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Beyond the Talented Tenth: Preachers of the Masses, the Hip-Hop MC, and the Reimagination of African American Homiletics

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Abstract

Beyond the Talented Tenth: Preachers of the Masses, the Hip-Hop Emcee, and the Reimagination of African American Homiletics

By Mark Andrew Jefferson

This dissertation discusses how the ideological and cultural influence of the concept coined the "Talented Tenth" and made popular by W. E. B. Du Bois continues to influence the academic discourse within African American homiletics. In order to expand beyond Talented Tenth influence, this project invites Hip-Hop culture into a critical conversation with the prevailing homiletic discourse by centralizing the Hip-Hop emcee as a manifestation of a larger African American preacher tradition. This frame provides a more expansive theorization of the African American preacher, which, by nature of its centrality and influence within African American religion, reimagines the theorization, practice, and imaginative capabilities of African American homiletic discourse.

The Introduction and Chapter One provide an overview to the ideological underpinnings that set the stage for the development and propagation of the Talented Tenth within the African American social imagination. This chapter narrates how the ideological concept of the Talented Tenth developed from an idea into a social imagination through the support of private and religious African American colleges in the shadow of the Civil War. The image of the ideal African American preacher would be imagined within Talented Tenth sensibilities.

Chapters Two and Three trace how themes of race, visibility, and representation bundled within a politics of racial respectability shape the current discourse in African American homiletics, and more specifically, in the theorization of the African American preacher, who exists at the center of an unstated Talented Tenth homiletic method. The intervention of Henry Mitchell and his seminal work *Black Preaching* would indelibly influence the theorization of African American preaching and the preacher figure.

The final chapters extend the African American homiletic conversation beyond its sizeable indebtedness to Talented Tenth influences by offering an expanded theorization of the preacher figure in the Hip Hop MC. Reimagining homiletics begins with exploring areas of imagination and images of the preacher, detecting how the self-understanding of the preacher is guided by metaphor and images. The MC offers new imaginative possibilities.

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Contents:

Introduction

The history of the African American experience in the United States of America includes, among other things: (a) the transatlantic slave trade; (b) violent subjugation in a foreign country; (c) chattel slavery; (d) enforced legal prohibitions against marriage, reading, and writing; (e) surviving an legal emancipation that emerged without any preparation or provision for future living or incorporation into the socio-economic, cultural, and political fabric of the nation; (f) destruction of the Reconstruction initiatives; (g) lynching; (h) ninety years of legal segregation in housing, schools, colleges, universities, government offices, health facilities, public transportation, inter and intrastate commerce; and, (i) mass incarceration.[1] The American imagination concerning its enslaved Africans and their descendants manifests in the realities of the interlocking, overlapping, and continuously renewing socio-political forces. To ensure that African Americans remained wholly enslaved in mind, body, and soul, the social imagination of white Americans intricately designed and implemented systems of subjugation that, in different forms and structures, persist to the present day. Structural and interpersonal obstruction continue to encounter present projects and persons concerned with African American uplift and eventual liberation.

[1] For a solid overview of Black life in America, see Ira Berlin's *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880* (New York: A Touchstone Book, Published by Simon & Schuster, 1935), Reprint. 1995; Lerone Bennett, *Before the Mayflower: A History of the Negro in America, 1619-1962* (Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 1962), Reprint. 2016; John W. Blassingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009); John Hope Franklin and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom a History of African Americans* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011); Henry Louis Gates, *Life upon These Shores: Looking at African American History, 1513-2008* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013); Nathan Irvin Huggins, Black *Odyssey: African-American Ordeal in Slavery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); and Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism: 1850-1925* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

Despite this unique and unthinkable social history—the incalculable impact on the African American spirit notwithstanding—African Americans, over the centuries, have negotiated and endured countless hurdles and impediments. African Americans have, in fierce opposition, developed various tactics, responses, and institutions to advance their cause, uplift themselves, and build sustainable communities. Along the way, they have overcome with vigor and fortitude many of the injustices they have faced. Their leaders have often carried the banners of freedom, civil rights, and reform.

Although African Americans share similar experiences of oppression, the solutions proposed to ameliorate white supremacy and oppression have varied as widely as the many languages, customs, and ethnicities of Africans and their progeny who found themselves in perpetual enslavement. African American leaders have not always fully aligned or in full agreement regarding approaches, strategies, goals, or objectives related to African American uplift and safety. However, many have been of one accord regarding the need for positive change amidst oppression. Often this message of change has come from different sectors of African American leadership, such as labor, legal, education, arts, civil rights, and religious. There was a diversity of experiences depending on social location -- denomination, theology, region, education, gender, socio-economics, ethnicity, power structures, role models, and preaching within predominately Black or multiracial churches.

