent of their rural background. Despite living in new urban surroundings, the masses of urban migrants arriving at the nearby train platform brought their rural cultural practices with them to the city. Atlanta's black elite deemed such practices as an affront to black middle class decorum. An unidentified black visitor to Summer Hill disparagingly observed that the neighborhood residents "sit on their porches rudely dressed, without shoes or stockings if they so desire; stand on their front porches and call their children who are at play several blocks away; and ask of their neighbors whatever they desire to know of their business, no matter how personal it may be." The visitor continued her disapproving description of rural life in the city, "the men congregate on the corners of the main thoroughfare in their overalls on Saturday afternoons presenting the picture of a country town on Saturday between 3 and 7 o'clock."[198]

The aforementioned description offers vivid imagery of the ways in which migrant practices in the city upset urban decorum. The observer illuminates how black vernacular forms of communication ran counter to urban propriety. Black migrant forms of speech and auditory levels of expression were seen as backwards and offensive. Small knit rural communities shaped their open forms of inquiry. However, in a larger urban environment this form of personal inquiry was seen as off-putting and invasive. In addition, migrant attire was also seen as impertinent to city life. Migrant adornment was considered "rude" and backwards. The lack of women wearing stockings, for example, ran afoul of black uplift ideologies, particularly among black church women, who aimed

[197] Kuhn, Joye, and Wes, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*., 3-4; Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*., 45.
[198] Summer Hill described in, Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*., 27.

to uplift the race through the public performance of civility and proper decorum.[199]

However, as historian Earl Lewis observed concerning similar dim views of black migrant street life in Norfolk, Virginia, outside observers fail to fully understand the significance of such activities for the social world of urban migrants. Lewis maintains that such pejorative descriptions "robs these scenes of their real importance and ignores the centrality of congregation in a segregated setting. Such gatherings wrote the history of a people as they struggled to be included in a rapidly changing and industrializing economy."[200] Acts of informal congregation helped to form a collective social fabric that helped rural migrants confront the vagaries of urban living. These informal assemblies and neighborhood gatherings provided the framework for affirming rural domestic practices and forms of black rural expression in the midst of the city.[201] This survival of black migrant working class culture and regional forms of expression in the city were characteristic themes in Gates' future urban ministry.

In addition to the informal community gatherings such as those in Summer Hill, Atlanta's industrial employment and cash wages also helped urban migrants construct a semi-autonomous social life. Gates, like a host of urban migrants, took a job as a laborer. He may have taken a job at the Atlanta Milling Company, the S.S.S. Company Chemical Laboratory, or the Fulton County Jail, all located within blocks of his Martin Street home. The majority of Atlanta's black residents were laborers. By 1920, 70.3% of Atlanta's entire black workforce was employed as unskilled laborers. Moreover, African Americans comprised 88.8% of the city's unskilled labor force. During World War I,

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[199] On black church's women's efforts of uplift see, Deborah G. White, *Too Heavy a Load : Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*, 1st ed.(New York: W.W. Norton, 1999).; Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent : The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*..
[200] Lewis, In Their Own Interests : Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia., 95.
[201] Ibid.

black unskilled laborers were working an average of forty to fifty hours per week, made an average of $.40 to $.50 cents an hour, and brought home wages in the range of $19 to $25 a week.[202] Such cash wages helped migrants construct a sense of freedom in a black world of commerce and recreation. In their respective studies of black urban migration, historians James Grossman and Peter Gotlieb observed that cash wages were the material basis of the social world black migrants created in the city. Urban migrants from rural and agrarian economies based on credit had little experience with cash wages. However, the opportunity to receive and spend cash wages presented urban migrants with a new tangible experience of freedom, autonomy, and improved standard of living.[203] Grossman adds, "Migrants valued the freedom to spend or save according to their priorities and inclinations."[204]

This self-determination was especially expressed in recreation. Forrester Washington, Director of the Atlanta School of Social Work, observed that not only was recreation at the root of black urban migration; but urban migrants rigorously pursued cash wages as a means to enjoy urban amusements.[205] Accordingly, cash wage labor endowed James Gates with the freedom and means to enjoy Atlanta's emerging black commercial entertainment culture. The new urban environment provided the migrant with the opportunity to participate in a host of new amusement technologies such as movies, theatre shows at the 81 Theatre, and the various working class commerce options

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[202] Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*., 97; *United States. Dept. of Labor. Division of Negro Economics., The Negro at Work During the World War and During Reconstruction; Statistics, Problems, and Policies Relating to the Greater Inclusion of Negro Wage Earners in American Industry and Agriculture., 45-49;* ProQuest Information and Learning Company. and Sanborn Map Company., "Digital Sanborn Maps, 1867-1970. Georgia.", Vol.1, 1931, Sheet #26.
[203] Grossman, *Land of Hope : Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration*., 261; Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way : Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916-30*., 5.
[204] Grossman, Land of Hope : Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration., 261-262.
[205] Washington, "Recreational Facilities for the Negro.", 272.

on Decatur Street. These options were unavailable in rural Hogansville. Gates would incorporate several forms of popular black amusement into his urban ministry, particularly in his mass media career discussed in chapters six and seven.

In addition to the freedom and improved standard of living, urban migration also offered migrants improved educational opportunities. Cities offered the regulated workday of industrial employment, affording black migrants leisure time to pursue recreation as well as education. Most of America's superior educational institutions were located in urban areas.[206] This was particularly pronounced in the urban south following the Civil War. Religious groups such as the American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS) established several black schools across the south. Institutions such as Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia; Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina; and Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina provided African Americans with religious, normal, high school, and college education. In Atlanta, the ABHMS established both Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary (later Spelman College) and Atlanta Baptist College/Seminary (named Morehouse College by 1913). Similar to the masses of urban migrants, James Gates benefitted from the rise of black educational institutions in the urban south. Gates enrolled in the city's Baptist College. The school was the standing antithesis to the vocational education philosophy of Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute. Instead, the school offered students a modern liberal arts education, particularly in the subjects of religious and theological studies. In fact, by 1923, Howard Thurman, the famed religious scholar and first black Dean of the Chapel at

[206] Frazier and Lincoln, *The Negro Church in America the Black Church since Frazier*., 28,55.

Boston University, was named the school's valedictorian.[207] Migrating to Atlanta gave James Gates the opportunity to depart the educational limits of rural Georgia (his village did not have a established school for blacks) and encounter one of the leading black educational institutes in the country. Gates' urban migration encapsulates the journey of many black urban migrants. City life provided migrants with the prospect of encountering modern educational institutes as well as new demographic surroundings, employment practices, and recreational options. As Du Bois predicted in his 1897 address "The Problem of Amusement," such social and cultural changes precipitated change in black urban religious cultures.

Reverend Gates and Mount Calvary Baptist Church

As discussed in chapter two, black urban religious cultures were altered by the rapid changes of urban migration and commercial amusements. Established black religious institutions confronted the shifting tempo of the city, in part, by demonizing black working class culture and amusements on one hand; and developing alternative forms of commercial entertainment based on uplift ideologies on the other. This shift in the programmatic focus of established black churches was not the only hallmark of new black urban religious cultures. Urban migrants also transformed black urban religious practice by instituting new religious communities. These sizeable upstart urban religious communities, spanning a wide spectrum of religious orientations, catered to black rural diasporas through creative worship practices, esoteric racial politics, and social outreach programs. For example, beginning in Newark, New Jersey, Timothy "Noble" Drew Ali

[207] American Baptist Home Mission Society, http://www.nationalministries.org, accessed November, 18, 2010. The announcement of Reverend Gates death states that the preacher attended "Atlanta Baptist Institute," another common name for the local school see, "Reverend J. M. Gates Passes At Home," *Atlanta Daily World*, Aug 19, 1945, pg.3;

founded the Moorish Science Temple in 1913. This group's message of salvation was an amalgamation of Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity. The black religious group eschewed the label black or Negro. Rather the group claimed to be "Asiatic." Similarly, in New York, George "Father Divine" Baker founded the Peace Mission Movement. This interracial religious community eschewed all racial identities, sponsored several communes, and operated an extensive outreach program that feed thousands during the Depression.[208]

Still other urban migrants established Protestant religious institutions. "Many of these were the outgrowth of regionally specific 'migrant clubs' and prayer groups that met in houses. Black Baptists, in particular, found these methods effective in developing a diasporic and re-gathered religious community."[209] One of Chicago's largest black churches during the migration era, Pilgrim Baptist Church, for example, started as the Union Grow Prayer Club that met in a private home beginning in 1915 before building an established edifice. Likewise, Chicago's Monumental Baptist started as a "prayer band" meeting in a private home in 1918. In the same year, a group of laypersons founded Liberty Baptist Church on account that "more churches were needed to accommodate the hordes of immigrants from the rural south."[210]

Similarly, urban migrants to Atlanta also elected to establish their own churches. In 1900, seven black women living in the Rockdale Park community, a neighborhood west of downtown, founded Mount Calvary Baptist church in 1900. Founders Eliza Lindsey,

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[208] On Noble Drew Ali and Father Divine see, Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North*.; For more information of Father Divine and his struggle for racial equality see, Robert Weisbrot, *Father Divine and the Struggle for Racial Equality*, Blacks in the New World(Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983).; Watts, *God, Harlem U.S.A. : The Father Divine Story*..
[209] Best, Passionately Human, No Less Divine : Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952., 47.
[210] Ibid., 47-48.

Hattie Holley, Jane Hardeman, Mary Clark, Mintoria Walker, Eliza Hardman, and Minnie Davidson established the church in a brush harbor in the backyard of a Mr. Felix Wilson. Reverend Morris Young served as the brush arbor congregation's first pastor. Brush arbor congregations were common facet of southern rural worship. The founding of this rural congregation in the city further illuminates the degree to which urban migrants helped to recreate urban religious cultures. The brush harbor congregation provided the context for black migrant worshippers to continue their rural religious practices. The emergence of such congregations "challenged the primacy," worship practices, and hegemony of the city's more established middle class black Baptist churches such as Wheat Street, Ebenezer, and Friendship.[211]

The congregation experienced significant growth. After just four years, the small congregation purchased land on Avenue A in their Rockdale Park neighborhood. The small congregation erected a wooden plank structure for its first house of worship on a lot measuring 50x140. Under the leadership of the church's fourth pastor, Reverend J.H. Johnson, Mount Calvary erected a larger frame structure. Reverend Johnson resigned in 1916 to pastor a larger congregation in Detroit. The migrant congregation elected fellow migrant James Gates to succeed Johnson as pastor. Gates remained pastor of Mount Calvary from 1916 to 1942.[212]

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[211] Journal Committee, "100th Anniversary," ed. Mount Calvary Baptist Church(Atlanta: 2000)., 12; Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine : Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952*.,40.

[212] Committee, "100th Anniversary.", 12; After a long pause, Reverend Gates announced in one of his sermons in 1940 that he had been pastor at Mount Calvary for 26 years, which would have placed him at the church in 1914. However, church records and the records of the previous pastor differ with this calculation. It is possible that Reverend Gates' calculation during the on location recording is remiss. In the Atlanta City Directory, Gates is listed as a laborer in 1914. In 1916 Gates is not listed in the directory. The fire of 1917 prevented the printing of a city directory for that year. In 1918 Gates is still not listed as a minister. The 1919 Atlanta City Directory is the first time Gates is listed as Reverend. Listen to, "Men and Women Talk too Much," Blue Bird BB8382, Gates.

Rural Protestantism in the Modern City

The new pastor encountered an Atlanta that was not only undergoing changes in its black religious culture, but was also experiencing several changes in racial and residential climate. As the city's black population was growing with the daily arrival of black migrants, Atlanta was becoming known as a center of white supremacy. By 1910, blacks constituted almost forty-three percent of the city's population.[213] The increase in the city's black population animated white fears about integration and equality. The city's reception of DW Griffith's motion picture *Birth of a Nation*, is telling. The film, America's first full-length motion picture and the first to be screened at the White House, opened to an enthusiastic audience in Atlanta on December 6, 1915. The half million-dollar film, based on Thomas Dixon's novel *The Clansmen,* details the story of the south during Reconstruction. The film depicts a subjugated south at the hands of drunken Union soldiers, northern capitalist, and emancipated sex crazed blacks. In unprecedented cinematic technology, the film depicts Ku Klux Klan horseman heroically murdering a black soldier accused of attempted sexual assault on their way to restoring the south back to "order." The film broke all attendances records in Atlanta during its three week showing. The *Atlanta Constitution* (AC)*,* the leading daily newspaper in the city, stated that the film displays how America was established and then "humiliated and crushed under a black heel….You sicken at the sight of an attempt to enforce marital racial equality!" The paper posited that the film's depiction of Reconstruction revealed "the insufferable reason for the Ku Klux Klan (KKK)." The film was praised for "reproduce[ing] incidents of history that no northern audience could appreciate with the

[213] Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*., 99; White and Crimmins, "How Atlanta Grew: Cool Heads, Hot Air, and Hard Work.".

same glow of pride as can an audience of Georgians." The daily news organ concluded that the climatic KKK scene provoked Atlanta moviegoers to throw "restraint to the wind! Many rise from their seats, and with a roar of thunder a shout goes up! Freedom is here! Justice is at Hand! Retribution has arrived." The reception of the epic film not only reflected the city's racial attitudes, it also, for many Atlantans, imitated recent events in the city.[214]

FIGURE 11

Source: Newspaper advertisement found in, *The Atlanta Constitution,* Dec 5, 1915, pg.C12

[214] Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930*, The Urban Life in America Series(New York: Oxford University Press, 1967)., 3-4; *The Atlanta Constitution,* Dec 2, 1915, pg.14; Ned McIntosh, " "Birth of a Nation" Thrills Tremendous Atlanta Audience," *The Atlanta Constitution,* Dec 7, 1915, pg.7;

Two weeks before the film debuted in Atlanta, white urban migrant and Methodist preacher William Joseph Simmons established the modern KKK. Simmons, armed with a Bible and a burning cross, led sixteen men atop the rocky crest of nearby Stone Mountain to establish a memorial organization to the Ku Klux Klan. One week later, the modern Klan was granted a preliminary charter from the state of Georgia with Simmons as the group's first Imperial Wizard. Simmons saw *Birth of a Nation* several times. His love for the film and Klan leadership status garnered him free admission to the film. His reinvigorated Klan reinforced the status of downtown Atlanta, particularly Peachtree Road as the seat of white supremacy. Along Peachtree Road, the group established their headquarters atop the Georgia Savings Bank Building, a three story $20,000 Klan robe factory, a Klan printing office, and a recruiting office. Amidst this growing institutional empire, Imperial Wizard Simmons established the custom of presiding over Klan meetings by placing two revolvers before him and shouting to his local followers, "Bring on your niggers!" By 1921, as membership grew, the Klan rewarded their leader with a $30,000 house at 1840 Peachtree Road. The influential group also established a $75,000 white mansion known as the Imperial Palace at 2621 Peachtree Road. The palace became a national Mecca for Klansmen. By 1922, the group yielded enough political influence to elect Klansman Walter A. Sims mayor of the city and Clifford Walker as governor. The combination of a Klansmen mayor and the Imperial Mansion garnered Atlanta the nickname of the "Imperial City."[215]

The group's growing power in Atlanta garnered even more national attention when Marcus Garvey, founder and leader of the black nationalist organization the United

[215] Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930*., 3-44.

Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), came to Atlanta to meet with the Grand Wizard in 1922. Garvey's UNIA had the largest membership of any black volunteer organization in American history. In a show of the Klan's raising influence in urban American, the two notable leaders held a formal meeting on Peachtree Street, presumably, to discuss how the two otherwise diametrically opposed organizations might work together. Rumors swirled in regards to the meeting. However, in a telegram to the *Atlanta Constitution,* Garvey denied that the two had arrived at any sort of cooperative plan. However, according to Garvey, the two did agree on several issues. Both men affirmed Garvey's African colonization plans and both shared a deep-seated distaste for "miscegenation." Garvey praised the Klan leader's forthright posture regarding his racist attitudes. Garvey further admired the Klan for openly proclaiming what, according to Garvey, every white man believed in secret.[216]

This influential growth and explicit racial sentiments of the KKK, coupled with the increase in the city's black population, contributed to significant racial demographic shifts in the city. With the rise of the Klan, Atlanta's local government sought to control the direction of the city's black population growth. The city's 1920s "Forward Atlanta" public relations campaign opened with a million dollar advertising crusade encouraging the relocation of businesses into the metro area as well as civic, educational, and residential improvements. Apart of these improvements were the completion of white and black residential suburbs. The white suburbs were established to the north and east of downtown including Inman Park, Ansley Park, Buckhead, Druid Hills, and the

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[216] "Alliance With Klan Denied by Marcus Garvey," *The Atlanta Constitution,* Aug 22, 1922, pg.14; Mary Gambrell Rolinson, "The Universal Negro Improvement Association in Georgia : Southern strongholds of Garveyism," in John C. Inscoe, Camille Billops, and James Vernon Hatch, *Georgia in Black and White : Explorations in the Race Relations of a Southern State, 1865-1950*(Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994)., 221;

neighborhoods surrounding Emory University.[217] Fearing inter-racial residential patterns, Atlanta city officials orchestrated the establishment of the black suburbs to the west of the city, blocks from Gates's migrant church.[218]

African American Entrepreneur Heman Perry took advantage of the black population growth and the city's desire to orchestrate the growth. Perry, a 1908 migrant to Atlanta, was the founder of the Standard Life Insurance Company and Citizens Trust Bank, the first black owned bank to join the Federal Reserve. Perry was a nationally known entrepreneur. He was the subject of a 1924 Forbes Magazine article entitled "The Largest Negro Commercial Enterprise in the World: Amazing Story of Herman E. Perry." In 1922, Perry's Service Reality Company purchased 300 acres of land west of Ashby Street. Perry's purchases punctured Atlanta's racial barrier to the west side. Much of the area Perry purchased was comprised of neglected slums, mud, and a city dump for trash. Between 1923-1925 Perry's Service Realty Company and his Service Engineering and Construction Company together constructed bungalow style homes for African Americans between Simpson and West Hunter Street (now MLK, Jr. Boulevard) in black neighborhoods such as Ashby Heights and Washington Park. Perry attracted black homeowners by lobbying Atlanta's city government for public facilities and utilities such sewer service and a public park. The city government established Washington Park, the city's only public park for African Americans in the section west of Ashby Street. The public park had a swimming pool and a pavilion where public dances were held. One Atlanta resident recalled the popularity of the park among black residents, stating,

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[217] White and Crimmins, "How Atlanta Grew: Cool Heads, Hot Air, and Hard Work.";
[218] On residential patterns and race in Atlanta see, Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*; Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*., 29; Bayor, Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta, 80-90 ; Kuhn, Joye, and Wes, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*.; White, "The Black Sides of Atlanta.".

"Everybody from across town and everywhere else came over to Washington Park. It was a place of recreation and the only park for blacks at the time." In addition to the park, Perry also opened up an all black movie theatre. The commercial amusement venue, The Crystal Theatre, was also located on Atlanta's Black west side.[219]

Black expansion to the west side was furthered by the erection of Georgia's first public high school for blacks in 1924. Perry's company received a $212,000 contract to construct Booker T. Washington High School. Perry's company not only constructed the school at a profit of $20,000, Perry also sold the city the land upon which the school was built. Later, between 1929-1930 all the city's black colleges and universities came together in one section on the west side to form the Atlanta University Center (AUC). The opening of Atlanta's University Homes in 1937 further punctured the color barrier to westward expansion in the city. The "project" style AU Homes were the first "negro" federal housing project in the nation (Atlanta's Techwood Homes, which opened one-year earlier, was the first federal housing project in the nation. However, Techwood was designated for whites only). With a vibrant center of educational institutions, residential facilities, and a growing business district around the AUC, Atlanta's west side, particularly Hunter Avenue, began to rival and, in some respects, surpass Auburn Ave and the black East side as the center of African American culture and life in 1920s Atlanta.[220]

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[219] Eric D. Walrond, *Forbes,* February 2,1924, quoted in Juliet E. K. Walker, *The History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship*, ed. Kenneth Lipartito, Twayne's Evolution of Modern Business Series(New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998).,183; Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*.,29; White, "The Black Sides of Atlanta.", 216-219; Howard L. Preston, *Automobile Age Atlanta : The Making of a Southern Metropolis, 1900-1935*(Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979)., 106-107; Quote from Kuhn, Joye, and Wes, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*.,42; White, ""A Landmark in Negro Progress" The Auditorium Theatre, 1914-1925.".

[220] White, "The Black Sides of Atlanta.", 216-219; Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta* (The Fred W. Morrison Series in Southern Studies; Chapel Hill and London: The

The establishment of exclusive black neighborhoods with electricity and indoor plumbing, the first Public Park and high school, along with the establishment of the AU Center attracted upwardly mobile black residents seeking more space, access to education, and modern amenities. The move instilled west side migrants with a sense of inclusion and social and technological progress. Estelle Clemmons recalled her experience of moving from the crowded black sections of the city to the west side immediately after the completion of her family's new bungalow home. As a young girl she recalled that when her family moved to the west side the family felt as if they were,

> "going somewhere, you see, having five rooms, with a bathroom on the inside and hot and cold running water. We could bathe in a bathtub whereas previously you heated water on the stove in the kitchen and bathed in the tin tub. But here, to be able to get into a bathtub meant so much."[221]

The establishment of commercial facilities, such as movie theaters and uplift social institutions were also seen as sign of racial progress. When Booker T. Washington attended the dedication of the opulent Odd Fellows Building on Auburn Avenue, he stated that no negro could "go inside without feeling inspired with a new and enlarged confidence in his race."[222]

In many ways, the interplay between the modern progression of black Atlanta and Reverend Gates's experience as a migrant preacher typifies the experience of black rural Protestantism in the city. St. Clair Drake, pioneering black sociologist and co-author of the landmark urban sociological study *Black Metropolis,* noted that "the city is a world of

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University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 55-56; Preston, *Automobile Age Atlanta : The Making of a Southern Metropolis, 1900-1935*., 106-107.

[221] Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*., 29-30; Quote found in Kuhn, Joye, and Wes, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*.,44.

[222] Booker T Washington quote from *The Atlanta Independent,* August 16,1913 quoted in White, ""A Landmark in Negro Progress" The Auditorium Theatre, 1914-1925.",16

rapid change. Such tempo of life affects even religious behavior profoundly."[223] The aforementioned racial and, residential, and demographic changes in Atlanta affected how migrant churches instituted rural Protestant worship in the city.

Gates lived in a shared dirt floor home and led a small migrant congregation with a strong rural identity. The preacher and his congregation, however, were in the midst of a period of rapid transition in black city life. The construction of black suburban neighborhoods with modern amenities, such as indoor plumbing, near the preacher's plank structure church was a striking image of the rural/urban dichotomy that was created by migration. Gates' home, church, and congregation represented relics of rural life. Conversely, the establishment of modern edifices and social institutions marked progress. Reverend Gates's ability to incorporate these notions of progress and simultaneously maintain a rural religious identity and practices epitomizes some of the ways urban migration alter black urban Protestantism.

One way the migrant preacher accomplished such a feat was by leading Mount Calvary though several significant changes that transformed the church into a modern institution of rural Protestantism in the city. The first major urban and modern transformation the church under went during Reverend Gates's leadership was the construction of a brick edifice. As the church grew, the congregation doubled the acreage they owned in order to complete the construction and accommodate its growing membership. The brick structure church was not only modern; it was also safer from fire. Atlanta's devastating fire of 1917 destroyed the predominantly wooden city. The Fourth

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[223] St. Clair Drake, "Churches and Voluntary Associations in the Chicago Negro Community," Report of Official Project 465-54-3-386, conducted under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration, (Chicago, December 1940), 6-7, quoted in Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine : Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952*.,50.

Ward, particularly the black sections from Auburn Avenue to Old Wheat Street, was engulfed in flames, as was the storied Wheat Street Baptist Church. The fire waged for eleven hours. In all, 70 city blocks, 300 acres, and almost 2,000 houses were destroyed, leaving more than ten thousand Atlanta residents, mostly black, homeless. Insurance companies estimated that total damages were in excess of $5 million dollars. Gates' west side brick church was not only safer from fire it also possessed cultural significance. Mount Calvary's new brick structure was a major departure from the rural brush harbor and wooden plank edifice that the church had established just barely two decades before. Along with an aesthetic appeal, the new church signaled that Mount Calvary was prospering, growing, and in-step with its increasingly modern and urban surroundings.[224]

Gates also oversaw the modernization of other church facilities. Under the migrant pastor's leadership the church installed indoor plumbing and secured an indoor pool for baptism. The church used the pool for the first time on Mothers Day 1926. This addition enabled the church to conduct its first indoor Baptismal rites, as opposed to the common outdoor ritual of baptism. In addition to the baptismal, the new brick church was also equipped with a water cooler, pews to accommodate its growing congregation, as well as stained glass windows. At the hands of the urban migrant pastor, the brush harbor congregation was transformed into a thriving urban ministry.[225]

In addition to modernizing the church edifice, Reverend Gates and Mount Calvary also established several ministerial and social activities to address the new urban religious milieu, particularly in regards to addressing social concerns. The preacher established

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[224] Committee, "100th Anniversary.", 12; "Beautiful Homes Raized by Flames," *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 22, 1917,pg.3; Gary M. Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn : The Saga of Two Families and the Making of Atlanta*(New York: Scribner, 1996).,85 Newman, "Decatur Street: Atanta's African American Paradise Lost.",13.
[225] Committee, "100th Anniversary.", 12.

several programs and clubs at the church to foster social interaction among his transplanted urban parishioners. For the church's youth, the church organized a Junior Usher's Board Club, Baptist Young People's Union (BYPU), and a Young Men's Christian Club. These three organizations and clubs aided the church in involving teenagers and pre-teens in the life of the church. Moreover, the BYPU and Young Men's Christian Club aided the growing church in providing "wholesome" church-based recreation for the young people in the Rockdale community who were known to "hang out" on the corner of the adjacent streets of Avenues B and C. The church also began a jobs program. The Willing Workers Club aided rural parishioners in training for urban industrial job skills as well as obtaining employment opportunities in the city.[226]

To raise tuition funds for members of his congregation to attend the city's thriving black educational institutions, Reverend Gates organized a local celebrity baseball game. The charity game pitted "the members of the two saving professions," Atlanta's black ministers against Atlanta's black physicians. The charity game was held on Morehouse College's Athletic Field. Gates was the captain and starting pitcher for the ministers' team. The game was held at 3pm on a warm August Tuesday afternoon. Adults were charged $.25 cents and children $.10 cents to witness the popular preacher lead his team.[227]

The preacher also adjusted his ministerial priorities to address the development of black commercial amusement in the city. He made a newspaper announcement to inform the community he was undertaking an agenda to solve the problem of "regaining our young people." Serving as President of the New Hope Baptist Young Peoples Union

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[226] Committee, "100th Anniversary.", 12.
[227] "Benefit Ball Game Features Pastors, Medics," *Atlanta Daily World,* Aug 5, 1932, 1A; "Heads District," *Atlanta World (1931-1932);* Dec 6, 1931,pg. 6.

convention of Georgia and as President of his congressional district for the State Baptist Convention, Gates sponsored several interracial music and talent contests throughout the city. These contests were aimed at providing musical recreation in opposition to the secular music contests held at the city's premiere 81 Theatre. For example, Atlanta's "Masonic Day with Reverend J.M. Gates" featured a choir contest between the Scottish Rite Masons and the Eastern Star."[228] These religious amusement contests usually required an entry fee of $.10 cents. An impressive twenty-piece Pullman Shop Band supplied the live music for these sanctified amusement spaces. For one such event, Gates used his relationship with record companies (discussed more fully in the following chapter) to secure the contest's grand prize. The event featured twenty-five quartets vying for the first place prize: a trip to New York City and a recording contract to record the winning rendition. The extravaganzas featured reserved segregated seating. Despite the segregated nature, one evening gala was praised for its large interracial attendance.[229] One talent show event featured white Atlanta Judge John D. Humphries as the guest host. These activities epitomized how commercial amusement was compelling black Protestants to re-conceptualize church work.[230]

In addition to the host of music and talent shows, Gates' church also installed the neighborhood's first water and beverage cooler. Similar to Gates' Summer Hill neighborhood, most black neighborhoods in Atlanta during the early twentieth century lacked indoor plumbing, running water, or refrigeration. Therefore, many churches took to establishing public beverage coolers as a means to providing an alternative to the

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[228] Atlanta Daily World (1932-2003); Apr 30, 1944, pg.2.
[229] "Reverend Gates Will Sponsor Contest," *Atlanta World,* Feb 12, 1934, p.1; Feb 28, 1932, p.1; Mar 4, 1932, p.5; Aug 19, 1932, pg.3A.
[230] *Atlanta Daily World,* Apr 28, 1934, pg.5; Sep 7, 1932, pg.3A; Sep 2, 1942,pg.3; Sep 11, 1942,pg.3.

saloon, a common gathering space for leisurely drinking and socialization. In his stated attempt to make his church as attractive urban amusements, Reverend Proctor of Atlanta's First Congregational erected a public water cooler to "take away from some the excuse for going to the saloon to get a cold drink." Accordingly, Mount Calvary's water cooler provided the migrant community of Rockdale Park with a clean source of drinking water. In addition, the refrigerated beverage service provided an oasis of recreational consumption in the midst of the city's growing number of saloons and recreational spaces of dining and drinking along Decatur Street.[231]

The pastor's skilled leadership resulted in the preacher leading several other area congregations simultaneously. His pastoral installation at Atlanta's Greater Bethany was heralded in the local black press. His special installation service included musical presentations as well as literary works and special guest speakers from Atlanta's black middle and white-collar professional class. The pastor's efforts of addressing the social and leisure concerns of the city's children were particularly praised. Mrs. L.W. Sims, First Baptist Church Sunday School Superintendent, spoke at the installation service on the subject "Reverend J.M. Gates, Leader of Young People."

The pastor's re-prioritization of the church's financial concerns and outreach was also lauded. Distinguished black business men C.S. Cox of Atlanta's Cox Undertaking Company and Roosevelt Flannangan, manager of the Auburn Avenue Service Station, praised Reverend Gates in their address: "Rev J.M. Gates as a Business Pastor."[232] The

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[231] Committee, "100th Anniversary.", 12; "Use of Water Urged for Negroes of City," *The Atlanta Constitution,* Jun 23, 1913, pg.6;

[232] *The Chicago Defender*, Oct 4, 1941,pg.11; *Atlanta Daily World,* "Being Installed" and *The Pittsburgh Courier,* May 16, 1931, pg A2 praise Reverend Gates for being on the radio, the author has yet to locate further evidence concerning Reverend Gates broadcasting career apart from the phonograph. Reverend Gates' respective tenure at the aforementioned churches was derived from a combination of church

preacher's timely recognition of the changing role of black Protestantism in urban America established him as a recognizable and respected local leader.

FIGURE 12

Source: Reverend Gates picture from "Being Installed," *Atlanta Daily World,* Mar 21,1937, p. 3.

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websites as well as the "Church News" section in the *Atlanta Daily World*, See Elizabeth Baptist, http://www.elizabethbaptist.org/new/home.html, accessed April 25, 2008; "Churches"**,** *Atlanta Daily World, Feb* 11,1934, p.8; Reverend Gates picture from "Being Installed," *Atlanta Daily World,* Mar 21,1937, p. 3; "Greater Bethany Begins First Anniversary Meet," *Atlanta Daily World,* Nov 16, 1937,3; The Elizabeth Baptist Church website has Reverend Gates leadership ending in 1940 however, *The Atlanta Daily World* has Gates listed as the pastor and preacher at the church through 1940 up until his death in 1945. The newspaper even reports that Gates was scheduled to preach at Elizabeth on Sunday August 19, 1945. However, Gates died on Saturday morning August 18,1945. See: *Atlanta Daily World* "Church News", *Atlanta Daily World,* Aug 18, 1945, pg. 6 and "Reverend J. M. Gates Passes At Home"**,** *Atlanta Daily World,* Aug 19, 1945, pg. 3.

In addition to re-prioritizing church work and capacity, the cultural practices of black migrants also altered the ways black Protestantism was practiced in urban America. Historian Wallace Best observes that the "capstone" transformation of black Protestantism during the migration era was the ways in which migrants helped to alter black worship practices.[233] This change was particularly pronounced in preaching. Best observes that black urban migrants were accustomed to a "preaching style that was unschooled, emotional, and theatrical," where as most urban black pastors stressed sermons that were delivered in a restrained and scholarly manner.[234] However, the competition of black secular organizations as well as commercial amusements vied for the attention and patronage of migrants who desired spaces where demonstrative expression was welcomed, especially in worship. Subsequently, urban black churches and black preachers found success in adopting what sociologists St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, Jr. described in their land mark study of migration era Chicago, as a "mixed type" preaching style.[235] This mixed type approach "attempted to appeal to two classes of listeners: the intellectually inclined and those who felt compelled to express their emotions freely and demonstratively. This new and innovative addition to the black sermonic tradition attempted to appeal to both reason and to the emotions on the same occasion—if not at the same time."[236] Mixed-type sermons usually began "at a slow, studied pace [and] as it progressed, the minister moved from text to extemporaneous speaking, the volume of his voice rising steadily. Decorum would soon be cast aside as

[233] Best, Passionately Human, No Less Divine : Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952, 94.
[234] Ibid., 95.
[235] Ibid., *96.*
[236] Ibid.

he worked himself, and the congregation, to an emotional frenzy."[237] This recognition and incorporation of folk and elite religious sensibilities and cultural expression became a hallmark of black Protestant churches that adjusted their practices according to the demographic shifts of the Great Migration era.[238]

Reverend Gates ministerial career offers insightful data concerning the aforementioned phenomenon. The rural native's leadership helped to transform Mount Calvary from a brush harbor gathering into a modern urban facility geared toward engaging the city's new religious environment. However, in the midst of this modern progression, the preacher continued to lead the congregation in rural worship practices, particularly in regards to his preaching. Gates typified the mixed type style of preaching. Upon hearing the preacher at his church, one Atlanta reporter described Reverend Gates' preaching style as one "that could be understood by the most humble and, and at the same time could be appreciated by the highest educated people of the city." He went on to describe the flow of the preachers mixed-type sermons: "Rev Gates uses logic in the order of his sermon, he eases off at the start, but after he gets his congregation in the 'swing' the sermon seems to touch you from its own momentum."[239] Gates's ability to adapt his preaching style to the expectations of his urban environment as well as channel the vernacular and demonstrative expression of the congregation's shared rural background aided his appeal to both the intellectually inclined (black professional/managerial class) as well as Atlanta's rural Diaspora. While the congregation had progressed away from their brush harbor gatherings, they did not neglect their brush harbor religious expressions. Gates's utilization of "logic" reflected

[237] Ibid., 97
[238] Best, Passionately Human, No Less Divine : Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952, 99.
[239] *Atlanta Daily World,* Jun 11, 1934, pg.6.

the sermon types of his established black Protestant peers. However, his ability to get his congregation "in the swing" reflects the rural religious practices of his migrant congregation.

In their Depression era study of black Protestantism, Benjamin Elijah Mays and Joseph William Nicholson concluded that a mix of emotional and intellectual preaching was ideal for modern black religious practices. "If the emotional appeal made through the extremely other-worldly sermon verges on superstition, and if the highly intellectual sermon verges on simply a statement of philosophy," they wrote, "then somewhere about midway between these extremes the thing sought in preaching should be discovered."[240] Reverend Gates mixed-type sermon style straddled this line. The confluence of the religious practices of rural migrants—such as those at Mount Calvary—and city life helped to create this lasting homiletical model.

Gates's adroit leadership ability helped Mount Calvary's membership to grow and the church even retired its debt in the midst of the Depression in 1934.[241] The growth and economic progression of Mount Calvary enabled the Gates to live comfortably. As the church grew, the migrant couple moved and purchased a better home two blocks from their Martin Street residence. The new home differed in two distinct ways. First, in contrast to their first home in the black working class section of Martin Street, the preacher's new home at 424 Fraser Street was located on a street block that was predominantly white. Unlike the dirt floors and muddy thoroughfares of Martin Street, this white neighborhood was complete with paved roads for the ease of car travel and stability of housing foundations. Secondly, the preacher's new neighborhood not only

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[240] Mays and Nicholson, *The Negro's Church*., 17.
[241] "With The Churches," Jun 10, 1934,pg.6; On church tenure, see Mount Calvary Baptist Church, http://www.atlmtcalvary.org/history.html, accessed April 25, 2008.

differed by race and physical construction, but also in socio-economic status. Gates' former Martin Street neighbors were employed in working class professions such as laundresses and laborers. On Fraser Street, the migrant couple found themselves living next to whites that were employed in a number of skilled jobs and white-collar professions; including a white railroad conductor, a white city policeman, a white US Postal service letter carrier, and a white printing apprentice. Living next door to the migrant preacher at 422 Fraser Street was the family of grocery store proprietor Joseph Silverman. The Silvermans were Russian Jews who migrated to America in 1916. The Silvermans lived on the second floor, and used the bottom level to operate their grocery store. On the other side of the Gates' residence, stood the white family of James Donaldson, a commercial Truck Driver probably for the neighborhood Parcel Delivery Company.[242]

Urban migration offered blacks the opportunity for an enhanced standard of living. This residential shift marked a drastic change in the life of this migrant. In less than a decade, Reverend Gates had made his way out of the shared dirt floor home he and his wife occupied when they first arrived in the city. The preacher of the thriving migrant church progressed into an urban home complete with modern amenities. The city was providing the context and means by which the preacher was changing his life even as he was helping to change the city's religious culture.

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[242] United States. Bureau of the Census. and Enumerator 5778, *Fourtenth Census of the United States:1920-Population Schedule of Atlanta Ward 3*1920. pt. Atlanta, Georgia, Fulton County 3rd Ward. Sheet No.21.; ProQuest Information and Learning Company. and Sanborn Map Company., "Digital Sanborn Maps, 1867-1970. Georgia.", Vol.1, 1931, Sheet #26. Around 1927, many streets in Atlanta were renamed and re-numbered. Gates' residence thereafter is listed as 796 Fraser Street. To no surprise, by the 1930 Census, Reverend Gates' block of Fraser Street is predominantly all black.

Conclusion

The life of James M. Gates illuminates the way that black urban migration was a stepwise experience that consisted of urban cities.[243] Urban migrants altered black life in the urban south beginning after the Civil War, as they would northern cities. The growing population of black migrants to Atlanta altered the city's employment and residential patterns. Urban migrants comprised the city's growing proletariat. These cash wage laborers brought their rural folk practices with them to the city. These modes of expression were an affront to acceptable notions of black city life. The influx of black migrants contributed to the expansion of black Atlantans to the west side of the city. The establishment of black neighborhoods and social institutions on the west side altered city demographics and accentuated black social stratification in the city.

Rural black diasporas also helped to change black Protestantism in the city as well. The establishment of small religious communities such as the brush harbor congregation of Mount Calvary was a direct result of the arrival of black migrants. Mount Calvary's combination of rural expressive worship practices and modern institutional development is a profound example of how rural black Protestantism and black vernacular confronted modernity and took shape in the city. In just a decade, from 1916 to 1926, Reverend James Gates helped Mount Calvary progress exponentially from their brush harbor and old plank structure edifice to a church congregation with a modern facility that reflected their urban environment. No longer did his congregation worship and baptize out in the open, nor did parishioners tap their feet and dance on dusty ground. The resources of the

[243] Lewis, "Expectations, Economic Opportunities, and Life in the Industrial Age: Black Migration to Norfolk, Virginia 1910-1945..", 25.

city helped the congregation practice their demonstrative worship underneath the protection of brick walls and in the kaleidoscope of sunlight cast by their new stained glassed windows. The comfort of their brand new pews and concrete flooring helped the congregation keep the cadence of their songs as well as stay in step with the surrounding modern culture. In the midst of this progression, the congregation continued to worship in a style reminiscent of their rural brush harbor context. The church continued to put a premium on the "frenzy" of worship. In this regard, Mount Calvary testifies to the ways in which urban migrants used the negotiation between rural folk practices and traditions and modern urban technology to recreate how African American Protestants worshiped God.

Harnessing the phonograph for the mass transmission of such worship practices serves as another, perhaps quintessential, example of how urban migrants encountered modernity and used rural folk practices to carve out a space for such practices as well as became agents of progress. The prolific career of Reverend Gates affords a focused analysis of this phenomenon.[244]

[244] On the ways in which the combination of rural and urban helped to create modern African American Protestantism see, Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine : Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952*., 2-3. For a discussion about how the introduction of new media challenges social patterns, see, Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New : Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century*(New York: Oxford University Press, 1988)., 3ff.

CHAPTER SIX: AMERICAN IDOLS: GATES, THE POPULARITY OF RECORDED SERMONS, AND THE MASS MEDIA CELEBRITY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PREACHE*RS.*

The life and ministry of Reverend Gates displays how urban migration and exposure to modern domestic technology altered residential life and black Protestantism. Gates' career as the most prolific sermon recorder of his time also typifies how urban migration and modern technology—recorded sermons—altered black Protestantism, particularly in helping to popularize new forms of black religious discourses.[245] Gates' modern media ministry gives voice to the emergence of a new urban black ministry; one rooted in rural forms of expression ,yet addressing the demands of urban life. The commodification of this new black religious discourse made the local preacher a fixture in black modern media and black consumerism establishing him as a religious commercial celebrity.[246]

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[245] The author recognizes that radio, in many regards, took the place of the phonograph, particularly after WWII. Several black preachers had relative consistent radio broadcasting careers after World War II. Elder Lucy Smith, Elder Solomon "Lightfoot" Michaux, Mother Rosa Horne, and William Holmes Borders, for example, all had some form of radio ministry. However, most of these figures did not have a consistent radio broadcast until the 1930's. Elder Lightfoot did his first broadcast in 1929. However, many of these preachers enjoyed local and regional broadcast until the late 1930's. Two newspaper articles refer to Gates as a radio-broadcaster, however the author has yet to find radio program lists to confirm this. Nevertheless, I constitute his use of the phonograph as religious "broadcasting" based on Jonathan L. Walton's definition of religious broadcasting "as the use of electronic media as a primary tool of proselytization." Up until the 1930's recorded sermons may have enjoyed a broader reach than many religious radio broadcasts due to the disproportionately high numbers of black phonograph ownership compared to radio ownership as well as the nationally and internationally distribution networks of the phonograph industry. On Elder Lucy Smith, see Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine : Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952*.; on Elder Michaux see, Webb, *About My Father's Business : The Life of Elder Michaux*.; For Walton's definition see, Walton, *Watch This! The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism*., 2.