One of the most significant intellectuals in the history of African American history and letters who is both a product and an example of such leadership is none other than W. E. B. Du Bois (1863-1968). Du Bois, born in Great Barrington, MA and grew to become one of the most influential and productive intellectuals ever produced on American soil. According to Martin Luther King, Jr., Du Bois was "… one of the most remarkable men of our time. Dr. Du Bois was

not only an intellectual giant exploring the frontiers of knowledge; he was in the first place a teacher… he was himself unsurpassed as an intellect, and he was a Negro."[2] Du Bois, a graduate of Fisk University, is the first African American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard University. After completing his dissertation, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870,* in 1896, he published the first American sociological text on race, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899). While publishing work that slowly garnered respect, Du Bois then published a collection of essays that formed one of the most important books of the 20th century—The *Souls of Black Folk* (1903). According to cultural historian Farah Jasmine Griffin,

> [*Souls*] has a become a founding text of African-American studies: its insistence on an interdisciplinary understanding of Black life, on historically grounded and philosophically sound analysis, on the scholar's role as advocate and activist, and on close study of the cultural products of the objects of examination – all became tenets of the study of Black life in the United States.[3]

One of the most significant aspects of *Souls* is that it is one of the first texts to take the intricacies of African religion and performance seriously on its terms. In the tenth chapter of *Souls*, Du Bois describes being a school teacher who took a trip to a Sunday night service where, before he even arrived, he "… could hear dimly across the fields a rhythmic cadence of song,— soft, thrilling, powerful, that swelled and died sorrowfully in our ears."[4] After witnessing and experiencing the spiritual energy of the Sunday service, Du Bois concluded that "Three things characterized this religion of the slave—the Preacher, the Music, and the Frenzy."[5]

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[2] Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Radical King*, ed. Cornel West (Boston: Beacon Press, 2016), 113.

[3] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk (Classics Edition)*, (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2005), 8.

[4] Ibid., 115.

[5] Ibid., 115.

Du Bois' characterization of African American religion is essential. Du Bois argues that the "Music," the "Frenzy," the "Preacher" are core characteristics of the religion of the enslaved Africans in America. These elements are exceedingly powerful because they unified, sustained, and empowered enslaved persons to withstand the mechanisms of complete dehumanization despite the vast linguistic, tribal, and ethnic differences amongst themselves. Though different religious imaginations were active amongst African Americans, those differences did not disqualify anyone, including Du Bois, from observing and participating in a shared, physical experience called "the Frenzy," and that vigorous embodiment manifested through a hybrid sonic experience called "the Music."

Du Bois' theorization that the enslaved and recently emancipated were calling to a transcendent God, whom they believed would intervene on their behalf, came: (a) before the significant growth of African American and Protestant religious engagement and assimilation causing a proliferation of Baptists and other mainline denominations amongst the masses, (b) prior to the organization of modern Black Nationalistic or Pan African movements like the Universal Negro Improvement Association led by Marcus Garvey, and (c) predating the rise of urban religious movements like The Nation of Gods and Earths in the early and mid-1900's. For Du Bois, the "preacher" is central to God's work and the experience of the religion of the slave because the figure is one steeped in the imagination and experience of the masses, inextricably bound to the realities of a shared struggle. The preacher was formed and shaped by the customs of the masses; the enslaved preacher imagined alongside the enslaved people. The people themselves fashioned the preacher and shaped by their hopes and desires for leadership based on how this figure communicates an alternate vision of this life and the possibilities of eternal life. The Du Boisian theorization of the origins of slave religion operates as an interpretive

framework to detect if the religion of the slave and its parts manifest in the past and future forms of African American religion. Moreover, attending to the context where they might be active is helpful.

Much can be learned not only about the historical development and modern function of this figure but, also, how the critical concept of enslavement, the macrostructure for "the religion of the slave," and the Du Boisian preacher are each discernable in a modern guise and signified in modern language.

Concerning the Black preacher, in particular, Du Bois stated, “The Preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil.”[6] The preacher is influential because it was "developed by the Negro" masses as an extension of their collective ingenuity. The people fashioned a leader, whom Du Bois calls the “Preacher.” Since the beginning of slavery in the American colonies, the bandwidth of the ideal preacher must serve the personal, cultural, civic, economic, educational, political, and religious needs of the Black community. According to historian Albert J. Raboteau, the “slave preacher” operated in many roles and navigated complex social terrain:

> Presiding over slave baptisms, funerals, and weddings were the slave preacher, leader of the slaves' religious life and an influential figure in the slave community. Usually illiterate, the slave preacher often had native wit and unusual eloquence. Licensed or unlicensed, with or without permission, preachers held prayer meetings, preached and ministered in a challenging situation. The preacher was overseen, straddling the conflict between the demands of personal conscience and the orders of their masters.[7]

After the Civil War, the identity of Du Bois' preacher would continue to fluctuate and evolve with the socio-political condition of the Black masses. The unlettered preacher navigated a

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[6] W. E. B. Du Bois. *The Souls of Black Folk (A Norton Critical Edition)*, eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Terri Hume Oliver (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 120.

[7] Albert J. Raboteau. *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford, 1978), 231-232.

complicated social context. The restrictive nature of white racism limited spaces of African American empowerment predominately to the sphere of religion so that in matters of race, the Black preacher, during and after Emancipation, spoke and worked for the holistic improvement of the African American population through spiritual leadership. For Du Bois, the preacher's influence—except as limited by the white socio-political imagination —went mostly unchallenged as the concept of the Black Church operated as space under the relative autonomy of African Americans. The enslaved preacher identity, along with the masses who supported this leadership image, helped create and develop the oldest and longest surviving Black institution in America: what is often called the Black Church or Black Church tradition.

The Talented Tenth

One would not be wrong to surmise that Du Bois' respect and admiration for the Black preacher is contingent upon and limited to *a particular type* of Black preacher. For Du Bois Alexander Crummell (1819-1898) —the pioneering African American Episcopal priest, African nationalist, and Cambridge-trained thinker was a hero and image of aspiration. Du Bois found Crummell to be an archetype of the type of race leader he aspired to be. Crummell also served as the ideal preacher image Du Bois believed could uplift Africans in America and throughout the diaspora. He figures prominently in *Souls* as Du Bois dedicates an entire chapter to his influence.

In "On Alexander Crummell," Du Bois testifies to his deep admiration for Crummell by recalling his reaction to and reflection of the noted minister upon meeting him. "Instinctively I bowed before this man, as one bows before the prophets of this world."[8] By Du Bois' estimation, Crummell was a prophet whose character, accomplishment, and commitment to the holistic uplift

[8] Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 108.

of African peoples were underexplored and at risk of fading into permanent obscurity. Du Bois laments:

> The more I met Alexander Crummell, the more I felt how much the world was losing which knew so little of him. In another age he might have sat among the elders of the land in a purple-bordered toga; in another country, mothers might have sung him to the cradles.
>
> He did his work –he did it nobly and well; and yet I sorrow that here he worked alone, with so little human sympathy. His name to-day [*sic*], in this broad land, means little and comes to fifty million ears laden with no incense of memory or emulation.[9]

Du Bois addresses the injustice of history by writing about him and thus furthering his name before generations as a more subtle but significant action to shape the image of the ideal Black preacher in Crummell's image. Du Bois believed a minister of broad European and American education, an essential African racial consciousness, and a willingness to apply religion in the service of human liberation through uplifting African Americans is necessary for the progression and advancement of recently freed Black people in America. Crummell's education, exposure, and desire for racial uplift would begin to set the mold for what Du Bois eventually theorizes as the "Talented Tenth." Crummell's journey in many ways would foreshadow many of Du Bois' tragedies and triumphs. To contextualize the atypical formation of Crummell, he is the first Black person to attend and graduate from the University of Cambridge.[10] Du Bois would become the first Black person to graduate with a Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1895. To be sure, these men represented what many would identify as "the best of the race."

The "best of the race," Du Bois argues, is needed for African Americans to uplift the entire Black race. Unfortunately, the "best of the race" argument often neglects the contributions

[9] Ibid., 108.

[10] Stephen Bates, "Alexander Crummell, Cambridge's first Black graduate," The Guardian, October 20, 2011. https://www.theguardian.com/education/2011/oct/20/alexander-crummell-cambridge-Black-graduate (accessed January 9, 2017).

of countless uneducated African American preachers. This Talented Tenth bias is discernable in the literature of the field of homiletics. There are traces of this thought evident in the literature of African American homiletics. However, before continuing this argument, exploring the Talented Tenth is needful.