[246] Note to the reader concerning the usage of the terms "commercial celebrity" and "icon:" I use the term "commercial" based on Reverend Gates status as a well recognized face/personality used to advertised commodities and engage in commerce and profit. For "celebrity," I am referring to modern celebrity. That is to say, in a world that lacked television, the Internet, and a large black radio presence, local and nationally circulated black newspapers were major mediums of news and information for black communities. Gates' presence in these newspapers afforded him the opportunity to enjoy consistent national exposure, acclaim and notoriety. Moreover, Gates' picture, name, and/or advertisements were placed next to internationally known black entertainers such as Duke Ellington, Victoria Spivey, and Louis Armstrong. I am classifying this experience as "celebrity." Similarly, I use the term icon to refer to

The Great Migration and Modern Black Religious Expression

The pioneering phonograph sermons of Reverend Calvin "Black Billy Sunday" Dixon and Reverend W.A. White did not sell well. These black mass media religion originators failed to garner large sales as their secular race record counterparts had done. Race records gained mass appeal, in part, because there were grounded in forms of black vernacular expression, a form of expression that was more common to African American during the early twentieth century. The earliest recorded sermons did not embrace the same common parlance; rather recorded sermons reflected a commitment to formal language and decorous worship practices. Like the short-lived Black Swan Records, these sermons were aimed at offering "positive," high-classed portrayals of black cultural expression—in this case black preaching—in response to the popularity of the black vernacular of race records. Religion scholar Cornel West has observed that such efforts of creating "positive" black cultural expressions were integral to the modern experience of black middle classes. West concludes that such expressions (music, movies, arts, etc.) were aimed at "re-presenting monolithic and homogenous black communities in a way that could displace past misrepresentations."[247] Likewise, the early sermon recorders presented orderly expression aimed at highlighting polished African American expressions. Despite these valiant efforts of combating white stereotypes, the architects of recorded sermons, (and Black Swan for that matter) failed to garner financial viability and popular acceptance.

Reverend Gates and the use of his image based advertisements as representations, symbols, and standards of Christian ministry, in particular preaching and morality.

[247] Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russel Ferguson et al.(Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).,5.

These didactic sermons encountered a black public that was in the midst of re-shaping black cultural expression, especially black preaching. As discussed previously, rural diasporas helped to make mixed-type preaching a hallmark of black Protestantism during the migration era. This concession to demonstrative vernacular expression and disregard for decorous expression in the pulpit did not comply with black middle class notions of propriety. However, animated forms of religious expression (mixed type sermons, and later Gospel music) became central for urban black faith communities seeking to attract black urban migrants.

Gates epitomized the phenomenon of mixed-type preaching during the Great Migration. Gates combined his rural vernacular and emotional expression with the intellectual expectations of the city to formulate a mixed-type homiletic. The logical narration and emotional nature of Gates' sermons typifies the ways in which black religious discourses during the migration era were altered in attempts to appeal to two types of listeners: "the highest educated" as well as those who preferred to express their religious devotion through the demonstrative "swing" portion of the sermon. The utilization of this new form of black religious discourse made Gates a favorite among Atlanta's black urban migrants. The commodification of this new form of religious expression made him a national religious celebrity.

Columbia Records employee Polk Brockman discovered the vogue preacher through informal local networks in Atlanta in the early part of 1926. With the help of Western Electric, Columbia became the first phonograph company to effectively utilize electronic recording for on-site or "field" recording. Formerly, the industry use of acoustic recording produced mediocre and inconsistent field recordings, making

recording studios a necessity. However, electronic recording produced superior sound and made on-site or "field" recording a viable option. Columbia sent their field-recording unit south to discover and record new talent. Brockman used the state of the art field-recording machine to make Gates' first recordings on Saturday April 24, 1926.[248]

In his first recording session, the popular local preacher recorded five sermons: "Need of Prayer," two versions of "The One Thing I Know," "I'm Gonna Die With the Staff in My Hand," and "Death's Black Train is Coming." Columbia chose to release "Death's Black Train is Coming" and "Need of Prayer" first. The record was marketed cautiously compared to the standard race record issues. During the 1920's, a race record artist was considered successful if he or she sold 5,000 copies or more, while big sellers ranged from 20,000 to 50,000 copies. Gates' record was released in July with an initial order of 3,675 copies. His sermon recordings were priced at $0.75 cents each, slightly less than the average price of a pound of bread in 1926.[249]

"Death's Black Train is Coming" was a black vernacular chanted-sermon and song grounded in the African American cultural practice of imploring aspects of the railroad as a religious metaphor. During the Great Migration, in particularly, the train was a popular symbol of social and spiritual transformation for African Americans. African American sermons, letters, autobiographies, and music of the era reveal that blacks widely viewed the train as the primary vehicle of physical and spiritual deliverance. Historian John

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[248] Roger S. Brown, "Polk Brockman, Recording Pioneer," *Living Blues* 23 (1975).; Seeger, ""Who Chose These Records" : Interview with Frank Walker on June 19,1962.",15; Oliver, *Songsters and Saints : Vocal Traditions on Race Records*.,140; Dixon and others, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*., 287.

[249] Dixon and others, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*., 287; Oliver, *Songsters and Saints : Vocal Traditions on Race Records*., 140; Mahony, *The Columbia 13/14000-D Series: A Numerical Listing*.,33; A race record artist was considered lucrative and successful if he or she sold more than 5,000 copies. See, Tuuk, *Paramount's Rise and Fall: A History of the Wisconsin Chair Company and Its Recording Activities*.,64-68; The national average price for bread was $0.94/pound. See, United States Department of Commerce., *Statistical Abstract of the United States:1926*., 316, 324.

Giggie points out that the centrality of the train to black modern life, especially in the twentieth century, contributed to the flourishing of chanted songs and sermons centered on the aural and visual metaphor of the train. Moreover, Giggie states that the train was such a significant facet of black life in the twentieth century that black cultural expressions that drew upon railroad imagery could assume that listeners were familiar with train stations, the significance of the train's bell and whistle, as well as the necessity of a purchased ticket.[250] In all, many rural African Americans "incorporated the railroad as part of their identity as a chosen people journeying from slavery to freedom," both physically and spiritually.[251]

Physically, the train was regarded as a primary vehicle of the "Second Exodus"—the means by which African Americans would migrate from the limits of the rural south "toward liberty and the Promise Land" of urban America.[252] In fact, the African American religious imagination of train travel was so pervasive, some trains in the south, particularly in the Mississippi Delta, bound for urban areas simply carried the chalked message, "Bound for the Promise Land."[253]

Accordingly, the spiritual metaphor of the train projected the imagery of the train as the medium to the afterlife—for black Protestants this meant heaven or hell. Reverend C.L. Franklin, a prominent post-war black sermon recorder and religious radio broadcaster, attested to the physical and spiritual significance of the train. Reflecting on

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[250] Giggie, *After Redemption : Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta, 1875-1915*.,51.
[251] John Giggie, 'When Jesus Handed me a Ticket: Images of Railroad Travel and Spiritual Transformation among African Americans, 1865-1917,' in David Morgan and Sally M. Promey, eds., *The Visual Culture of American Religions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001)., 250.
[252] John Giggie, 'When Jesus Handed me a Ticket: Images of Railroad Travel and Spiritual Transformation among African Americans, 1865-1917,' in Morgan and Promey, eds., *The Visual Culture of American Religions*., 249.
[253] Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land : African American Religion and the Great Migration*., 59.

his early twentieth century experience of sharecropping in the rural south, Franklin stated that in his community, railroad travel became one of the most "meaningful" symbols of transformation.[254] Alabama resident Joe Hutchings used the train as a metaphor to describe his journey to heaven. The former slave recalled that upon his conversion to Christianity he shouted, "Oh it is a good thing to serve the Lord…I am going to Heaven…I am going on the train!"[255]

Gates's "Death's Black Train is Coming" reflects this shared metaphoric incorporation of the train as a means of physical and spiritual transformation. As an urban migrant, Gates was familiar with the significance of the train. He settled in Summer Hill, a predominantly black neighborhood established, in part, because of its proximity to the railroad. Both of the preacher's residences on Martin and Fraser Streets gave him aural and visual proximity to the Georgia Rail Road. In his "Death's Black Train is Coming" recording, Gates warns "sinners" that the "bell" and "whistle" of death are indeed on the way. Gates, accompanied by a few members of his growing congregation, warn listeners in an antiphonal song and speech to not wait until "the train was in sight" to get their ticket for heaven. The chorus resounds, "Oh, the little black train is coming/ get all your business right/ you better set your house in order/ for the train may be here tonight."[256] For Gates, the arrival of the train represented the inevitability of death. He encouraged his listeners to make certain they purchased their "tickets" for heaven by way of religious devotion.

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[254] Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land : C.L. Franklin, the Black Church, and the Transformation of America*., 16.
[255] John Giggie, 'When Jesus Handed me a Ticket: Images of Railroad Travel and Spiritual Transformation among African Americans, 1865-1917,' in Morgan and Promey, eds., *The Visual Culture of American Religions*., 258, 255.
[256] Reverend Gates, "Death's Black Train is Coming," Columbia 14145D.

Gates' utilization of the logic of modern train travel to narrate his sermon and rural black vernacular to express it, resulted in the record becoming the first recorded sermon to receive wide acclaim. Similar to the European immigrants who requested phonograph recordings in their own native style, cadence, and colloquialisms (chapter 3); African Americans were especially interested in Gates' phonograph sermon because the preacher articulated black Protestant faith in a manner that reflected rural and southern forms of black expression. Contrary to the decorous and reserved recorded sermons that preceded the preacher, Gates' religious expression included antiphony, black vernacular, and emotion. The *Chicago Defender* advertisement reflected the demonstrative nature of the sermon, declaring "the sermon grips you until you feel like hollering!" [257] (see FIGURE 15) In black vernacular, Gates elucidated a prevalent experience and theme in African American life: the train as a transformative entity. This metaphorical usage of the train drew upon the experiences of the masses of African Americans who boarded trains to America's urban cities armed with the belief that the train was an instrument in a divinely orchestrated sojourn from rural disenfranchisement to purported urban prosperity and freedom.

Black urban migration helped to make Reverend Gates's black vernacular sermon a hit across the country. Black rural diasporas in America's cities were reshaping black cultural practices, particularly in establishing religious communities that reflected their rural religious experience. Subsequently, the preacher's mixed-type recording received widespread acclaim in cities that were undergoing significant changes because of black urban migration. One black Atlanta reporter reflected that he first heard "Death's Black Train is Coming" while in the black urban migration city of Cleveland, Ohio in July

[257] *Chicago Defender,* August, 21,1926, pg.8

1926. From 1900 to 1930, Cleveland had a black population increase of approximately 900%. This black population growth resulted in an increase in black clergy of almost seventy percent from 1920 to 1930 alone.[258] Within this context of black urban migration, the mixed-type sermon thrived. The reporter recalled that while in Cleveland he, "heard the record made by Reverend Gates in nearly every home" he passed[259] The phonograph enabled the local preacher to have a national "congregation" of listeners.

The Talking Machine World, reported that the recorded sermon received unprecedented success in the black migration city of Newark, New Jersey as well. Newark's black population increased some four-fold from 1910-1930.[260] In an article titled, "Demand for Record so Big, Dealer Drives to Factory," the industry journal stated "the colored evangelist Reverend J.M. Gates has been given a great reception by record fans." The paper went on to report that G.K. Korn, Columbia record dealer in Newark, New Jersey had quickly sold out of his shipment of Gates' first release and placed a rush order to Columbia's New York City warehouse. However, the popular sermon recording was already out of stock at the warehouse. Mr. Korn was informed he would have to await the arrival of the new stock from the Bridgeport, Connecticut factory to have his order filled. Mr. Horn, responded that he "was unable to wait, the demand was so strong." Rather than wait, Horn elected to drive to the Bridgeport factory to pick up his order in person. The Broad and Market Music Company, also in New Jersey, reported that the company witnessed a high demand for Gates' first release as well. The company placed a single order of 1,000 records to fill the demand, however the quota proved

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[258] William Wayne Giffin, *African Americans and the Color Line in Ohio, 1915-1930*(Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005)., 232-233.
[259] *Atlanta Daily World,* Aug 24, 1945, pg.6.
[260]Nancy J. Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln : Black Politics in the Age of Fdr*(Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983)., 182-183.

insufficient as the company sold out. Such demand prompted Columbia to supplement initial orders of the record with another 2,500 copies, totaling 6,175 copies making the record, according to race record sales, a successful hit.[261]

Columbia Records recognized the money making potential of Gates as a successful artist. In his second release, "I'm Gonna Die with the Staff in my Hand," Gates once again utilized the aural and visual metaphor of the train. In this recording, the preacher refers to "That Train that runs to Glory," and has "Jesus as the Captain and he always makes his time." The second release had an initial order of 34,025 copies on October 10,1926, approximately ten times the amount of his first release. The record sold quickly, causing a supplemental order of another 20,000 the very next month, totaling 54,025 copies making it the most successful recorded sermon to date.[262]

The Atlanta Daily World, Atlanta's black weekly newspaper, declared that following the release of Gates' first sermon, his "fame as a revivalist circulated over the country." [263] After the lucrative success of his first two releases, Gates was bombarded by a host of record labels seeking to record him. The high demand for his talent led to an unprecedented recording excursion in New York City. In August 1926, Gates boarded a train for New York City for his recording tour. The trip would mark the mass commodification of mixed-type religious discourse and, subsequently the popularity of the same.

Gates' month long recording excursion in New York resulted in the recording of

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[261] *Talking Machine World,* Vol. 22, No.8, August 15, 1926, 86; Order figures found in Mahony, *The Columbia 13/14000-D Series: A Numerical Listing*.,34.
[262] Oliver, *Songsters and Saints : Vocal Traditions on Race Records*., 140; Foreman, "Jazz and Race Records, 1920-1932: Their Origins and Their Significance for the Record Industry and Society"., 160; Reverend Gates, Document Records, "I'm Going to Die With the Staff in My Hand" Columbia 14159D; Order figures found in Mahony, *The Columbia 13/14000-D Series: A Numerical Listing*.,34.
[263] Atlanta Daily World, Aug 24, 1945, pg.6

approximately fifty titles for several different labels including: Pathe, Actuelle, Perfect, Odeon, Victor, Blue Bird, Vocalion, Supertone, and Romeo Record Companies. After a brief recording hiatus and return trip home to Atlanta, Gates returned to the studio in November and December and recorded some forty titles in Atlanta, Chicago, and New York.[264] In all, Gates recorded over ninety titles in 1926 alone, more than the combined total of all previous sermon recorders combined.[265]

Not every record label embraced Gates' style during his national recording tour. Thomas Edison took note of Gates the same day that the preacher entered Victor's New York City studio to record the labels first recorded sermon. The choice of Edison's top competitor to record Gates and break with their tradition of issuing "respectable" and "high class" records did not move Thomas Edison. Edison recognized the talent and potential of recording Gates. However, instead of contracting Gates to record in his nearby Orange, NJ recording laboratory, Edison chose not to sign the rising icon. Rather, on September 10,1926, the father of the phonograph wrote of Reverend Gates in his talent file, "This fellow might be a wonder, but I can't use him."[266] Gates's black vernacular, while popular, was representative of a lower class of expression, a form of expression Edison continually rejected in his recording lists.

Gates' recording tour during the fall of 1926 encapsulates, in a small way, how the encounter of rural and urban practices influenced black religious discourses. During his time in New York City, the native of Hogansville, Georgia was exposed to ultra modern

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[264] Dixon and others, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*., 287-290.
[265] Although Columbia and Okeh Records merged, the two companies functioned as two separate companies with separate managements until 1929. It more likely that Gates recorded for Okeh on September 8. However, it is possible that he recorded on September 18th and 19th as well. See, Dixon and others, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*.,288; For the location of Okeh's recording studio see, Floyd J. Calvin, "Spivey's Records Biggest Seller," *The Pittsburgh Courier,* Feb 25, 1928, A1.
[266] Quoted in Mark A. Humphrey, "Holy Blues : The Gospel Tradition," in *Nothing but the Blues : The Music and the Musicians*, ed. Lawrence Cohn(New York: Abbeville Press, 1993).,114.

technology of studio recording and city life. The urban migrant preacher recorded his rural vernacular sermons in such places as Okeh Records' state of the art high-rise studio in Manhattan's Union Square. In the midst of this sophisticated studio overlooking Broadway Avenue—one of the city's most famed built-up thoroughfares—the preacher recorded common parlance titles reflective of his rural background such as "Ain't Gonna Lay My Religion Down," a warning of the dangers of urban living upon one's devotion to "down home" religion and "The Dying Gambler," an admonition of the vices of urban living. The image of the rural native in the ultra modern New York studios is striking. The historical moment typifies how the crucible of rural and urban influenced modern black religious discourse.[267]

As Edison's sentiments suggest, Gates' homilteical discourse was not considered "cultured." Historian Evelyn Higginbotham has observed that through these vernacular discourses of religion, urban migrants and the black working class "waged a struggle over cultural authority that ultimately subverted the hegemonic values and aesthetics standards of the traditional Protestantism of the black middle class."[268] The popularity of this working class religious discourse further challenged the normative religious practices of established black Protestantism. Black urban migrants such as those in Gates' Summer Hill neighborhood as well as those in Cleveland, Newark, Norfolk, and other American cities remade modes of expression as they utilized their rural cultural practices to respond to their encounters with urban America and modern technology. Their enthusiastic reception of this demotic mode of expression resulted in the proliferation of recorded sermons in black vernacular. When Gates first recorded in 1926, only six African

[267] Dixon and others, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*., 287-290.
[268] Higginbotham, "Rethinking Vernacular Culture.", 979.

American preachers had recorded sermons. Following Gates' blockbuster success and production, the number of recorded sermon recorders rose from six to thirty by the end of 1927. The following decade witnessed black urban migration rise further into the millions. Accordingly, approximately 750 sermons by seventy black preachers had been recorded for commercial purposes by 1938. Black migrants were harnessing the phonograph to further alter the way the faith was proclaimed and heard.[269]

The mass production and popularity of mixed type sermons was a manifestation of a change in black Protestantism. In addition to altering how black Protestantism was expressed, the phonograph and the commodification of recorded sermons in the marketplace provided "a new public dimension to black religion."[270] This new public dimension included black Protestantism as a twentieth century commodity and the creation of the black preacher as a twentieth century commercial celebrity. Gates' career reveals this celebrity.

Gates and the Creation of the Black Religious Commercial Celebrity.

The interwar period produced a host of clergy who utilized forms of mass media to establish their ministries as national celebrities. Audible forms of mass media introduced the nation to local preachers. Such national exposure helped to create religious celebrities who enjoyed extraordinary privilege, monetary reward, and considerable luxury during their lives. American print media reflected, commented, and contributed to the celebrity status of leading mass media preachers. Beginning in 1923, the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) broadcasted the network radio program "National Radio Pulpit." The weekly program featured clergy who would garner national fame, such as

[269] Oliver, *Songsters and Saints : Vocal Traditions on Race Records*., 140-145, 160, 280; Dixon and others, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*.
[270] Higginbotham, "Rethinking Vernacular Culture.", 979-980.

Norman Vincent Peale, the best selling author of *The Power of Positive Thinking*, and Henry Emerson Fosdick, who in 1930 graced the cover of *Time* magazine as "the most famed living Protestant preacher."[271] Aimee Semple McPherson's radiobroadcasts helped her gain celebrity status as well. *Vanity Fair* crowed McPherson as "the greatest showman of our times," and one of the most influential individuals of the post-Civil War era.[272]

Similarly, the phonograph and recorded sermons situated Gates in the public as a cultural celebrity. One of Gates' sermons, "I'm Gonna Die with the Staff in my Hand," topped the charts, selling 54,025 copies. His record-breaking sales occurred alongside releases by some of the industries most popular race record artists. Columbia made total orders of 17,400 copies of famed blues artist Ethel Water's "Take What You Want/We Don't Need Each Other Anymore." In addition, exclusive Columbia artist Bessie Smith, "The Empress of the Blues," had a total order of 21,325 copies of her "Lost Your Head Blues/ Gin House Blues."[273] The commodification of the new form of black religious expressions and practices that emerged during the urban migration era enabled Gates, a black preacher, to outsell leading race record artists and two of the most recognizable black celebrities in the country. The black preacher was a major cultural and commercial star. Mainstream white publications such as *Time* or *Vanity Fair* did not cover Gates' ministry as they did popular white religious broadcasters. However, black press coverage helped to make Reverend Gates a race celebrity. One reporter said it best concerning the

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[271] Dennis Voskuil, "Reaching out: Mainline Protestantism and Media," in Hutchison, ed. *Between the Times : The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960*., 82; *Time,* "Riverside Church," Oct. 06, 1930; *Time, "*Cinema: Heavenward Hollywood," Monday, Sep. 08, 1941.
[272] *Vanity Fair*, March 1933, 42, in Sutton, *Aimee Semple Mcpherson and the Resurrection of Christian America*., 75.
[273] Order figures found in Mahony, *The Columbia 13/14000-D Series: A Numerical Listing*.,34.

preacher's celebrity status when he stated the following: "You may say what you may, but all races have celebrities among them and can boast of them, so the Negro race has a celebrity in the person of the Reverend J.M. Gates."[274]

Gates received significant black press coverage through his nationally circulated newspaper advertisements. Black newspapers were a vibrant mass medium in black life. Presence in nationally circulated black newspapers during the 1920s and 1930s provided significant exposure within the black community. Such national exposure added to Gates' celebrity. Record labels largely used image based advertising to publicize Reverend Gates' recorded sermons. The sermons were publicized in nationally and regionally circulated black newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*, the *New York Amsterdam News,* the *Norfolk Journal and Guide,* the *Baltimore African American,* and the *Pittsburgh Courier*. Gates's name, sermon titles, and face became a fixture in the weekly issues of the black newspapers from the beginning of his recording career until record labels ceased to advertise in 1932 due to the Great Depression. From 1926-1930, Gates's name or face appeared at least twenty-seven times in the weekly *Chicago Defender* alone. His exposure in *The Defender* was greater than any other mass media preacher as well as blues greats Ethel Waters, Clara Smith, and Victoria Spivey.[275]

The preacher's advertisements emerged during a pivotal moment in national advertising. Sut Jhally observes that the 1920s witnessed a "progressive integration of people (via visual representation)" into advertising messages. The advertising industry thus turned to using print media and utilizing images of people who possessed and represented happiness, authority, and the reigning social values of the day to advertise

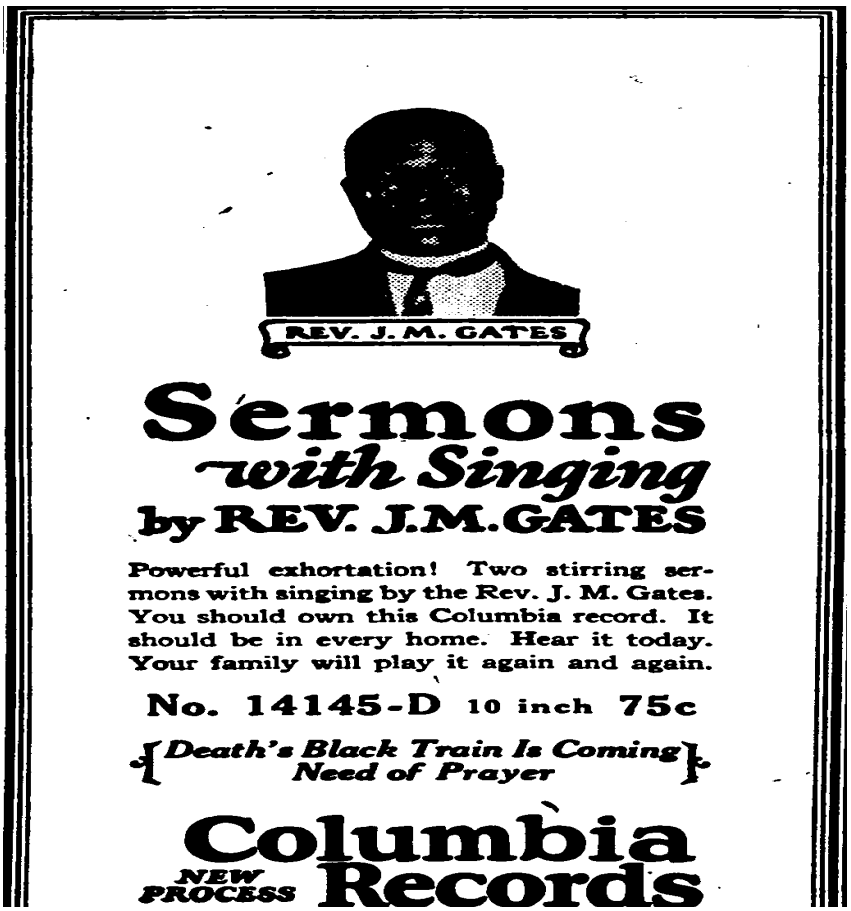
[274] "What Sam Of Auburn Avenue Says", *Atlanta Daily World;* Jul 14, 1932, pg. 6.
[275] A very special thanks to Lance Ledbetter of Dust to Digital for his assistance in tallying the number of race record advertisements in the *Defender.*

their respective products. Advertisers skillfully displayed the connection between the accomplished status of their images and the advertised product.[276]

This image-based advertising strategy aided the celebrity appeal and cultural authority of black preachers. Reverend Gates' advertisements regularly described him as "Atlanta's great race preacher" and "the well-known race preacher." Likewise, his products—recorded sermons—are described as the "Greatest Race Record Ever-Produced." Moreover, the advertisements present the sermons as possessing the ability to induce the "frenzy" of black Protestantism in contrast to the previous reserved and decorous recorded sermons of 1925. The sermons are described as "stirring," "inspiring", and with the ability to "grip you till you feel like hollering." The advertisements catapulted the local preacher into both the national sphere as well as the commercial marketplace as a celebrity endorser or salesmen of a particular product. In this case, the product was the emerging form of black Protestantism. Such advertisements helped to establish black preachers as icons and black Protestantism as a stalwart commodity in the twentieth century (see FIGURES 13-16).

[276]Sut Jhally, Image-Based Culture: Advertising and Popular Culture. In *Gender, Race and Class in Media: A Text Reader*, edited by G. D. J. M. Humez. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1995), 78; T.J. Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930," in *The Culture of Consumption in America: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*, edited by R. W. Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 19.

FIGURE 13

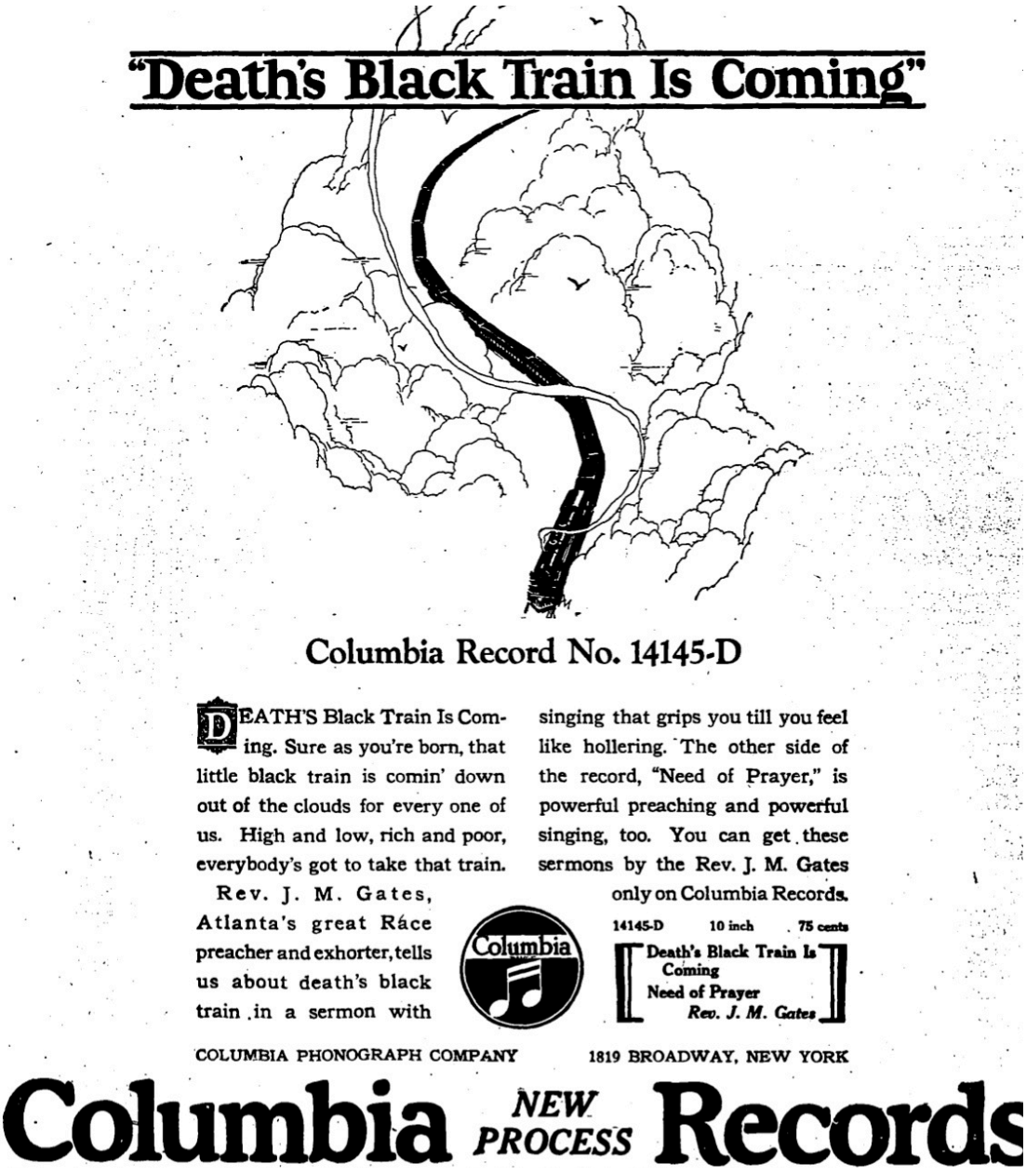


Source: *The Chicago Defender,* August 7,1926, Part 1, pg.7.

FIGURE 14

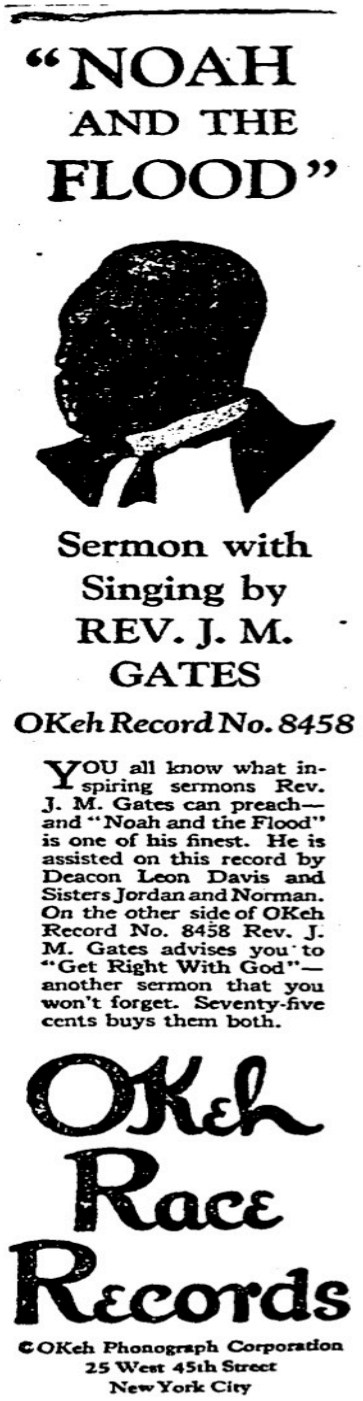
Source: *The Pittsburgh Courier,* August 7,1926, pg.6.

FIGURE 15



Source: *Chicago Defender,* August, 21,1926, pg.8.

FIGURE 16



Source: *Chicago Defender,* May 14, 1927, pg.6

Several of the advertisements also place the preacher side by side with other black celebrities. In fact, Gates enjoyed more print media exposure than several of his secular counterparts. These advertisements commercially placed Reverend Gates' image and name on par with the likes of jazz greats Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington; as well as blues icons Bessie Smith, Ethel Waters, and Sarah Martin. This placement of black preachers alongside race record artists, who enjoyed iconic status and public adulation, helped to further secure the place of black preachers as commercial celebrities and black Protestantism as a twentieth century commodity (see FIGURE 17 and 18).

FIGURE 17

Source: *New York Amsterdam News,* November 17, 1926, pg. 12.

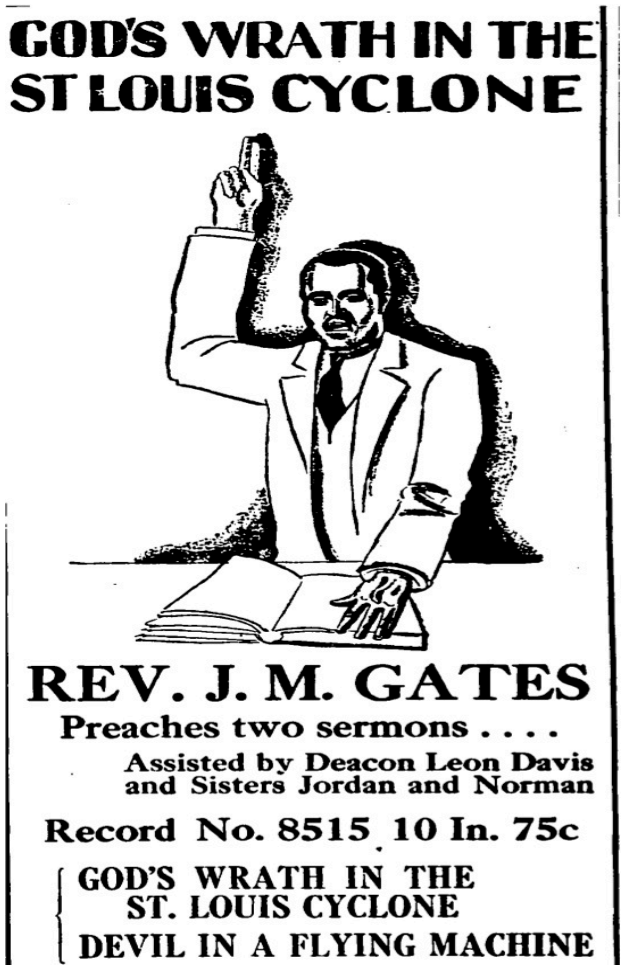
FIGURE 18

Source: *The Pittsburgh Courier,* Dec 24, 1927, pg.15.

In addition to the celebrity of black preachers and black Protestantism as a commodity, the advertisements also helped to establish black preachers as authoritative interpreters of morality and social values. Such advertisements aided black preachers in maintaining cultural authority in light of the rise of race record icons who rivaled such authority as discussed in chapter four. Several of Reverend Gates' advertisements depict the preacher as an attested interpreter of social events such as a natural disaster in St.

Louis and a moral and social authority regarding urban vice (see FIGURE 19). Therefore, his considerable presence in the black press, while not *Time* magazine, amounted to national exposure in black society and put him on par with several other "race" icons as a black celebrity.[277]

FIGURE 19



Source: *Chicago Defender,* November 26, 1927, pg.3.

[277]*Chicago Defender, August, 7,1926-November 15,1930.* A special thanks to Lance Ledbetter for providing me with materials that aided me in determining *Chicago Defender* advertising frequency of Race record artist like Reverend Gates; Foreman, "Jazz and Race Records, 1920-1932: Their Origins and Their Significance for the Record Industry and Society"., 137,182.

In addition to his advertisements, the black press also praised the preacher as a national celebrity. The *Chicago Defender* announced Reverend Gates' arrival to the city for the 1930 National Baptist Convention. Four years after his groundbreaking release of "Death's Black Train is Coming," The *Defender* lauded the preacher's arrival proclaiming, "Author of 'Death's Black Train' is Here!'" The newspaper went on to proclaim that while in Chicago, Gates "preached to record-breaking audiences at Friendship Church," and "The Metropolitan Church."[278] Gates' mass media ministry made the preacher a nationally recognized name in black Protestantism.

Black newspapers also made it a practice to publicize the preacher's national speaking events. *The Chicago Defender* advertised the preacher's Cincinnati, Ohio revival. The newspaper announced that the nationally known "leader in the field of song and gospel," would be "seen and heard" at the Peace Baptist Church beginning Monday February 12 through February 23, 1940.[279] *The Pittsburgh Courier* lauded the preacher's ability to appeal to wide audience. During a revival in Mobile, Alabama, the paper praised Gates for thoroughly impressing the crowds at Mobile's Delaware Street Baptist Church. The newspaper applauded Gates' preaching, adding that during his stay the commercial icon "won many souls for Christ and many friends for himself among both races."[280]

Gates' hometown black newspaper also paid tribute to his celebrity status. The *Atlanta Daily World* credited Reverend Gates with being "known all over the United States."[281] The paper declared the preachers superior status by stating "in his line of

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[278] "Author of 'Death's Black Train' Here," *The Chicago Defender,* Aug 30, 1930, pg.13.
[279] *The Chicago Defender*, Feb 3, 1940,pg.10.
[280] The Pittsburgh Courier (1911-1950); Jul 7, 1928, A3.
[281] The Atlanta Daily World, Dec 30, 1932, p.6A

work," Reverend Gates "has no peer as a sought for minister."[282] The newspaper referred to Gates as "the well-known Baptist minister who has been acclaimed throughout the nation for presentations over the radio and phonographic recordings."[283] One columnist summed up Gates' notoriety when he proudly boasted that he met the "stately and grand nationally known pastor" on the " 'Ave.' "[284] The local paper ran a picture of the preacher announcing the celebrity's return home from one of his urban revivals "after an absence of two weeks" from the city The preacher was returning from the National Baptist Convention in Cleveland, Ohio. After the convention, Gates made appearances across Ohio, including Cleveland, Akron, and two days at the largest church in the state, Reverend J.H. Burke's Columbus, OH congregation. The newspaper reported that Gates was so popular in Ohio that he had to decline an invitation from the city's black churches to stay for a three-month evangelical revival tour. [285]

[282] "What Sam Of Auburn Avenue Says," *Atlanta Daily World,* Jul 14, 1932, p6; Jun 11, 1934, p.6.
[283] "Being Installed," *Atlanta Daily World,* Mar 21,1937, p. 3. Other than this newspaper article, I have yet to find other evidence of Reverend Gates on the radio.
[284] "What Sam of Auburn Avenue Says," *Atlanta World,* Dec 13, 1931,8; "What Sam Of Auburn Avenue Says," *Atlanta Daily World,* Jul 14, 1932, pg.6.
[285] "Returns to City," *Atlanta Daily World,* Sep 25, 1932,4A.

FIGURE 20

Returns to City

Source: "Returns to City," *Atlanta Daily World,* Sep 25, 1932,4A.

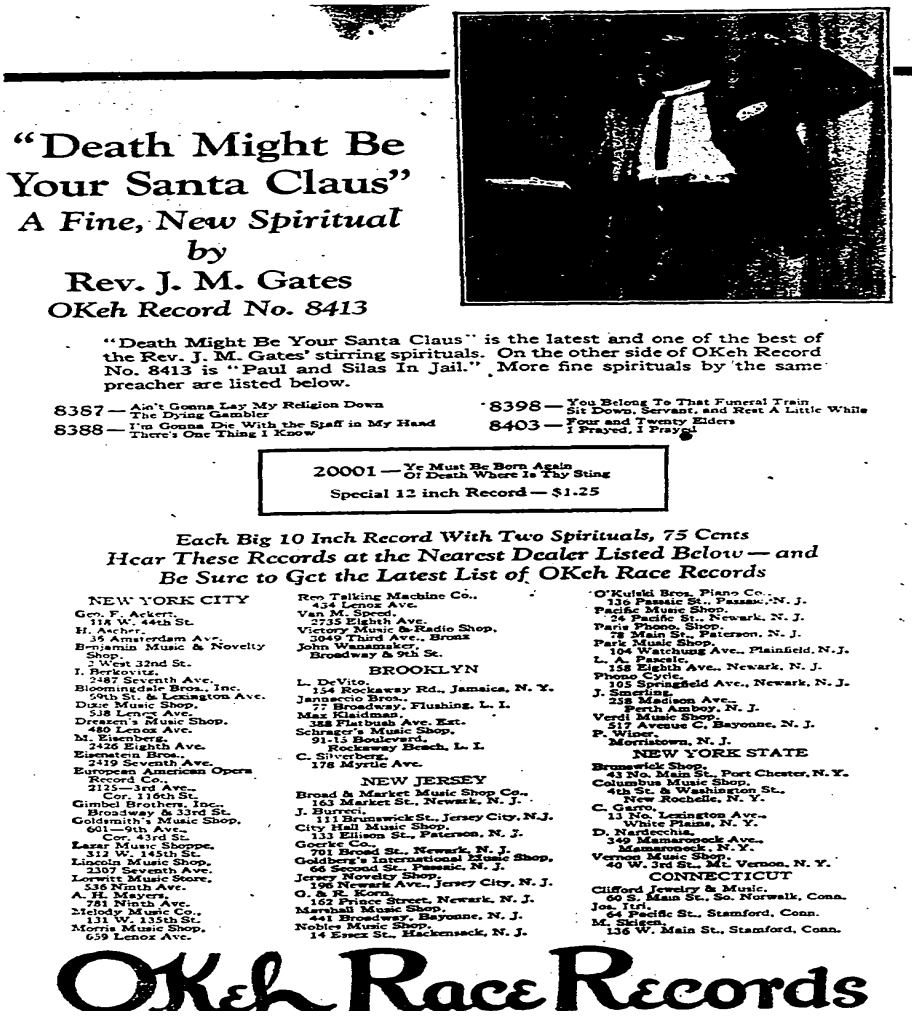
Reverend Gates' ministerial activities did not receive the same coverage as white religious celebrities or the often-caricatured coverage of black religious celebrities such as Father Divine or Daddy Grace. Nevertheless, the phonograph made the preacher nationally known. The mass medium transmitted the preacher's voice throughout the country, helping the demotic preacher to popularize new forms of black religious expression. Gates' commercial success, advertisements, and notoriety, at least in the black world, created a twentieth century commercial media celebrity.

Money

Recorded sermons made black Protestantism a lucrative twentieth century commodity. The prices of popular race records such as those by Reverend Gates ranged in price. Most of his sermons were featured on ten-inch disc and placed on the market for a retail price of seventy-five cents each. However, the preacher's career also included the rarities of twelve-inch recordings. While the standard ten-inch recording held about three minutes of recorded material, twelve-inch disc could hold three-and a half minutes of material. The twelve inch versions of " You Must Be Born Again" and "Oh Death, Where is Thy Sting?" were recorded for both Victor and Okeh in 1926 (see FIGURE 21). The special edition records were heavily marketed during the Christmas season. The "special" twelve-inch records were priced at $1.25 a piece, equal to the national average price of two-dozen eggs in December 1926.[286]

[286] Foreman, "Jazz and Race Records, 1920-1932: Their Origins and Their Significance for the Record Industry and Society"., 134, 194. Prices taken from Okeh advertisement found in the, *New York Amsterdam News,* Dec 08, 1926, p.13, col.1; Price of eggs in December 1926 can be found in United States Department of Commerce., *Statistical Abstract of the United States:1926*., 324.

FIGURE 21



Source: *New York Amsterdam News,* Dec 08, 1926, p.13, col.1.