It was Henry Lyman Morehouse, the former general secretary of the American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS), who first coined the term "Talented Tenth" while describing whom he and his organization desired to reach and teach in the post-Civil War south. Morehouse stated that "Industrial training is good for the nine; the tenth man ought to have the best opportunities for developing the intellectual part of himself."[11] His concept of the Talented Tenth was grounded in the belief that an educated, professional class of elites was best qualified to lead humanity, especially the uneducated masses. The ABHMS and Morehouse supported this concept because it reflected the social imagination and structure of white society; therefore, it replicated amongst African Americans living in racial segregation. The Talented Tenth concept was popularized by Du Bois in a 1903 speech, in which he said:

> The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its *exceptional men*. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the *best of this race* that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races.[12] [emphasis mine]

The Talented Tenth concept was a direct refutation of the industrial-focused position voiced by Booker T. Washington at the Cotton States and International Exposition 1895 in Atlanta, Georgia. Washington argued for African American industrial and agricultural education as the spur of collective self-help. Instead of rushed integration, Washington allayed white fears by

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[11] James M. McPherson, *Abolitionist Legacy: from Reconstruction to the NAACP* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 22.

[12] W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth," in *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative Negroes of To-day* (New York: J. Pott & Company, 1903), 31.

offering a controlled segregation strategy that was politically patient. Du Bois presented an approach different than Washington. The Talented Tenth is a select group of men and women who will help to assimilate the Black race into mainstream white society**,** by gaining racial respectability to uplift the Black race through education and the acquisition of cultural, political and social power. These individuals, according to Du Bois, have the ability and capacity to influence the civic, cultural, political, educational, and economic development of the remaining ninety percent of the African American masses. Du Bois believed they could make good citizens of those in the masses.[13]

What I am calling the Talented Tenth preacher, an almost mythic preacher type, was identified, defined, and promoted by W. E. B. Du Bois as being part of that small percentage of Blacks who, because of their intellectual capacity, are worthy of the highest forms of academic pursuit.[14] However, history reveals that Talented Tenth preachers were and remain more closely tied to the Black middle-class ethos than to the culture of the Black masses.[15] This dissertation centralizes the contributions of countless Black preachers, in the tradition of Washington, who did not neatly fit within the framework of the Talented Tenth. These persons nonetheless deserve acknowledgment and proper theorization. Preachers outside of Talented Tenth social and educational formation contributions are seldom acknowledged, highlighted, or analyzed in the homiletical literature. These untutored preachers are not part of the Talented Tenth. They vastly outnumber them. This dissertation refers to this group of Black preachers as the "preachers of the

[13] Ibid., 12.

[14] W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth" in *The Negro Problem*, ed. Booker T. Washington, (New York: Firework Press, 2015, 1899), 9.

[15] Joy James, *Transcending the Talented Tenth: Black Leaders and American Intellectuals*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 6. Although James does not explicitly mention preachers, she does address all "Talented Tenth" leaders, and this certainly includes preachers.

masses." The preachers of the masses include street preachers, tent revivalist, store front preachers, leaders of "Black sects and cults," and other persons who minister in spaces beyond the traditional Christian pulpit.

Comparatively, unlike their Talented Tenth brothers and sisters, many of the preachers of the masses are not college-educated or trained at accredited seminaries. Akin to their status as part of the uneducated Black masses, their lack of access to any education and the inability to assimilate into broader economic opportunities left them closer to African folkways. Without access to opportunities to read, these preachers of the masses learned as autodidacts. They engaged stories and legends of the Bible seriously, and despite lacking formal theological training, utilized their imagination and creativity to draw parallels between the events of the Bible and the events of the lives of people in their congregations. Following the work of Antonio Gramsci, it can be argued that some of these preachers, especially those highlighted in chapter three, are *organic intellectuals* who understand—with intimacy—the lives of the community and congregation.[16]

For Gramsci, an intellectual is someone who may not be part of the hegemonic ruling class but reproduces its ideas; meanwhile, the organic intellectual seeks to disseminate ideas and build power with the working class. I want to highlight the different ways that the African American masses formed folk preachers who preached as organic intellectuals. The differences within the class of unlettered and often unassimilated African American folk preachers were wholesale deemed as "ignorant" by leading African American intellectuals steeped in Talented

[16] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from a Prison Notebook*, (New York: International Publishers, 1971. Reprint, 1971), 93.