For similar prices, fans of Reverend Gates could also purchase complementary merchandise as well. For example, the music publishing company QRS advertised the availability of its piano roll version of Gates' recording, "I'm Gonna Die with the Staff in My Hand," only months after Gates' release of the same title.[287]

[287] Foreman, "Jazz and Race Records, 1920-1932: Their Origins and Their Significance for the Record Industry and Society"., 194;

The financial value of these religious commodities in the 1920s can be assessed when compared to black wages. In 1918, the average hourly wage for manufacturing labor was fifty-three cents (fifty-eight cents in 1935) while skilled trade laborers made on average forty-five cents an hour (sixty-one cents in 1935). The purchase of a ten-inch seventy-five cent race record, then, was more than an hours wage and three times the price of a half-gallon of milk in the 1930s. Similarly, the purchase of a $1.25 twelve-inch race record amounted to more than two hours worth of wages for the average urban laborer.[288]

The seventy-five cent cost of recorded sermons was a particularly a substantial purchase for black urban residents in the south. By 1936, the median income for black families in Atlanta was $615 a year or $1.68 a day. These figures on black families in Atlanta can be misleading due to Atlanta's relatively large black middle class. In 1936, laborers headed 83% of black families in Atlanta. These families had a lower median income, making $476 annually, or approximately $1.30 a day. Subsequently, the purchase of a race record or recorded sermon was over half a day's income for black families.[289]

Despite this expenditure, recorded sermons enjoyed high sale volume. Subsequently the popularity of these religious commodities enabled Reverend Gates to

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[288] United States, *100 Years of U.S. Consumer Spending: Data for the Nation, New York City, and Boston*., Table 9, pg.17. I have provided prices for both 1918 and 1935 as way to accommodate and control for the inflation of WWI and the decrease in prices and wages during the Great Depression.

[289] Much of the financial income figures have been derived from various memoranda that were prepared for the Gunnar Myrdal study *An American Dilemma.* The memoranda are contained in, "Carnegie-Myrdal Study, the Negro in America Research Memoranda for Use in the Preparation of Dr. Gunnar Myrdal's *an American Dilemma*," (New York: 1940).. The figures used here can be found in the one of the published memoranda, see Richard Mauritz Edvard Sterner, Lenore A. Epstein, and Ellen Winston, *The Negro's Share; a Study of Income, Consumption, Housing and Public Assistance*(New York, London: Harper & brothers, 1943).,61-66, Appendix Table 21; Black labor family incomes derived from A.D.H. Kaplan, Faith M. Williams, and Jessue S. Bernard, *Family Income and Expenditure in the Southeastern Region, 1935-36*1939. Vol. 1:Family Income. pt. Bulletin No.647., 116.

live the life of the upwardly mobile. To be sure, Gates did not reach the income levels of other religious celebrities of the era i.e. Aimee Semple McPherson and Henry E. Fosdick, however, his income enabled him to live a life of public adulation and considerable luxury that socioeconomically positioned him among an elite class of African Americans. Exact figures of Reverend Gates compensation over the course of his long career are unknown. However, the compensation practices of the industry offer important details to the preacher's commercial compensation. The compensation of race record artists varied according to their contract, popularity, and longevity. Polk Brockman of Okeh and Frank Walker of Columbia both recalled that on their respective field trips, they usually recorded an artist once and most times did not compensate the artist at all. Walker recalled that many artists were content knowing that "They had made a phonograph record, and that was the next thing to being President of the United States in their minds."[290]

However, exclusive black artists who enjoyed repeated returns to the studio and high sells, enjoyed unprecedented compensation in relation to black entertainers. These artists possessed royalty agreements in conjunction with flat rate payments per release. Paramount race record executive J. Mayo Williams recalled that he paid his race record artist $25 to $50 in cash per title. However, in the heyday of 1920s, top selling exclusive artists received $75 to $200 per recorded side or $150 to $400 per record.[291]

Royalties helped many black artists to enjoy lifestyles of considerable luxury. Some artists received $.02 cent royalty agreements. The *Pittsburgh Courier* reported in

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[290] Wardlow, "Rev. D.C. Rice: Gospel Singer.";Seeger, ""Who Chose These Records" : Interview with Frank Walker on June 19,1962."; Brown, "Polk Brockman, Recording Pioneer."

[291] Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life : The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945*., 136; Tuuk, *Paramount's Rise and Fall: A History of the Wisconsin Chair Company and Its Recording Activities*.,62-68.

1928 that jazz pianists and songwriter Clarence Williams was receiving $10,000 to $15,000 a year in royalties, which "helped him buy that Lincoln Sedan he drives around Harlem" (In 1928 Lincoln's new vehicles raged in price from $4,200 to $7,200). Blues singer Victoria Spivey, who had an exclusive contract with Okeh, also had a royalty agreement and flat rate payment contract. Miss A.M. Kennard, the Advertising Manager at Okeh detailed that exclusive Okeh artists were offered down payments as well as $.01 to $.02 cents in royalty payments. Spivey's 1926 Okeh release "Black Snake Blues," sold 150,000 copies by late 1926. Spivey testified that her first royalty check from Okeh records was $5,000.[292]

Gates enjoyed the national celebrity and considerable compensation of his race record celebrity counterparts. *The Pittsburgh Courier* reported in 1928 that the mass media preacher "preached his way to wealth through the phonograph." His wealth included a signing bonus. Atlanta record dealer and Okeh southern talent scout Polk Brockman signed Gates to a contract in 1926 after learning that Columbia had failed to do so. Brockman, upon learning of Columbia's lack of foresight, quickly went to Reverend Gates' home on Fraser Street and signed the rising celebrity "for about $200." The signing bonus amounted to almost half the annual median income of black working class residents in Atlanta, or almost one-third of the average annual salary of white public

[292] Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life : The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945*., 136; See discussion of Alice Hunt and Bessie Smith in, Tuuk, *Paramount's Rise and Fall: A History of the Wisconsin Chair Company and Its Recording Activities*.,62-68; Wardlow, "Rev. D.C. Rice: Gospel Singer."; Floyd J. Calvin, "Spivey's Records Biggest Seller," *The Pittsburgh Courier,* Feb 25, 1928, A1; Anita Sheer and others, "Blues Galore: The Story of Victoria Spivey," *Record Research* 2, no. 8 (1956).,3; Car prices found in James H. Moloney and George H. Dammann, *Encyclopedia of American Cars, 1930-1942*, Crestline Auto Books(Glen Ellyn, Ill.: Crestline Pub., 1977).,213.

school teachers in Georgia. The handsome bonus alone catapulted Gates' up the black socioeconomic ladder.[293]

In addition to contract-based compensation, Gates also made money on flat rate payments for his recordings. Based on the flat rate payment figures detailed by Okeh Advertising Manager Ms. A.M. Kennard, Reverend Gates would have received approximately $75 for each of his some 220-recorded titles. According to these figures, the preacher would have made approximately $16,500 in flat rate payments over the course of his recording career from 1926-1941. In regards to royalties, The *Pittsburgh Courier* reported that Gates's 1927 Okeh recorded sermon " 'Will the Coffin Be Your Santa Claus?' brought the big royalty checks flying in."[294] At .02 cents a record, the royalty payments for his first two recorded sermons alone would have compensated him roughly $1,200. That is to say, the royalties from his first two sermons amounted to double the average yearly income of all black families in Atlanta. Gates had reached elite socioeconomic status among African Americans.[295]

Reverend Gates' commercial income made it possible for the preacher to enjoy several personal luxuries. The star enjoyed the rarity of car ownership and its associated social capital. In the 1930s only seventeen percent of Atlanta's black families possessed an automobile compared to sixty-three percent of Atlanta's white families. Gates automobile ownership placed him among the black elite in the city. Moreover, it enabled him to be more mobile than most of Atlanta's black residents. Gates' vehicle enabled

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[293] Foreman, "Jazz and Race Records, 1920-1932: Their Origins and Their Significance for the Record Industry and Society"., 160; United States Department of Commerce., *Statistical Abstract of the United States:1926*.,330,102.

[294] Floyd J. Calvin, "Spivey's Records Biggest Seller," *The Pittsburgh Courier,* Feb 25, 1928, A1

[295] Flat payment figures were derived based on the number of recorded, not released, titles found in Dixon and others, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*.. Royalty payments are based on the total number of copies ordered by Columbia for the sermons "Death's Black Train is Coming" and "I'm Going to Die with the Staff in my Hand."

him to travel with ease across the city from his new south side residence to Mount Calvary Baptist church on the northwest side of city. In addition, his vehicle enabled him easy access to mobility and transportation. This aided the celebrity preacher in reaching the various churches he simultaneously served across the growing metropolis. Moreover, his car enabled him to circumvent the Jim Crow laws of Atlanta's streets cars. In 1891, the Georgia legislature issued an ordinance mandating segregation on public transportation. The law regulated that blacks had to sit in designated seats in the rear of streetcars, even if the seats designated for whites were available. The law remained intact until 1959. Reverend Gates' car enabled the rising celebrity to escape this particular reminder of black second-class citizenship; a reality that even he, as a commercial success, was subject to.[296]

Not only did Gates enjoy the rarity of car ownership, he also drove a relatively elite car. One Atlanta reporter excitedly proclaimed witnessing Reverend Gates drive by in his luxury car. In the midst of the Great Depression, the commercial preacher was known to "glide" down Atlanta's famed Auburn Avenue in his shiny Hupmobile made by The Hupp Motor Car Company in Detroit, Michigan. Hupp boasted thirteen different models of Hupmobiles by 1930. These vehicles were noted for their relatively high speeds, plush mohair interior, and uniquely colored paint combinations. Hupp maintained a relatively exclusive clientele, ranking 17th in automotive sells right behind Cadillac, another luxury vehicle maker. In 1930, Hupmobiles ranged in price from $995

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[296] "What Sam Of Auburn Avenue Says", *Atlanta Daily World,* Jul 14, 1932, pg. 6; United States. Work Projects Administration. Georgia., *A Statistical Study of Certain Aspects of the Social and Economic Pattern of the City of Atlanta, Georgia, Official Project 465-34-3-4. 1939*([Atlanta]: 1939)., 92-93; Sterner, Epstein, and Winston, *The Negro's Share; a Study of Income, Consumption, Housing and Public Assistance*., 145-146; Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*.,99; Atlanta's streetcar segregation was particularly strictly enforced after the 1906 riot, see: Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*., 188.

for a two-passenger coupe to $2,145 for a seven passenger Phaeton. These prices were significantly higher than that of the more popular and affordable Chevrolet and The Ford Motor Company, the top two selling U.S. automobile brands in the 1930s. In 1930, Chevrolet's seven models were significantly cheaper than Hupp, ranging in price from $495 to $695. Ford produced twenty-three different models of vehicles, also substantially lower in price than Hupmobiles. Ford vehicles ranged in price from $430 to $1,200. The preacher's Hupmobile and its higher price tag, afforded him an accouterment of the black elite. Reverend Gates did not pastor one of Atlanta's elite establishment black churches on Auburn Avenue; but his commercial celebrity enabled him to traverse the famed avenue in exclusive luxury.[297]

In addition to his luxury vehicle, the commercial celebrity also belonged to the small minority of black families in Atlanta who enjoyed home ownership. Throughout the 1930s, only fifteen percent of black families in Atlanta owned their homes, compared to thirty-seven percent of whites. Gates' home was complete with a private garage for his prized Hupmobile as well as a fireplace where the preacher entertained reporters, friends, and parishioners. In addition, Gates also enjoyed the luxury of having phone service at his residence. His telephone ownership put him among an elite minority in his neighborhood where less than twenty-five percent of the households had home phone service during the Depression.[298]

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[297] "What Sam Of Auburn Avenue Says", *Atlanta Daily World;* Jul 14, 1932, pg. 6; The Hupmobile was produced from 1908 through the summer of 1940. On the cost of Hupmobiles see: *Standard Catalog of American Cars, 1805-1942*, 2nd Edition, Eds Beverly Rae Kimes et al, (Iola, Wisconsin: Krause Publications, 1989), 723-725; and Moloney and Dammann, *Encyclopedia of American Cars, 1930-1942*.,187-196.

[298] See, United States. Bureau of the Census. and Enumerator Mrs. Edward S. Wellons, *Fifteenth Census of the United States:1930-Population Schedule of Atlanta Ward 3*1930. Sheet No.3A.; On income see, Sterner, Epstein, and Winston, *The Negro's Share; a Study of Income, Consumption, Housing and Public Assistance*., Appendix Table 52; Kaplan, Williams, and Bernard, *Family Income and Expenditure in the*

Conclusion:

From his first recordings in Atlanta in April 1926 to his last on October 2, 1941 at Atlanta's Kimball Hotel, Reverend Gates recorded over 220 titles for twenty different record labels. His sermon production constitutes approximately a quarter of all recorded sermons released during the interwar period. [299] The preacher's prolific production helped to popularize the most distinguishing feature of black Protestantism during the migration era: the mixed type sermon. In addition, his production helped to establish black Protestantism a profitable commodity in the twentieth century.

Gates' commercial success established him as a black religious celebrity. His celebrity was buttressed by his consistent appearance in nationally circulated black newspapers. His appearance alongside the likes of Ethel Waters, Duke Ellington, and Victoria Spivey made the preacher a race icon. His climb from a small town laborer to black elite socioeconomic status, in many ways, epitomizes the dreams of many urban migrants. Urban America offered black migrants unprecedented economic, social, and educational opportunity. Gates took advantage of them all and re-created his life.

In addition to epitomizing the journey of a black urban migrant, Gates' sermons exemplify black working and migrant class sentiments of life and culture during the interwar period. Accordingly, the content of these black religious commodities are under-utilized data for understanding black Protestantism and black consumer culture

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Southeastern Region, 1935-36., 95, Table 67; *Atlanta Daily World,* Dec 30, 1932, 6A; *Atlanta City Directory,* 1939; On Telephone service statistics see, United States. Work Projects Administration. Georgia., *A Statistical Study of Certain Aspects of the Social and Economic Pattern of the City of Atlanta, Georgia, Official Project 465-34-3-4. 1939*., 82-83; Home construction information found in ProQuest Information and Learning Company. and Sanborn Map Company., "Digital Sanborn Maps, 1867-1970. Georgia.", 1932 Vol. 3 Sheet #351.

[299] Dixon and others, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*., 287-294; Foreman, "Jazz and Race Records, 1920-1932: Their Origins and Their Significance for the Record Industry and Society"., 134, 194; Oliver, *Songsters and Saints : Vocal Traditions on Race Records*., 140-145; 160, 280. Some of the Reverend Gates' sermon titles were repeated, however, the repeated titles were recorded on different labels.

during the interwar period.

CHAPTER SEVEN: "IT'S TIGHT LIKE THAT": ANALYZING THE RECORDED SERMONS OF REVEREND J.M. GATES

The commercial sermons of J.M. Gates provide an audible archive that elucidates black life, black Protestantism, and the relationship between black cultural production and consumer capitalism during the interwar period. The commodification of black Protestant sermons during the Great Migration propelled the religious discourses of working class preachers such as Reverend Gates' into popular culture. These popular culture articulations reveal much about black life in the early twentieth century. Lawrence Levine has encouraged historians "to explore the degree to which popular culture functions in ways similar to folk culture and acts as a form of folklore for people living in urban industrial societies, and can thus be used to reconstruct people's attitudes, values, and reactions." In this regard, Gates' commodified sermons constitute underutilized resources for reconstructing aspects of African American Protestantism and culture during the interwar period.[300]

In particular, phonograph sermons give voice to how black Protestant expressions and practices were altered by modernity and urbanization. As discussed previously, mixed-type sermons—homiletical discourses aimed at appealing to both the intellect and emotions—grew to popularity during the Great Migration. A host of Reverend Gates sermons adhere to the popular form, allowing the listener to hear and experience popular black Protestant expression during the interwar period. In addition to their aesthetic import, Reverend Gates' recorded sermons provide insight into black Protestant thought and attitudes during the interwar period. Several of his sermons address current events

[300] Lawrence W. Levine, "The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences," *The American Historical Review* 97, no. 5 (1992)..

such as President Roosevelt and the New Deal. Furthermore, the recorded sermons also speak to issues of racial segregation, gender, class, and amusement. In this regard, the content of his recorded sermons are lesser-known sources for understanding black Protestantism during the interwar period.

Reverend Gates' corpus also illuminates aspects of the relationship between religious commodification and the consumer marketplace. As discussed in the last chapter, Gates became a celebrity and occupied a significant media presence in black life. His successful and prolific career was a result of his appeal in the marketplace and the profitability for record labels. This unprecedented success in the commercial market place raises questions concerning the influence of the record industry, the marketplace, and profit upon commercial religious discourses and practices. The dialectic between Gates' popularity and marketplace dynamics is particularly evident when inspecting the ways the preacher dealt with the topics of amusement, gender, race, and current events.[301]

Reverend Gates and Commercial Amusement

Reverend Gates's corpus reveals the continued tradition of Black Protestant churches attempting to be the center of amusement in black life as well influence the commercial amusement marketplace in the process. The preacher recorded several comedy skits. These orchestrated parodies made it possible for black preachers to remain purveyors of amusement, as well as exist as a competitive product in the black commercial entertainment market during the Great Migration. These skits included serial characters and were formatted after popular skit comedy programs.

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[301] Brendt Ostendorf, "Ethnicty and Popular Music," in *Exeter Conference on Popular Music*(Exeter University, UK: International Association for the Study of Popular Music, 1982). Box 1, Paul Oliver Collection of African American Music and Related Traditions, University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham, UK.

The skit comedy of vaudeville variety shows and radio programs, or what religion scholar Jonathan Walton refers to as "Vaudeville Inspired Radio," were some of the most popular forms of mass entertainment. From its first radio broadcast on January 12, 1926, the serial sketch comedy program "Amos and Andy" was the most popular radio show in the country. The nightly show, featuring two white actors in black caricature, remained a top ten program for over two decades before being televised. Every radio episode was pre-recorded on phonograph records, distributed to other radio stations, and simultaneously broadcasted on seventy radio stations throughout the nation—making it the first syndicated radio program in American history. During its height, department stores and movie theatres found it necessary to transmit the show through their public announcement systems. The program defined the format of every serial program that followed it and established serial comedy as one of the most popular forms of mass media entertainment.[302]

Gates's amusement skits followed this popular serial format. The recordings were primarily scripted comedy based on church life. For example, in parts one and two of

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[302] For more information on Amos and Andy and recorded sermons see Walton, *Watch This! The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism*.,40; *Amos 'n' Andy* premiered as *Sam n' Henry* on Chicago's WGN network only to move to the city's WMAQ as *Amos 'n' Andy* on March 19, 1928. To be sure, one reason Amos and Andy enjoyed such popularity was for its capitulation and promotion of stereotypical depictions of African Americans that were rooted in minstrelsy. However, the show was also popular with a good portion of African Americans. The black newspaper *The Pittsburgh Courier*, tried unsuccessful to mount a national boycott of the show. However, the boycott did not receive significant attention and support to thwart the shows popularity among many African Americans. The shows popularity launched a host of other serial programs on radio and television. On Amos and Andy see, Elizabeth McLeod, *The Original Amos 'N' Andy : Freeman Gosden, Charles Correll, and the 1928-1943 Radio Serial*(Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2005).; *Amos 'n' Andy -- In Person: An Overview of a Radio Landmark, http://www.midcoast.com/~lizmcl/aa.html, accessed* Nov.11, 2010; Norman W. Spauling, "History of Black Oriented Radio in Chicago, 1929-1963" (Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1981)., 30; Robin R. Means Coleman, *African American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy : Situating Racial Humor*, Studies in African American History and Culture(New York: Garland Pub., 1998).; Barbara Dianne Savage, *Broadcasting Freedom : Radio, War, and the Politics of Race, 1938-1948*, The John Hope Franklin Series in African American History & Culture(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999)..

1928's "Deacon Board Meeting," Reverend Gates and his cast of serial characters—Deacon Davis, Sister Norman, and Sister Jordan—recreate the scene of a meeting of deacons in a small church. In part one, the preacher opens the meeting by leading the group in signing the hymn "There is a Cross For Me." Next, Gates addresses the chairman of the deacon board and raises charges against two women of the church for "not speaking" and for being out late at night past "12:30am." Using Robert's Rules of Order, the charges are affirmed. In part two, the comedic relief is delivered. The chairman of the deacon board announces the charges of "not speaking and being out late at night" against "Sisters Jordan and Norman." The women confirm that they were not speaking. The women make amends to which Sister Norman adds the caveat that she will reconcile with sister Jordan if she "stay sick or die, but," Sister Norman continued, "if I get well," the relationship will continue along the lines of hostility. After much murmuring, Reverend Gates as the moderator promptly rules the comment out. The meeting promptly turns to the charge of the women "being out late," to which both of the women adamantly deny. Deacon Davis confesses to meeting the women in Atlanta's "Darktown" after departing a place of questionable morality. He states to the Deacon board that he feels that nobody who belongs to their church should be out that late. Based on his after hour's confession, the deacon board comically and ironically approves the motion to remove Deacon Davis, not the women, from the church. As the congregation sings "There is Rest for the Weary," Deacon Davis is heard contesting his removal from the church, as his voice grows continually faint as he is being escorted out of the "church". Deacon Davis appeals his removal based on his service to the deacon board. Reverend Gates takes a breath from signing to proclaim, "Don't make no

difference," only to return to signing.[303] The comedic entertainment lies in Deacon Davis' tactics backfiring leading to his own ex-communication from the church.

In another parody, "Clean the Corners of Your Mind," Gates lectures his congregation on the harmful nature of being superstitious. Recorded in Atlanta on Friday April 25, 1930, the skit serves as another example of how Reverend Gates used comedy and amusement to continue to sell records, particularly during the Great Depression era. On the recording, the iconic pastor gets himself in trouble with his congregation when he states that he witnessed a woman wearing a dime around her leg for good luck. Playing off the stereotype of the philandering minister, the woman responds to Gates, "How you know I had a dime 'round my leg?" The preacher quickly responds to the charge, "Oh I seen it, I have eyes, I have a right to look out of my eyes, that's why!" With the congregation eagerly playing along, the woman pretends to abstain from her charges by stating, "Oh well I didn't mean anything, I just had the dime tied pretty high up and I just wonder how you seen it?" The skit parodies notions of sexual promiscuity among black clergy—a common topic of race record artists as well as black comedians.[304]

The "Dead Cat on the Line" recording series was perhaps Reverend Gates' most successful comedic skit. The skit uses rural black vernacular and double meaning to entertain listeners. The phrase "Dead Cat on the Line" is believed to have its roots and origins in the practice of using the baited hooks of a trotline to catch catfish. Fishermen were known to check the trotline regularly. If a fellow fisherman noticed a dead catfish on another's line, she would be immediately alerted that something peculiar is occurring. For some reason her neighbor had not been regularly tending her trotline therefore

[303] Okeh 8730.
[304] Okeh 8817.

"something is fishy." Joseph "Jody" L. Powell, Jr., Georgia native and Press Secretary for President Jimmy Carter, offered another fishing explanation of the popular phrase. Powell stated that in the South it was a practice to disregard unwanted kittens by placing them in a brown bag before throwing them in a body of water. He continued, "Now if you were out there fishing in a creek, and you got something heavy on the line, you hoped you had a fish—but then you pulled it up, and all you had was a dead cat on your line. It meant a disappointment, a letdown, something that wasn't what it was suppose to be."[305]

In Atlanta on March 18,1929, Reverend Gates recorded "Dead Cat on the Line." The recorded comedy skit was the first commercial recording of the popular rural colloquialism. Gates ability to use a popular multivalent colloquialism in the pulpit for entertainment purposes proved very successful. He begins the skit "Ah I want to preach to you on this subject: if a child is in no way like it's father, 'There's a dead cat on the line.' " The preacher uses the story of a dead cat on a telegraph wire prohibiting messages from being carried over the wire to illustrate his sermon on infidelity and illegitimate children. The choreographed skit continues with Gates questioning members of his "congregation" regarding the legitimacy of their children. Sister Jordan replies to Gates inquiry by stating, "Well, uh, you asking me too much of my business right here in company, you come to my house and I'll tell you all about it." Reverend Gates quickly offers the comedic reply, "Well, ahhh, I didn't go down to your house before the children was born, and I don't have to go down there now!" The outlandish advertisement for the

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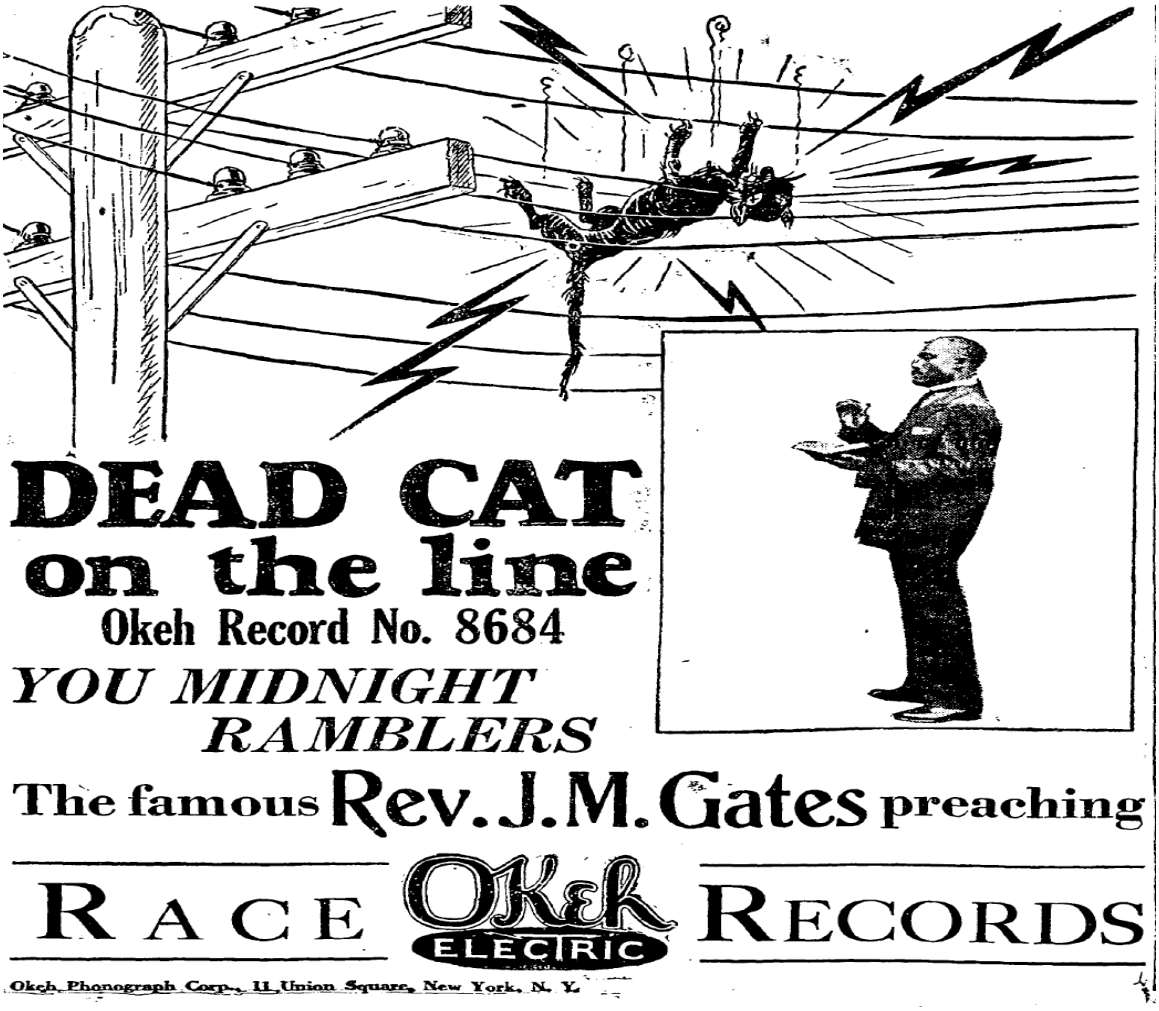
[305] Paul Oliver, "A Dead Cat on the Line," in *Saints and Sinners: Religion, Blues, and (D)evil in African-American Music and Literature: Proceedings of the Conference held at the Universite´ de Liege, October 1991*, ed. R. Sacre(The Universite´ de Liege Society of Musicology, 1996)., 207-208. Oliver's piece offers a broad overview of the idiom "Dead Cat on the Line," and its meaning and appearance on recorded sermons and African American musical expression.

sermon, which features a black cat being electrocuted on a telephone wire, furthers the comedic aim of the recording.[306] (See FIGURE 22)

FIGURE 22



Source: The Chicago Defender, Jul 13, 1929, pg.2.

"Dead Cat on the Line," might have been the most popular thematic idiom of all recorded sermons. The popularity of the sermon led to several competing versions of the sermon as well as blues songs. Several preachers used the theme to record sermons within a year of Gates's recording. Reverend M.H. Holt of Memphis recorded "Live Cat

[306] "Dead Cat on the Line," Okeh 8684.

on the Line," on May 26, 1930. Reverend F.W. McGee, an urban migrant to Chicago recorded his own version of "Dead Cat on the Line" in Chicago on January 28,1930. His version gave the phrase a more religious meaning. McGee used the phrase to refer to Christians not resembling God and added, "Now that's no Joke!" However, McGee's version did not have the popularity of Reverend Gates.[307] The popularity of Gates's "Dead Cat…" sermons also influenced Blues culture. Tampa Red and Thomas "Georgia Tom" Dorsey, who would become the "father" of Gospel of music, recorded a song along the same name. The blues duo used Gates' "Dead Cat on the Line," to record their own "Dead Cats on the Line," for Vocalion records in New York City on February 4, 1932.[308] The Atlanta preacher's ability to entertain and amuse from the pulpit contributed to his continued success and popularity in black cultural production.

Gates responded to Reverend McGee's "Dead Cat" within three months, recording "Dead Cat on the Line No. 2," in Atlanta on April 23,1930. Gates continued his diatribe concerning why children should favor their fathers' in some form or fashion. He avoided any explicit theological reference, but instead persisted with his entertainment motif. In this version, the congregation argues and begins to expose one another's activities and actions regarding their respective children. Even Reverend Gates fails to hold his laughter on this title. The preacher corrects a congregation member for stating that an illegitimate child is the result of a "slip up." Gates states, "Yeah, well it wasn't just a slip up; it was a slip down! Yes sir I believe that, it was a slip down!"[309] After a four-year hiatus from recording, Reverend Gates returned to the studio. Given the popularity of the "Dead Cat"

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[307] Reverend F.W. McGee, Victor V38579; Reverend M.H. Holt, Victor V38604; Oliver, "A Dead Cat on the Line.", 200-201.
[308] For a broad overview of the idiom "Dead Cat on the Line," and its meaning and appearance on recorded sermons and music see, Oliver, "A Dead Cat on the Line.",
[309] Reverend J.M. Gates, "Dead Cat on the Line No.2," Okeh 8799; Oliver, "A Dead Cat on the Line.",201.

theme, Gates recorded, "New Dead Cat on the Line," on Thursday August 2, 1934. In this sermon, Gates inquires with his congregation concerning what constitutes a case of a "dead cat on the line." When he inquires with one woman, she responds, "You needn't be hintin' at me…now you can stop that right there!" To which Gates accusatorily and teasingly replies, "Ah…you want me to stop cause there's a dead cat on the line, that's all!"[310]

Utilizing the format of popular entertainment became a hallmark of religious mass media. Joel Carpenter has stated that white radio evangelists constructed their program formats after the popular "radio variety shows and patriotic musical revues" of the day.[311] Orienting religious broadcasting for amusement helped mass media religious entrepreneurs to gain and maintain popularity. Reverend Gates' assortment of serial sketch comedy warranted the preache's repeated returns to the recording studio, as well as his celebrity status in black life. Furthermore, his amusement practices aided the preacher in remaining competitive in the black commercial amusement marketplace.

Gender

Religious historian Wallace Best has argued that the Great Migration and modernity altered the social construction of gender in black Protestant faith communities. One result of this transformation was the increase in black women clergy, and religious media reflected this change. Clergy such as Leora Ross, Mother Rose Horne, and Elder Lucy Smith all used mass media to transmit their ministries during the interwar period.

Several of Gates' sermons reveal anxiety regarding these shifting notions of gender in black life. Reverend Gates' sermons offer the scholar of American religion

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[310] Reverend Gates, Blue Bird B5627.
[311] Carpenter, *Revive Us Again : The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism*.,168

new data for understanding how the Great Migration and modernity altered and challenged normative social construction of gender in black life. In the midst of these changes, Reverend Gates, with the encouragement of the women in his congregation, emphatically maintained certain sociological notions of gender based on biological differences.

The cornerstone of his corpus on gender is the antiphonal sermon "Mannish Women." The sermon was recorded in New Orleans on Monday December 16, 1929 (approximately the same time that Gates and his first wife Nellie divorced). The sermon details how the preacher believes that certain attire and activities are exclusive to the sexes. Starting slowly, Gates accuses the women of his day of being mannish because they are "trying to do everything they see or hear of a man doin'." He elucidates the charges by stating, "They are on the race track, and they're in the air in the airplane." After detailing the charges that involve spaces and occupations, he moves to attire and appearance. "They are mannish women, and they're wearing pants! And cutting their hair like a man, In fact,"he continues, "they're getting so mannish until sometimes they try to walk and talk like man." Reverend Gates then parenthetically offers a brief commentary on male behavior by stating, "Now of course we got some men trying to walk and talk like a woman, but I'm talking bout these mannish women!" After his slow start, Reverend Gates speeds up the cadence of the sermon and closes the sermon with a series of refrains, introducing each with the words "So mannish" followed by an accusation; for example 'So Manish, they stay out late at night as any man. So Manish, they try to rob and steal like men—you hear about them being Bank robbers." Gates draws the conclusion that what makes women so manish is that they "Won't raise their children!"

Adding that manish women are "getting everywhere, getting in the course house, getting in the church, every auxiliary of the church."[312] The preacher vehemently opposed the changing of gender dynamics in black life. The sermon gives voice to the anxieties and transformations black Protestantism and black culture underwent during the interwar period.

[312] "Manish Women," Okeh 9779; "Hell Without Fire," Atlanta, Wednesday August 23,1939, Blue Bird B8256, Montgomery Ward 8537. On divorce, see Bureau of the Census. United States. and Enumerator Mrs. Edward S. Wellons, *Fifteenth Census of the United States:1930-Population Schedule of Atlanta Ward 3*1930. Sheet No.3A. *Atlanta City Directory,* 1929,1930,1931.

FIGURE 23

Source: "Manish Women" advertisement found in *The Chicago Defender,* May 10, 1930, pg.2.

In his sermon "Smoking Women in the Street," Gates expresses concern about women's public conduct and their responsibility of uplifting "the race." In the sermon, Gates states that men are "…not looking for a wife with a cigarette in her hand on the street…your lowering the dignity of your race." Gates' comments are reminiscent to the

National Association of Colored Women's mantra of "A race can rise no higher than its women." For the preacher, such inappropriate behavior frustrates efforts of black respect and dignity.[314] The sermon continues its diatribe against women, blaming women for creating gender chaos. "Your trying your best to look and be as much like a man as possible." He states that since women are becoming so masculine, "Men are trying to change, I find now men wearing pants with more pleats in their pants than women have in their skirts."[315] Again, the preacher's sermon offers insight into the anxieties surrounding how urban migration was changing gender roles in black communities.

Current Events

Reverend Gates' sermons were also very attentive to current events that were relevant to black life. The sermons offer further insight into the black working class and migrant life during the interwar period. Gates' willingness to use sermons and skits to tackle contemporary social problems contributed to his popularity. His current event sermons benefited from the phonograph's established status as a medium through which listeners might stay abreast of recent events, trends, and cultural shifts. High rates of African Americans illiteracy further solidified the place of electronic media as sources of information during the interwar period.[316]

Gates recorded several titles regarding the Great Depression despite the circumscribed recording of the Depression era. According to a national study conducted

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[314] On National Association of Colored Women, see both White, *Too Heavy a Load : Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*.; Deborah Gray White, "Race and Feminism," in Thomas C. Holt and Elsa Barkley Brown, *Major Problems in African-American History : Documents and Essays*, 1st ed., 2 vols., Major Problems in American History Series, vol. 2 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000)..

[315] "Smoking Woman in the Street," Atlanta, Wednesday, August 23, 1939 Blue Bird B8301, Montgomery Ward M8538; "Scat to the Cat and Suie to the Hog," Atlanta Friday, April 25,1930, Okeh 8844;; For the relationship of Black women's public conduct and Black Protestant religion in the early twentieth century see, Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent : The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*..

[316] Seeger, ""Who Chose These Records" : Interview with Frank Walker on June 19,1962."

during the Depression, Gates' willingness to directly address the Depression in his sermons was rare among black Protestant preachers during the Great Depression. In their national study of black Protestant Churches, *The Negro's Church*, Benjamin E. Mays and Joseph Nicholson found that few sermons directly addressed the Great Depression as the primary social issue of the day. To analyze the messages of black Protestant churches, Mays and Nicholson collected 100 sermons from across the country between September 1930 and November 1931. Their study found that only six sermons made any direct reference to the Great Depression. Moreover, they concluded that most of these references were incidental statements that were ill-informed.[317]

Reverend Gates recorded several titles directly addressing the Great Depression and President Roosevelt's response to the Depression.[318] In Atlanta on Friday December 12, 1930 he recorded "Tight Like That." This recording was a direct riff of Thomas "Georgia Tom" Dorsey, who would later become the "father" of Gospel music, and Tampa Red's 1928 sexually laced blues hit "It's Tight Like That." Gates' used the popular title and colloquialism to record an antiphonal sermon and staged conversation between he and a few members of his congregation. His words in the recording detail the hardships of black working class life during the Depression. He states:

> "…These hard times are tight like that…You haven't got the money to throw away like you used to…Ah your house rent is due, and nothing to pay with. And not only your house rent is due, but you have nothing to eat. Its tight like that…Mmm, and grocery bill is unpaid…Yeah and the boss man is driving his own car. No

[317] Mays and Nicholson, *The Negro's Church*., 85. This is a valuable resource in gaining a snapshot of African American Protestantism during the Depression era. However, while the study includes twelve urban cities in the south and north, the study ironically does not include New York City. The inclusion of NYC could have significantly changed the data and findings of their national study.

[318] For a thorough study on Black Gospel and Blues songs during the Depression era including a few recorded sermons see, Rijn, *Roosevelt's Blues : African-American Blues and Gospel Songs on Fdr*..

chauffeur now…Yeah everybody is doin their own cookin and washin now…[319] Gates' comments reflect his understanding of working class black life. His background as a laborer allotted him insight into the nature of black working class struggles. His understanding of how the Depression affected black domestic workers was influenced by his time in Summer Hill, particularly when he lived in the Black working class neighborhood on Martin Street. Moreover, Reverend Gates knew firsthand how the Depression affected blacks that served as chauffeurs for white families. Sam Smith, a private chauffer, was a boarder in the preacher's house on Fraser Street when the sermon was recorded.[320]

On Wednesday August 1, 1934 Gates recorded "President Roosevelt is Everybody's Friend" and "No Bread Line in Heaven." "President Roosevelt is Everybody's Friend" is a passionate antiphonal sermon in praise of President Roosevelt and his polices. Reverend Gates posits that God has provided for African Americans through President Roosevelt. He states in the sermon that although he is "a half a century of age "…never have I witnessed, never have I read in history of a man greater than our President Roosevelt!...He is a man that believes in equal rights for all!" Gates closes the sermon praising President Roosevelt and the New Deal while his congregation shouts in agreement. He proclaims:

> "He's our President! I used to say, "the president," "a president," But when I say "Our President," I'm talking about a man that has been touchin everybody! CWA (Civil Works Administration), look at it if you please…Have they given you a job, brother? Haven't you had a job! Didn't they make it possible for you? Have you

[319]Rijn, *Roosevelt's Blues : African-American Blues and Gospel Songs on Fdr*., 20-22. "These Hard Times are Tight Like That," Okeh 8850, Gates., Vol.8. All sermon lyrics are taking from listening to the sermons found in this Document Records nine-volume collection of Reverend Gates' sermon.
[320] United States. Bureau of the Census. and Mrs. Edward S. Wellons, *Fifteenth Census of the United States:1930-Population Schedule of Atlanta Ward 3*..

> worked five days in a week, brother? Have you been in the office Daughter? It was through the CWA, and it was our own President!"[321]

Reverend Gates's sermon provides insight into his willingness to address contemporary social issues. In addition, his sermon is an audible historical artifact that provides insight into black political sentiments in Atlanta during the Depression, particularly in regards to the New Deal. The New Deal marked the first time the federal government pinpointed poverty in Georgia as a social problem. The Civil Works Administration (CWA) was one of President Roosevelt's New Deal programs that helped to alleviate Black unemployment. By January 1934, the CWA employed 4.2 million people, including 50,000 teachers and 3,000 writers and artists. Other jobs resulted from the construction of 500,000 miles of roads, 40,000 schools, and 3,000 playgrounds and athletic field. The CWA work relief programs helped to alleviate black unemployment. In Atlanta, CWA work projects included rodent control to combat outbreaks of typhus, school renovations, lunch programs for poor children, domestic training programs, daycares, and recreation and public health services. Despite the creation of countless jobs and public services for Atlanta's black residents, the CWA has its historical critics. Southern historian Karen Ferguson states in her book *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta* that programs such as the CWA "did little to overturn the existing economic rules that governed the lives of the city's poorest group, African Americans…Relief programs offered all but a handful of Black workers nothing but unskilled labor" and low wages. To be sure, this structural critique is historically warranted. The New Deal did not confront Jim Crow laws nor address black civil and human rights in the south. However, Reverend Gates affinity for FDR and the CWA offer a contemporary perspective of how the work relief programs

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[321] Rijn, *Roosevelt's Blues : African-American Blues and Gospel Songs on Fdr*., 97-98. Blue Bird B5600

were embraced by urban migrants and members of the black working class in Atlanta.[322]

Gates's sermon, "No Bread Line in Heaven" further attests to how his black working class congregation viewed Roosevelt and the New Deal. The recording is a mix of Reverend Gates spirited proclamation interspersed with testimonies from his congregation witnessing to how they have benefitted from the New Deal. the preacher uses his extensive preaching travels to tell his congregation:

> "When I was walkin through the streets of Philadelphia, I saw a long line, in the breadline. And over in Columbus, Ohio, in the breadline. Atlanta, Georgia, in the breadline…But there's no breadline in heaven. There's no breadline in heaven and God has fixed it so that you can eat bread here. I believe I can get a witness!"

Members of the congregation offer personal testimonies detailing how FDR and his policies have fed, clothed, employed, and provided shelter. Reverend Gates repeatedly responds to his congregation's testimonies that FDR is God's instrument of relief. He states, "Through our president…God has made it possible…And it is God workin through him and not human stuff, it is God usin' him…God answered prayer and worked it out through the programs."[323] With all of its shortcomings, Gates and the members of his congregation embraced the New Deal as the work and provision of God.