Tenth sensibilities such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Carter G. Woodson,[17]Also, even Du Bois himself. In almost disdainful language, Du Bois stated: "The preacher was, even before the war, the group leader of the Negroes, and the church their greatest social institution. Naturally, this preacher was *ignorant and often immoral*, and the problem of replacing the older type by better-educated men has been a difficult one. …the college-bred preacher has an opportunity for reformatory work …"[18] [emphasis mine]. For Du Bois, the larger project of African American uplift would be at risk if the preacher of the masses would continue to exercise its significant organic influence over the masses of African Americans.

His statement concerning these uneducated preachers reveals two realities. First, as a sociologist, Du Bois viewed the African American condition as an immediate concern, a substantial problem needing attention. For Du Bois, the preacher should be the moral and educational leader because the figure is the custodian of the social and spiritual institutions and traditions often called the Black Church. The importance to the masses of African American churches and religious institutions provides the uneducated or unlettered preacher with significant influence. Du Bois believes that preachers shaped in Talented Tenth sensibilities would be best equipped to lead the masses from being "ignorant and often immoral." Secondly, Du Bois reveals that replacing the imagination and influence of the folk or unlettered preacher is part of a coordinated process. The mechanism of education, particularly religious education, served as a primary mode of intentionally forming preachers away from the masses and their

[17] Martin Luther King, Jr. and Clayborne Carson, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr*. (New York: Intellectual Properties Management in association with Warner Books, 1998), 15. Also see Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (San Diego: Book Tress Press, 1933), 68.

[18] Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth" in *The Negro Problem*, 17.

folkways and embracing a different imagination created by white philanthropists and educational foundations with the future of all African Americans, both educated and illiterate, at stake.[19]

In this dissertation, I contend, contrary to Du Bois' assertion, that the truly misjudged are those who are not in the Talented Tenth image of preachers but the multifaceted manifestations of the folk preachers of the nine-tenths, the preacher of the masses. The realities of social class and the elitism of academic pedigree within the Talented Tenth image provides for the exclusion and invisibility of an expansive and eclectic group of preachers and other proclaimers who encourage, inspire, organize, and reprove the masses in ways pulpit-centered but often not. preachers of the masses are generally non-elites in terms of education and social class who preach and proclaim to other non-elites who comprise the majority of African American life. Often operating and impacting people within the ebb and flow of African American daily life, names of preachers of the masses often are unknown or unspoken in elite educational and theological conversations about preaching practice, preaching theory, and homiletical pedagogy. The preachers of the masses are the theological embodiments of Du Bois' ninety percent, representing the beauty and complexity of African American life.[20]

The ideology of the Talented Tenth would cast a long and lasting shadow informing how generations of African Americans would come to make sense of the world. Du Bois' immeasurable sway in advocating the Talented Tenth combined with an increasing

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[19] Also see William H. Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865 – 1964* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001).

[20] Peter Paris, "The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for Common Discourse (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995). Paris highlights continuity between religious and cultural practices and perspectives in African and African American expressions. The "zanami" are mediums who predate North American enslavement. The preacher was not exclusively male. Women preached in different contexts. The Black preacher became mainly male in mainline denominations except for storefronts and house churches.

understanding of ministry being a profession deeply impacted how the Black Church tradition would understand itself. A class-conscious community would, therefore, create and give authority to a class-conscious preacher image. This figure would model "the best of" African American life in the profession of ministry.[21] The Talented Tenth preacher becomes the theological embodiment of a particular African American class-consciousness. Du Bois' critique of the preachers of the masses through the ideology of the Talented Tenth would have a lasting impact on the professional academic formation of African American ministers and shape the imaginative trajectory of the field of African American homiletics. Maybe unknown or otherwise calculated by Du Bois, his preference for a Talented Tenth preacher could, in many ways, truncate the power and leadership potential of his much broader theorization of the preacher. The undermining his overall aims of African American uplift and economic justice are at stake with this ideological truncation.