In his very last recording session, Gates covered the topic of war. From Atlanta's Kimball Hotel on Thursday October 2, 1941 Gates recorded six titles including "Hitler and Hell" and "When the War is Over." In his mixed-type sermon "Hitler and Hell," recorded almost exactly two months before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Reverend Gates repeatedly warns The Fuhrer, "Hitler, you must come down! You're too high! There is only one God!" Encouraged by the audible affirmations of some of his congregation

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[322] Rijn, *Roosevelt's Blues : African-American Blues and Gospel Songs on Fdr*., 69; Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*., 120.
[323] Rijn, *Roosevelt's Blues : African-American Blues and Gospel Songs on Fdr*., 70-71; Blue Bird B5600.

members in the studio, Reverend Gates uses an insightful array of metaphors to describe and admonish the dictator. To allude to Hitler's purported reckless persona, Gates states that Hitler is "a man who lives in a storm!" Gates chastises Hitler for the casualties of war stating, "I'm sayin to you as you sit back in your easy chair, while men is dying on the battlefield!" Gates goes on to state that "innocent children and women dyin all over the land and country as you come crushin through like the demon of hell on earth!" Gates closes his fiery sermon by offering a vivid metaphor of the fall of Hitler as the absolute dictator and arbiter of knowledge in Germany. He warns the dictator on the final ten seconds of the recording, "You is a standin' library for your peoples in Germany. You is a walkin and talking encyclopedia for your people in Germany. You must come down!"[324]

On the B side of "Hitler and Hell" is Gates' mixed-type sermon, "When the War is Over." He states, "Pick up the newspaper, its war! Wartime! War all over! War is in everything! War in politics! War in the social world! War in The Church!" After detailing the pervasive nature of conflict and war and the pain and suffering it brings, Reverend Gates closes his sermon with a hopeful picture of life after "the war is over." "I'm talking bout when the smoke has been cleared from the battlefield, I'm talking about when husbands shall meet wives, and when sons shall meet mothers…No more!" Gates continues, "drenching our pillows with midnight tears! No more! Being worried about the war! When the war is over!"[325]

In addition, to gender, politics, and war; Reverend Gates also preached several sermons that addressed race in America. In his sermon "Somebody's Been Stealing,"

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[324] Rijn, *Roosevelt's Blues : African-American Blues and Gospel Songs on Fdr*., 172; Blue Bird B8851
[325] Blue Bird B8851.

Reverend Gates makes passing and almost veiled references to slavery, miscegenation, and racial pride. The sermon was recorded in Atlanta on Monday February 20, 1928. In take one of the sermon, Reverend Gates states,

> Somebody has been stealin', either psychological, or philosophically, or intellectually Ah! Or they've just been stealin. Somebody has been stealin. Well when I think about Africa, in the dark jungles, when the Negro race landed in this country, everybody was Black, white teeth, broad fingernails, and nappy hair. But since that time, we've got straight hair, blue eyes, grey eyes, Somebody's been stealin. And well it wasn't me! It wasn't me brother. Somebody been stealin. I'm satisfied in my race. I'm satisfied to be Black![326]

In take three of the sermon, Gates restates his veiled indictments on slavery and miscegenation, but abstains from his statement of racial pride. He states:

> "Somebody's been stealin and somebody's is wrong!" "I'm the grandson of an old man who left the dark jungles of Africa, sixteen years of age and was brought to this country…they tell me that a negro, ah they tell me that his fingernails are broad, and his lips are red and his teeth are white, and hair is kinky! Ah if that be true, since that time somebody's been stealin, I don't know just who is was, but somebody's been stealin… Somebody's been stealin…and and and it wasn't me! But whoever did the stealin is wrong! Somebody's wrong![327]

The following year, the preacher makes explicit comments about the paradoxical nature of race in America in his sermon "Straining at a Gnat and Swallowing a Camel." The sermon was recorded in Atlanta on Monday March 18, 1929. Gates uses the Biblical hyperbolic statement accredited to Jesus to point out the ironic and hypocritical relationship between racism, Jim Crow, black domestic servants. He particularly focuses on the paradox of the ways in which Jim Crow maintained two separate yet intersecting white and black worlds. He begins his sermon by stating, "Ah, I want to speak to you peoples from this subject, since we have a mixed congregation, straining at a gnat and

[326] Blue Bird BB B7936.
[327] Victor 21281

swallowing a camel." Accompanied by a host of "amens" and "Preach!" Reverend Gates expounds to his white listeners,

> "…You, you Negro haters, you that can't sit with him on the streetcar, you that can't eat ah at the same table with him, you, I'm talking bout you, you that can't sit in your own automobile with him, ah I tell ya what you can do. You can eat what they cook, you can sleep ah in their bed, you can let them drive your car why you sit in the rear, ah he has your life in his hands! You straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel. Hmm? You straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel![328]

The preacher adamantly opposed the second-class citizenship of blacks and the hypocritical taboo rules of race relations in the Jim Crow south.

Reverend Gates' recounting of The Baptist World Alliance meeting in Atlanta also addressed race. The international meeting began on July 22, 1939 in Atlanta, GA. The meeting garnered significant media attention due to both its size and racial climate. The international meeting hosted over 10,000 delegates from around the world. At the meeting, British minister and Baptist World Alliance Secretary, Dr. J.H. Rushbrooke ordered all Jim Crow signs removed from the meeting. After hearing the protest of Baptist ministers, The Londoner shouted from the podium, "Take down those signs now! There is no color segregation in this alliance." Dr. Rushbrooke's stand earned him the confirmation of the alliance as President-elect of the Baptist World Alliance, defeating Chicago's famed African American minister and Baptist World Alliance Vice President Reverend Lacy Kirk Williams of Mount Olivet Baptist Church.[329]

One month later on Wednesday August 23,1939, Reverend Gates made a recording by the same name. "Baptist World Alliance in Atlanta, GA" is more reflective of a church announcement detailing the event, rather than a sermon. THe preacher comments

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[328] Okeh 8699
[329] *The Negro Star,* August 4,1939, pg.1.

on the racial dynamics of the meeting. He praises the international gathering of Baptist Protestants in Atlanta as "the greatest meeting ever I witnessed (sic)!" Reverend Gates maintained that the Holy Spirit was very powerful at the meeting causing many people to be "regenerated" all over again. He states that he was regenerated because of witnessing the musical capabilities of some of the white delegates at the meeting. He boldly proclaims on the recording, "Ya know I was converted again in that meeting. I didn't believe white folks could sing, but let me tell ya, they sung! They can sing!" The organizations stand against segregation during the meeting caused Gates to proclaim on the recording, "That was a great meeting. You talk about your political meeting, you talk about race ah… problems, well all you need is to hold those meetings. They hold those meetings every five years, I wish they could be held every five days." Despite the tumultuous nature of race relations in America during the interwar period, Gates was able to use his commercial platform to address the hypocrisy of race in America.[330]

Chain Stores

The most interesting of Reverend Gates' sermons regarding contemporary social issues was his 1930 sermon series on chain stores. Perhaps more than any other of the preacher's recordings "Goodbye to Chain Stores Parts I and II," exemplifies the preacher's cultural awareness, relevancy, and the influence of the consumer marketplace. Chain stores grew significantly after World War 1. From 1920-1930, chain store units grew from 30,000 to approximately 150,000 units. By the Depression, the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company or A&P, founded in New York in 1859, was the largest chain store in the country. . By 1930 the chain store corporation had 15,737 units nation wide

[330] Blue Bird B8256, Montgomery Ward M8537.

and was the fifth largest industrial corporation in the United States.[331]

There are several inter-related reasons for the growth and popularity of chain stores and conversely the decline of small local "mom and pop" stores. During the Great Depression, small local stores suffered from limited access to capital due primarily to credit-based commerce. Most local stores operated on customer in-store credit. This credit system accommodated a largely agrarian economy that was dependent on the uncertainty of local harvests. Credit based trading limited the capital of local stores. This limitation of capital often resulted in local stores offering products and services that were substandard. In addition, many of the local stores purchased their goods through a network of local and regional wholesalers and distributors. This "middle man" system of supplying goods forced local stores to purchase goods with a middleman price hike. This price increase was then passed on to consumers.[332]

Chain stores, on the other hand, enjoyed the superior capital of stockholders and access to standardized products. Moreover, the long reach of corporations and improvements in the nation's transportation networks enabled chain stores to shrink the distance and time between the manufacturer and retailer. As chain stores grew, they relied less on local and regional wholesalers and increasingly received goods directly to their own warehouses strategically positioned across the country. In addition, chain stores began to use their superior access and capital to establish their own manufactures and brand name products. The establishment of national wholesalers and manufacturers

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[331] Ryant, "The South and the Movement against Chain Stores."; Richard C. Schragger, 'The Anti-Chain Store Movement, Localist Ideology, and the Remnants of the Progressive Constitution, 1920-1940', *Iowa Law Review* 90 (2005).

[332]Richard C. Schragger, "The Anti-Chain Store Movement, Localist Ideology, and the Remnants of the Progressive Constitution, 1920-1940," *Iowa Law Review* 90, no. 1011 (2005)., 2; Ryant, "The South and the Movement against Chain Stores.".

kept prices lower than local "mom and pop" stores by eliminating the "middle man" price increase. The lower prices of chain store goods began to erode the loyalties many customers possessed for their local community stores. Through the 1920s, chain stores such as A&P, Woolworth's, Montgomery Ward, and J.C. Penny—armed with superior capital, standardized products, and lower prices—increased their share of America's retail sales from 4% to 20% and their total share of grocery sales to 40%.[333]

The proliferation of chain stores in America's economy became a major issue in American news and political ideology. The Federal Trade Commission conducted the first official study on the economic effects of chain stores in 1928. Major magazines published stories debating chain stores. In 1930, *The Nation* ran a four-part series entitled "Chains Versus Independents." *The New Republic* followed with a three-part series poising the question "Chain Stores: Menace or Promise?" Fittingly, the most popular proposition for high school and college debate teams throughout the nation was "Resolved: That Chain Stores are detrimental to the best interests of the American public."

By 1929, associations in over four hundred cities and towns had formed to fight the proliferation of chain stores. Opponents accused chain stores of draining local economies through monopolies. These monopolies were accused of cultivated non-union competition, lower wage standards, as well as denying farmers fair prices for their crops.[334] The initial approach to regulate the chain store phenomenon was through local taxation. Legislatures were attracted to taxing chain stores as another avenue of state

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[333] Cohen, *Making a New Deal : Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*., 153-154; Ryant, "The South and the Movement against Chain Stores.", 208; Schragger, "The Anti-Chain Store Movement, Localist Ideology, and the Remnants of the Progressive Constitution, 1920-1940.", 2-10.

[334]Schragger, "The Anti-Chain Store Movement, Localist Ideology, and the Remnants of the Progressive Constitution, 1920-1940.", 2-6; Ryant, "The South and the Movement against Chain Stores.", 207-222.

revenue in midst of the depression years. Several states proposed various forms of taxation to curb the growth and profits of chain stores while increasing state revenue. Nationally, more than eight hundred tax measures against chain stores were proposed from 1930-1935. The state of Georgia proposed chain store tax legislation on the grounds that chain stores "foster[ed] monopoly" and were detrimental to the states local agrarian economies. The proposed bill stipulated that chains stores be charged a tax of $50 per store. Initially the bill passed, only to be struck down by the Georgia Supreme Court in a 1931 appeal.[335]

Various mediums of mass communication became important in the fight against chain stores. W.K. Henderson, a wealthy Louisiana businessman and owner of radio affiliate KWKH began a crusade against chain stores. Henderson continually attacked chain stores and urged his listeners against them with statements such as “We can drive them out in thirty days if you people will stay out of their stores,” warning his listeners that chain stores were "coming into your town and taking your money and sending it out to a bunch of crooked, no account loafers on Wall Street.” His resistance to chain stores was buttressed by the appearance of several notable politicians on his radio show including the Governor of Louisiana Huey Long, Governors Flem Sampson of Kentucky and Phil La Follette of Wisconsin, U.S. Representative Clyde Kelly of Pennsylvania, and US Senator Morris Sheppard of Texas. Henderson’s station reached across the south and west and by 1930 was voted the South’s most popular station. Radio hosts from around the country followed suit. In the Midwest, Grand Rapids, MI radio personality and author Winfield Caslow took up the fight against chain stores. The radio personality

[335] Schragger, "The Anti-Chain Store Movement, Localist Ideology, and the Remnants of the Progressive Constitution, 1920-1940.", 2-6; Ryant, "The South and the Movement against Chain Stores.", 207-222.

became known as the "Main Street Crusader" for his efforts against chain stores. Caslow even authored an anti-chain store novel entitled *The Sob Squad* in 1928. In California, radio personality Montaville Flowers gained a following for his hostility towards chain stores. Flowers also authored the anti-chain store *America Chained - A Discussion of What's Wrong with the Chain Store.* By 1930, there were at least twelve radio stations and twenty-four newspapers that proudly identified themselves as anti-chain store media outlets.[336]

Reverend Gates' sermon series "Good Bye to Chain Stores," Parts 1 and 2 joined the mass media chorus of chain store opponents. The titles were recorded in Atlanta in the midst of the national and state battle concerning Chain Stores on Friday April 25, 1930. His anti-chain store recording echoes much of aforementioned public concern regarding chain stores, namely, the erosion of local economies, particularly those based on credit and working class livelihood. Part one of the series features Gates offering a brief sermon on "so much evil that is being done through the chain store." Reverend Gates presumably sees himself as addressing an interracial audience, but African Americans in particular. He states that his sermon against chain stores is addressed to all but to "my people in particular." He proclaims that listeners should refuse to shop in chain stores for two primary reasons. First, chain stores patronanage means "no jobs," for his black listeners. Here Gates is commenting on the discriminatory practices of chain store hiring. Moreover, supporting chain stores alters the local economy. African Americans in a Jim Crow society would shoulder the burden of a weakened local economy. Second, Gates tells his congregation that they should refrain from shopping at

[336] Schragger, "The Anti-Chain Store Movement, Localist Ideology, and the Remnants of the Progressive Constitution, 1920-1940.", 207-22.

chain stores because chain stores offer "no credit!" The preacher proclaims that chain stores will not allow rural agrarian visitors to the city to have a mule, a wagon, or credit for their urban shopping excursion. He therefore instructs his listeners to "patronize the home merchant and independent merchants" who hire African Americans and offer store credit.

After his brief sermon, the recording turns into a skit to further elucidate the preacher's opposition of chain stores. Gates utilizes staged testimonies by serial characters Deacon Davis and Sister Jordan to exemplify how chain stores ruin local economies, small independent merchants, and the domino effect upon working class employment. Deacon Davis responds to Reverend Gates' sermon by expressing that his inconsistent church attendance is based on his unemployed status. He goes on to explain to his pastor that his local white employers went out of business because "the chain store ruined them." Likewise, Sister Jordan testifies that she is no longer serving as a domestic servant nor living "in the big house" of a local proprietor because the family can longer afford her services. Instead, the family is "cooking for themselves," leaving sister Jordan unemployed.

Reverend Gates concludes his sermon by reflecting on a man who "boasted" about being a truck driver, but lost his job because of the efficiency of the national distribution networks of chain stores (Gates is perhaps referring to his next-door neighbor James B. who was employed as truck driver for a local bakery in 1930). The preacher proclaims that the man is unemployed because the chain store systems of deliver "got one man going up and down these highways!" Moreover, the preacher pinpoints how chain stores drain local resources. He shouts that while the chain store deliver trucks use local roads,

"They don't help to pave/pay these highways nor streets, or pave/pay for nothing in town!" He concludes the sermon by admonishing his listeners to, "Stay out of these chain stores!"[337]

Part two of the sermon reiterates Gates' interracial populist stance against chain stores in the form of a song. The song features an unidentified male quartet. Reverend Gates introduces the quartet in concert style informing his audience that the group is going to sing a song titled "Stay Out of the Chain Stores." He tells his audience, "I want you to listen and then put it into action! Stay out of the chain store!" He goes on to summarize his sermon of the same title by stating:

> "The time has come as I have said to you before, for you to patronize your merchant in the town where you live. And to the country people that's out yonder, when you come to town, spend ya money with people who will give you credit, ah spend ya money with the people that who will give you a job. Ah I'm telling you this for your good!"

After Gates' introduction the quartet starts of in four-part harmony, " Just let me tell you people, both white and colored too, its time for you to wake up and see how they're treating you." Followed by the chorus, "You betta stay out, outta these chain stores, you betta stay out, outta these stores, you betta stay out, outta these chain stairs, they'll ruin you sure as your born!" The remaining song lyrics detail several populist reasons to oppose chain stores,

> "They'll send their advertisements, in order to draw you to their store
> Lord as soon as you get your payroll to the chain store you will go.
> Chorus
> "When you get your money, you better be for sure, that you give it to your wife,
> that she stays out these chain stores,
> Chorus

[337] Sermon quotes found in Reverend Gates, Atlanta, Friday April 25, 1930 Okeh Unissued; United States. and Mrs. Edward S. Wellons, *Fifteenth Census of the United States:1930-Population Schedule of Atlanta Ward 3*.

> You can walk up to the chain store, and they you'll find a key, and as soon as you get your money spent they ship it to another city.
> Chorus
> There are two things about these chain stores, Lord you'll find it to be true, they do not give you work to do and they will not credit you. Now let me tell you people, the best thing for this land, you betta stay out of these chain stores and visit your credit man.
> Chorus

Reverend Gates' two-part recording was an interracial populist stance against chain stores that reflected his rural upbringing, working-class background, and status as a working-class pastor. His upbringing in Hogansville, Georgia would have familiarized the preacher with rural economies and their heavy dependence on credit and local production and consumption. Reverend Gates' neighborhood also served as a reminder of the detriments of chain stores. By the time Reverend Gates recorded his anti-chain store message, his Fraser Street neighborhood had shifted from a majority white middle class neighborhood to a majority working class black neighborhood. His white policeman, carpenter, and public school principal neighbors had moved. By 1930, Reverend Gates neighborhood consisted of black domestic workers including three black cooks for "private families," three servants for "private families," Gates' boarder Sam Smith—a chauffer for a private family—and two black truck drivers. Next door to Reverend Gates was the family of Jewish Pole immigrants and independent grocery store merchant Phillip Shefferman. The occupational composition of Reverend Gate's neighborhood allowed him to see firsthand just how chain stores could cause rampant unemployment among the black working classes, domestic workers, and small independent merchants such as his neighbor Phillip Shefferman. The staged "testimonies" of Deacon Davis and Sister Jordan articulate the occupational vulnerability

of unskilled black urban migrants in an increasingly national economy and skilled labor force.[338]

Gates's populist opposition of chain stores further highlights the preacher's status as a working-class pastor. His populist stance againist chain stores differed from that of Atlanta's black Protestant establishment. The educated clergy of Atlanta's east side comprised the city's Black protestant establishment. The Atlanta Ministers Council (AMC) was the officially recognized organizational voice of the city's black Protestant clergy. The AMC pledged to "fight the Negro's battle along civic, political, and educational lines…" as well as address "…the labor situation and police brutality." The pastors of the city's largest black churches comprised the organization's leadership team. Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr. of Ebenezer Baptist Church served as the group's first president. The AMC board included the pastors of other elite churches such as Wheat Street Baptist, Big Bethel AME, Central United Methodist, and the churches affiliated with the schools of the AUC (Atlanta University Center) such as First Congregational and Friendship Baptist. The pastors of these churches also belonged to the local chapter of the NAACP and the Atlanta urban League (AUL) including Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr. who also served as President of the local NAACP. Despite his national commercial acclaim, Reverend Gates was not apart of the leadership of the aforementioned organizations.[339]

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[338] United States. Bureau of the Census. and 5778, *Fourtenth Census of the United States:1920-Population Schedule of Atlanta Ward 3*.; United States. and Mrs. Edward S. Wellons, *Fifteenth Census of the United States:1930-Population Schedule of Atlanta Ward 3*.

[339] Here I am using William Hutchinson's definition of Protestant Establishment to refer to the existence of an Atlanta Black Protestant establishment. Hutchinson defines the white Protestant establishment "as a broad church that held together, and exercised whatever cultural authority it did enjoy precisely because it retained the adherence of a broad range of persons. The Protestant Establishment was also a personal network of well-known personages. "A nation wide web of personal relationships…interconnected with other elite organizations." See, Hutchinson, "Protestantism as Establishment," in Hutchison, ed. *Between*

The combined leadership of Atlanta's NAACP chapter, AMC, and AUL shared the concern for chain stores. However, their stance regarding chain stores focused on equal access to upward- and middle-class mobility and employment, rather than the impact of chain stores to local economies and black working class. Black elite desires of employment and class mobility were buttressed by the New Deal policies of the 1930s—i.e. Social Security Board and the Fair Labor Standards Act—which offered Black elites access to new positions, employment, and government aid that excluded those who were greatly affected by chain stores, namely black unskilled workers, black farmers, and domestic workers such as those of Reverend Gates' neighborhood and congregation. As a result, the NCAAP and the AMC, or as Historian Karen Ferguson deems them, Atlanta's "black reform elite," advocated for several "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work Campaigns" as opposed to Reverend Gates' populist rejection of chain stores.[340]

Atlanta had several chain store boycotts during the interwar period. The majority were primarily concerned with chain store hiring practices. The longest standing boycott occurred on Atlanta's west side in, what the *Atlanta Daily World* referred to as, the "heart" of the city's "exclusive" black neighborhoods. The newspaper detailed the events surrounding the boycott. Dennis Redwine, a forty year old unemployed Black father of three, was severely beaten after he was accused of attempting to steal a sack of sugar from an A&P store located on the corner of West Hunter (now MLK Jr. Boulevard) and Ashby Streets. Redwine denied the claim, stating that he was only trying to serve

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the Times : The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960.. In this regard, the pastors of Atlanta's largest churches exercised significant cultural authority and were all interconnected through their cooperative leadership positions in elite organizations such as the local NAACP, Urban League, Negro Chamber of Commerce, and the Atlanta Ministers Council. On the AMC see, *Atlanta Daily World,* Apr 06, 1939, p.1, col.6.

[340] Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*., 1-15.

himself. A custom, he argued, that was common in chain stores. The black residents of Atlanta's elite west side neighborhood responded to Redwine's beating and incarceration by boycotting the local A&P. Despite the stores location in the heart of a black neighborhood, it did not employ any African American workers. Aimed at provoking the A&P to hire black workers, black middle class residents picketed the store and successfully deterred some black customers from patronizing the store. Their boycott began under a small telephone pole banner "Negroes Don't Trade Here: Stay Out!"[341]

Several black elite organizations became involved in the boycott, all united by the idea of integrating the A&P clerks. The Atlanta Negro Chamber of Commerce and the Atlanta Association of Physicians, Dentists, and Pharmacists both issued statements of solidarity with the "no buy" campaign against A&P. The Atlanta Urban League (AUL) and NAACP took lead of the boycott negotiations. The joint committee led by the AUL executive secretary Reginald A. Johnson and NAACP President and attorney A.T. Walden met with A &P Southern Branch Vice President Mr. F.P. Vinson to "work out a satisfactory solution to the problem." During their two-hour meeting, the black elite leaders presented A&P with "the need for jobs" in black communities. In their letter to the A&P Corporation the reform elite apologized for having to call the company's attention to the "occurrence" with Mr. Redwine, adding that there were not attempting to "make a racial issue." Nevertheless, the letter went on to suggest to the company that "adding help" from African Americans would "prove satisfactorily to the neighborhood as well as a patriotic decision coming from you." As reflected in the language of the letter and the appeals to patriotism, Atlanta's black reform elite and the black chamber of

[341] *Atlanta Daily World*, Nov 17, 1935, p.1, col.1; Nov 17, 1935, p.1; Nov 19, 1935, p.1, col.6; Nov 20, 1935, p.1, col.1; Nov 21, 1935 p.1, col.5; Nov 23, 1935, p.1, col.1; Nov 24, 1935 p.1, col.8.

commerce desired to fully participate in America's growing corporate consumer capitalism, rather than thwart the system or preserve a local-based economy. Despite their efforts, A&P refused the demands of the local joint committee under the guise that the local store could not change its policy on hiring black workers due to their national hiring policies. The boycott continued, unofficially, for several decades.[342]

Martin Luther King, Sr. lead his Ebenezer Baptist Church in several boycotts primarily aimed at influencing the hiring practices of both local and chain store establishments. In one such boycott, Reverend King asked the white owner of a commercial establishment to hire some of the black teenagers at his church. When the owner refused to hire "negroes," King instructed his church to boycott the store. Once the owner relented, the pastor told his congregation to patronize the store under the guise that the increased business would help create more jobs for the black teenagers of the city's upwardly mobile middle class.[343]

Reverend Gates chain storm sermon stood at odds with the efforts of the city's black elite reform efforts. Middle class black reformers paid little attention to the ways in which chain store patronage and proliferation affected those outside of elite and middle class circles such as the domestic workers of the preacher's congregation and neighborhood on the south side of the city. In addition to departing ways with the black elite, Reverend Gates' chain store sermon series stood at odds with the record industry as well. The sermon series was recorded along with four other titles in an April 1930 recording session in Atlanta. Two months after recording, Okeh engineers re-mastered all six titles before issuing them. However, despite the delicate attention and money

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[342] *Atlanta Daily World*, Nov 17, 1935, p.1, col.1; Nov 17, 1935, p.1; Nov 19, 1935, p.1, col.6; Nov 20, 1935, p.1, col.1; Nov 21, 1935 p.1, col.5; Nov 23, 1935, p.1, col.1; Nov 24, 1935 p.1, col.8.
[343] Quoted from, Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*., 141

given to this Depression era recording session, Okeh records decided not to issue the chain store sermon series, thus the sermon was never made available to the public. I argue, because the chain store series were antithetical to corporate profits.[344]

Despite the preacher's efforts of using mass media to mobilize his listeners against chain stores, his connection to the same muted his critique. The preacher's sermons were sold by chain stores such as Montgomery Ward, JC Penny, and Sears. Religion scholar Cornel West characterizes this irony of reformed-minded cultural production as "simultaneously progressive and co-opted." West's description of this position pinpoints the preacher's predicament, he writes "contributors to culture who desire to align themselves with the demoralized, demobilized, depoliticized, and disorganized people in order to empower and enable social action…put themselves in an inescapable double bind—while linking their activities to the fundamental structural overhaul of these institutions, they often remain financially dependent on them."[345] In spite of the preacher's valiant efforts to align with those most affected by chain stores, the vitality of his national mass media ministry was dependent upon chain store retailers, networks of national distribution, and the expansion of corporate America.

Conclusion

Historian Lawrence Levine maintains that popular culture aided by mass media technologies has helped to preserve authentic "folk culture(s)."[346] Reverend Gates' corpus of commodified sermons, aided by the phonograph, allows listeners to hear the folk religious expressions of black Protestantism during the interwar period. These aurally preserved expressions, both in content and aesthetics, challenged black middle

[344]Dixon and others, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*..
[345]; West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference.",1.
[346] Levine, "The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences."

class notions of propriety, public expression, and progress. Historian Evelyn Higginbotham has posited the notion that religious race records and their articulation of "southern folk culture challenged the middle-class ideology of racial uplift as pronounced by educated religious leaders." Higginbotham maintains that religious race records popularized working class and southern religious vernacular to help "the black poor wage [d] a struggle over cultural authority that ultimately subverted the hegemonic values and aesthetic standards of the traditional Protestantism of the black middle class." To this end, Gates' religious vernacular, amusement skits, and sermons i.e. Chain store series, challenged the black elite's positions on propriety, particularly in regards to the various modes of racial uplift. Recorded sermons then, allow the listener to actually hear the expressions, ideologies, attitudes, and concerns of the "folk"—ordinary black working class people.[347]

However, Reverend Gates recorded output also elucidates the dynamic relationship between religious cultural production, commodification, and the marketplace. Gates's chain store series challenges both Levine's notion of mass media preserving an "authentic" folk expressions as well as Higginbotham's counter-hegemonic thesis. Both fail to integrate how the various ways of financing and organizing cultural production influences products.[348]

Scholars of religious cultural production are beginning to alter their analysis in this regard. Religion scholar Jonathan Walton calls for a widening of "the interpretive

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[347] Higginbotham, "Rethinking Vernacular Culture.".
[348] Sut Jhally, "Image-Based Culture: Advertising and Popular Culture," in *Gender, Race and Class in Media : A Text-Reader*, ed. Gail Dines & Jean M. Humez(Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage, 1995)., glossary. See also Robin Kelly's critique of Levine, Robin D.G. Kelley, "Notes on Deconstructing "The Folk"," *American Historical Review* 97, no. 5 (1992).; and Jonathan Walton's critique of Higginbotham, Walton, "The Preachers' Blues: Religious Race Records and Claims of Authority on Wax."

lens from which we view the explicit and implicit messages of religious race records—a lens that evaluates the power relations between producers and consumers." He adds that the failure to consider this relationship between producers and consumers runs the risk of essentializing black working class cultural production and "being uncritically appreciative of these preachers and possibly overlooking the ways they, too, reinforced the perspective of the social elites."[349]

The mass medium of the phonograph amplified Reverend Gates' voice across the nation and enabled him to compete in the expanding consumer marketplace of inter-war America, making him a black celebrity in the process. However, his relationship to the phonograph industry and commercial marketplace attenuated the particular tenor of his voice as well. This dynamic relationship between Protestant clergy, media networks, and the commercial marketplace reverberates in the content, aesthetics, and culture of contemporary mass media religion in America.

[349] Walton, "The Preachers' Blues: Religious Race Records and Claims of Authority on Wax.".

CONCLUSION*:*
"OF THE WINGS OF ATALANTA:"
THE LEGACY OF REVEREND J.M. GATES, ATLANTA, AND RECORDED SERMONS

Reverend Gates recording career ended on Thursday October 2, 1941. American's involvement in World War II interrupted the production of phonograph recordings. Despite disappearing from black newspapers, his ministerial career continued to flourish. By 1942, he left the working class congregation of Rockdale Park's Mount Calvary Baptist Church and became the senior pastor of Elizabeth Baptist Church, a congregation on Atlanta's exclusive west side.[350]

His tenure at Elizabeth was brief. In the early part of 1945, Reverend Gates suffered an acute cerebral hemorrhage. The prolific sermon recorder, described by reporters as "jovial," was left incapacitated for months. In March, local ministers took up a collection for the ailing pastor and his family—Lydia, his second wife of thirteen years, and adopted daughter Virginia. His physician last saw him on June 17,1945. One month later, on Saturday August 18, 1945, James M. Gates died at his home on Fraser Street. He was sixty-one years old.[351]

On Tuesday August 21, the preacher's remains were displayed in the sanctuary of

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[350] *Atlanta Daily World,* Mar 14, 1945, p.2, col.1; "Reverend J. M. Gates Passes At Home," *Atlanta Daily World,* Aug 19, 1945, pg.3; State of Georgia. *Indexes of Vital Records for Georgia: Deaths, 1919-1998*. Georgia, USA: Georgia Health Department, Office of Vital Records, Certificate No. 16131; Lydia doesn't appear as Mrs. Gates in the city directory until 1933, the couple probably married in 1932 as the proceeding directory was being prepared. See, *Atlanta City Directory, 1933*; *Atlanta Daily World,* Aug 24, 1945, pg 6; Rijn, "Praying for the Pastor: The Life of Rev. Jm Gates.".

[351] *Atlanta Daily World,* Mar 14, 1945, p.2, col.1; "Reverend J. M. Gates Passes At Home," *Atlanta Daily World,* Aug 19, 1945, pg.3; State of Georgia. *Indexes of Vital Records for Georgia: Deaths, 1919-1998*. Georgia, USA: Georgia Health Department, Office of Vital Records, Certificate No. 16131; Lydia doesn't appear as Mrs. Gates in the city directory until 1933, the couple probably married in 1932 as the proceeding directory was being prepared. See, *Atlanta City Directory, 1933*; *Atlanta Daily World,* Aug 24, 1945, pg 6; Rijn, "Praying for the Pastor: The Life of Rev. Jm Gates.".

his church. Parishioners, who had visited their preacher during one of his fireside chats, came to the church to visit with their pastor one last time. When the doors of the sanctuary opened on Wednesday morning at eleven for the funeral, thousands came to say good-bye to the charismatic icon that "always had some witty saying to say after greeting you." Family and friends from Hogansville, GA paid their respects to their hometown celebrity. Mourners arrived by car; others by train--traveling as far as Columbus, OH-- to pay their respects. Fellow rural Georgia native turned urban migrant, Reverend J.T. Dorsey of Atlanta's Mount Zion Baptist Church, and president of the elite Atlanta Baptist Ministers Union delivered the eulogy.[352]

Several other prominent ministers gave remarks at the funeral, including prominent radio broadcaster and future Civil Rights icon, Reverend Dr. William Holmes Borders of Atlanta's five thousand-member Wheat Street Baptist Church. When the four-hour memorial concluded, clergyman from Reverend Gates' beloved Baptist Ministers Union carried their fallen colleague to the hearse driven by the Haugabrooks' Funeral Home. As the processional began its journey to the preacher's rural place of birth, the hearse passed through the very west side neighborhoods Gates' had watched transform from garbage heaps to modern black middle class homes. Polk Brockman, Gates' first A&R, recalled that large crowds lined the cortege to obtain a final glimpse of the celebrity. Brockman reminisced that the funeral was the largest black funeral in Atlanta until the

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[352] On Gates illness and funeral see, "Reverend J. M. Gates Passes At Home," *Atlanta Daily World,* Aug 19, 1945, pg.3; "Reverend Gates To Be Funeralized (sic) Today," *Atlanta Daily World,* Aug 22, 1945, pg.3; *The Atlanta Constitution,* Aug 21, 1945, pg.15; *Atlanta Daily World,* Aug 24, 1945,pg.6; Roger S. Brown, "Polk Brockman: Recording Pioneer ", *Living Blues,* No.23, (Chicago: Living Blues Publications, September/October 1975), p.31; Pete Lowry, "Atlanta Black Sound: A Survey of Black Music from Atlanta During the 20th Century," *The Atlanta Historical Bulletin* 21, no. 2 (1977).; Rijn, "Praying for the Pastor: The Life of Rev. Jm Gates."; Oliver, *Songsters and Saints : Vocal Traditions on Race Records*.,280. On Reverend J.T. Dorsey see, *Atlanta Daily World,* Mar 31, 1949 p.1, col.7; Apr 05, 1949, p.3, col.1.

city laid to rest native son and religious icon Martin Luther King, Jr.[353]

James M. Gates was laid to rest where he was born, Hogansville, Georgia. However, his career capitulated him far beyond his modest beginnings. Gates' journey from rural to urban life just before World War I was part of a national demographic shift in America. The twentieth century witnessed mass numbers of African Americans depart rural America for cities. Black urban migrants contributed to a multigenerational transformation of American life that vigorously altered the national patterns of work, community, residential life, as well as the ways in which African Americans understood and practiced Protestantism. James M. Gates was at once a product as well as an agent of these social and cultural transformations. His life and over two-hundred and twenty recorded sermons give voice to how urbanization and the phonograph changed the face of American religion and culture during the interwar period.

The examination of Reverend Gates career and life displays the scholarly importance of including the urban south and the phonograph in assessments of black Protestantism and the Great Migration. Southern cities were reshaped by black migration. When Gates arrived in Atlanta, the city was in the midst of drastic change, in part, due to black migration. As Atlanta's black population grew in the midst of Jim Crow, the city was reshaped by the proliferation of African American institutions. Commercial spaces of amusement and black migrant communities constituted a parallel black society that serviced the needs of the city's growing black residents, particularly in

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[353] On Gates illness and funeral see, "Reverend J. M. Gates Passes At Home," *Atlanta Daily World,* Aug 19, 1945, pg.3; "Reverend Gates To Be Funeralized (sic) Today," *Atlanta Daily World,* Aug 22, 1945, pg.3; *The Atlanta Constitution,* Aug 21, 1945, pg.15; *Atlanta Daily World,* Aug 24, 1945,pg.6; Roger S. Brown, "Polk Brockman: Recording Pioneer ", *Living Blues,* No.23, (Chicago: Living Blues Publications, September/October 1975), p.31; Lowry, "Atlanta Black Sound: A Survey of Black Music from Atlanta During the 20th Century."; Rijn, "Praying for the Pastor: The Life of Rev. Jm Gates."; Oliver, *Songsters and Saints : Vocal Traditions on Race Records*.,280. On Reverend J.T. Dorsey see, *Atlanta Daily World,* Mar 31, 1949 p.1, col.7; Apr 05, 1949, p.3, col.1.

regards to spaces of cultural expression, namely commercial amusement. These spaces forced many black Protestant institutions to re-prioritize church work and worship practices.

In the midst of re-conceptualizing black Protestantism, African American Protestant faith communities became ensnared in the paradox of demonizing commercial amusements, while attempting to mimic the same. Race records intensified this problem of amusement by creating mass media celebrities who, with their wealth, notoriety, and secular "gospel" openly challenged black politics of respectability and the authority and leadership of black clergy.

Du Bois asserted that black Atlanta was leading the coronation of this new black leadership. In his Atlanta treatise, "Of the Wings of Atalanta," Du Bois feared that the city's "black world" was falling prey to the same love of wealth that defiled Atalanta—the winged maiden of Greek mythology. He bemoaned that those with "property and wealth" were replacing black preachers and teachers as the "leaders of Negro opinion." Benjamin Elijah Mays also pinpointed that black urbanization altered the prerequisites and channels of authority and leadership in black communities. By the early 1930's he recognized that black clerics could no longer depend on being granted leadership and authority simply "by virtue" of profession; rather black communities were geared to judge black clergy by achievement. Du Bois and Mays both agreed that wealth and commercial celebrities were hallmarks of a new epoch of black leadership. These social forces, I argue, significantly contributed to the commercialization of black Protestantism on the phonograph.[354]

Phonograph sermons aided black Protestant faith communities in responding to

[354] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*., 81; Mays and Nicholson, *The Negro's Church*., 51.

these social and cultural challenges. Preachers who recorded on the phonograph were able to maintain a sense of cultural and social authority, compete with popular secular commercial amusements, and establish a presence in the growing arena of black consumer culture. Reverend Gates' notoriety, popular mass media ministry, and large funeral testify to the ways in which recorded sermons were in vogue with the era's emerging black cultural production and religious milieu.

This project also showcases that black Protestantism—via phonograph sermons--aided in the modernization of African American life. Historian Nathan Hatch's "Democratization" thesis persuasively displays how the trendsetting use of vernacular forms of religious communication and demotic religion buttressed the modernization of America. Similar to his fellow white religious broadcasters, Gates' utilization of mass media religion aided in the modernization process--even as the content of some of his sermons resisted aspects of modernity and valorized passing cultural practices. The preacher's popularization of mass media religion aided the modern acculturation of America's rural black Diaspora by establishing the use of modern technology and the commercial marketplace as sites of black emancipation, progress, and religious devotion; even as his packaged sermons helped this Diaspora stay connected to their rural patterns of speech, expression, and worship. The rural preacher confronted his urban world by using contemporary technology to express his rural cultural and religious practices. These mass media messages helped the preacher, his family, and fellow migrants negotiate urban life as both agents and products of modernity.[355] Ironically then, Gates' career reveals that "religious modernity emerged by way of an emotional folk orality"

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[355]See, Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).; Sweet, *Communication and Change in American Religious History*., 19-25.

that was commodified and transmitted on the pre-modern technology of the phonograph.[356]

Reverend Gates also helps scholars of African American religion to understand contemporary African American Protestantism. Observers may dismiss Gates' recorded sermons as pre-modern relics of rural religious expression. However, his ability to astutely utilize a mass medium to transmit his gospel actually helped to usher in twentieth century black religious broadcasting. The end of Gates' religious recording era therefore is at once a hallmark of American religion in the first half of the twentieth century as well as a harbinger of post war African American religious broadcasting. The flourishing of post war technology enabled a host of religious broadcasters to become religious celebrities and commercial successes. As radio technology progressed, the presence of black religious radio broadcasters increased. Chicago's Reverend Clarence Cobbs and Elder Lucy Smith continued their respective large radio broadcasts as did Washington D.C.'s Elder Solomon Micheaxu. Sermon recording continued as well. In the 1950's and 60's the recorded sermons of Reverend C.L. Franklin, a childhood listener of Reverend Gates, outsold African American popular music artists. Similar to Gates, Franklin enjoyed celebrity status. The preacher commanded appearance fees that rivaled that of international music sensations Sam Cooke, Lil Richard, and Elvis Presley. Following sermon recordings and radio broadcasts, Reverend Frederick J. Eikerenkoetter II enjoyed television fame in the 1970's. Reverend Ike's over 1,400 radio and television monthly broadcast and capacity crowd revival meetings paved the way for Black religious media moguls of the 1980's and 90's such as Bishops Carlton Pearson and TD Jakes. In the early twentieth-first century, Atlanta persists as a central location in the

[356] Best, Passionately Human, No Less Divine : Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952, 117.

growing market of black religious broadcasting. Revs. Juanita Bynum, Creflo Dollar, Cynthia Hale, Dale Bronner, E. Dewey Smith, and Eddie Long, to name a few, all base their media ministries in the metro Atlanta area.[357]

Similar to Gates, these black religious broadcasters continue to appropriate aspects of black commercial entertainment to attract followers and supporters. In his study of black televangelism, religion scholar Jonathan Walton identifies that amusement and entertainment persists as distinctive features of contemporary African American religious broadcasting. To broadcast their messages across the airwaves, black televangelists implore the commercial expertise of salaried recording artists and actors, marketing firms, public relations teams, as well as television and motion picture production studios.[358]

In addition to utilizing aspects of popular entertainment, phonograph sermons provide the blueprint for contemporary religious advertisements as well. Reverend Gates face graced the pages of newspapers, posters, and record catalogues. The iconic images of contemporary black religious broadcasters continue to adorn popular mediums of commercial advertisement, which today constitutes highways billboards, posters, satellite radio, television, and the Internet. The three and half minute recorded phonograph sermons have progressed into a plethora of digital spiritual commodities (i.e. sermon downloads, DVD's, music CD's, novels, fitness videos and books, television programs, and full length motion pictures) that all promise to enlighten as well as entertain, just as

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[357] "Billboard Joins Ranks In Banning Race Records", *Atlanta Daily World,* Jul 6, 1949, p.2For a discussion on the various phases of Black Popular music see, Oliver, 1-17; On C.L. Franklin see, Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land : C.L. Franklin, the Black Church, and the Transformation of America*.; On Reverend "Ike" see, Walton, *Watch This! The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism*., 51. Walton also argues for the importance of Reverend Gates, Rosa Horn, and C.L. Franklin in the study of contemporary black religious broadcasting, see especially pages 19-45; On TD Jakes see, Lee, *T.D. Jakes : America's New Preacher*..

[358] Walton, *Watch This! The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism*., 5-7.

phonograph sermons did.

Failure to examine phonograph sermons leads scholars to conclude that this contemporary experience of African American mass media religion is a new post Civil Rights phenomenon, and thus a pejorative departure from historic black Christian practices. The examination of the life of Reverend JM Gates illuminates that black Protestantism has a storied history of utilizing mass media to package, advertise, sell, and consume Christianity. Moreover, the omission of these audible artifacts from scholarly treatments of American religious broadcasting produces a historiography solely of white evangelicals. In all, James M. Gates and his early twentieth century mass media ministry are pivotal for understanding Protestantism during the interwar period and, therefore, the historical foundations and social forces that contributed to the rise and popularity of mass media religion in the twentieth century and beyond.

Postscript:

Reverend Gates' church in Rockdale Park no longer exists. The city cleared out the entire community during its urban renewal campaign of the 1960's. The congregation relocated to the Adamsville community on the city's far west side, just off Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard. In an ironic twist, Rockdale Park is now home to a major technical service center for the Metro Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA). The technologically innovative preacher's church was torn down in the name of technological innovation. Nevertheless, through his recorded sermons the preacher lives on. In November 2010 recording artist Paul Simon, inspired by Gates' very last recorded sermon "Getting Ready for Christmas Day," recorded a song by the same title. Gates and his congregation figure prominently on the song. The chorus features Gates preaching and his congregation encouraging him to do so. Once again, the urban migrant and the style of worship he helped to popularize are in popular culture.

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