The moral and ethical critique of the preacher of the masses by Du Bois and others impacts the ways the folk preacher is understood. Talented Tenth preachers like African Methodist Episcopal Bishop Daniel Payne actively critiqued expressions of emotion. Payne stressed a more Eurocentric approach to worship as a means of racial assimilation. These approaches obscure the manifold contributions of the unlettered bard: The preacher of the masses. I will demonstrate that these preachers of the masses have served the needs of their communities. They have planted and built churches of practically every Protestant persuasion. They have stood at the gates of white supremacy and protected the masses in times of trouble regardless of socioeconomic class or status. Without great education, many of them have provided insight into the forms of hegemony that have impeded Black progress in the U.S. These

[21] Kelly Miller, *The Ministry: The Field for the Talented Tenth* (Murray Brothers Press: Washington, 1911), p. 14.

preachers are equally as significant as elite Black preachers and deserve proper analysis in the field of Black homiletics.

Presenting the Talented Tenth preacher consistent with civil rights objectives and images, African American homiletics—beginning with Henry H. Mitchell—made a particular understanding of the Black preacher available for academic inquiry and conversation. Appearing in the ideological and physical spaces of what some call the Black Church tradition, and prominently described in the scholarship of African American homiletics, the Talented Tenth preacher is traceable to the preacher Du Bois offers in the "religion of the slave." Du Bois' concept of slave religion and the institution of the preacher posited in *Souls* is a prefiguring of the manifestation of the concept of the Talented Tenth preacher. Operating outside of a Talented Tenth imagination is a more recent expression of African American religion and culture called Hip-Hop where a modern manifestation of the preacher is active.

Hip-Hop Culture

That's the Joint! *The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, edited by Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal is a historiography of Hip-Hop culture. From its urban street beginnings to its worldwide acceptance by several generations, Hip-Hop has arisen as a culture with its art forms and shared imagination that is embraced by hearers for its messages of uplift, organizing, and subversives.[22] The Hip-Hop MC comes forth as the newest "bard," to use Du Bois' term, and can communicate messages to the public square—parts of which attend the Black Church and parts of which worship outside the Black Church at the main altars of the Hip-Hop MC.

[22] See Michael Eric Dyson's "The Culture of Hip-Hop," and Mark Anthony Neal's and Clarence Lusane's "Rap, Race, and Politics," in *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, eds. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004), 61, 351.

I argue that the Hip-Hop MC is a manifestation of the Du Boisian theorization of the preacher and, for many, the MC is a more relevant and robust preacher than the Talented Tenth image. Though not possible in this dissertation, the field of preaching would be enriched by a renewed homiletic method with the MC image at its center. I aim to make the more substantial methodological work possible in this dissertation by expanding the image of the preacher in the African American homiletic imagination.

The relevance of the image may be due to ideological and contemporary connections to the concept of slavery. A key focus of this dissertation is to demonstrate how the Hip-Hop MC, whose birth and development occurred in the urban streets and boroughs of New York City, is part of a broader tradition of the "preacher" theorized within the "religion of the slave" framework proposed by Du Bois. In *God and the Ghetto*, African American preacher and scholar William Augustus Jones argues that the American inner-city condition in the 1960s and 1970s and the economic realities that enforce perpetual poverty and disenfranchisement are, in effect, recasting African American enslavement.[23] I will argue that the Hip-Hop MC is a modern manifestation of the slave preacher, often operating beyond the scope of the Talented Tenth imagination. If the "religion of the slave" must have "Music," then Rap is Hip-Hop's genre.

The Hip-Hop preacher, the MC or emcee, rose out of a mixed genre of familiar African American music, new folk poetry, and a new musical expression called Rap. According to Princeton scholar Imani Perry, "Hip-Hop calls for radical honesty concerning the complexity of

[23] Jones, *God in the Ghetto*. William Augustus Jones argues that there has been African American advancement for certain middle-class African Americas but, for most, the situation grows increasingly dire. The urban ghetto is a symbol of American experimentation and dehumanization, and he argues for religion more responsive to these realities, in part, because God is present in the "hood."

Black communities and art, even in the public eye."[24] People around the world have absorbed this new preacher's cadence, style, and poetic structure. Such that in some instances it is used to deliver messages that challenge the masses to wake up, take action, and form a united front against negative forces in the world. The Hip-Hop MC's central pulpit is not in the traditional church building. It is in the public square. The MC's messages are heard on the airwaves and in underground gatherings and meeting places. The culture of Hip-Hop, manifesting in the mid-to-late 1970s, consists of the elements of the deejay (DJ), the emcee (MC), break dancing (B-boys/B-girls), graffiti (street art), styles of fashion, and an activist political perspective and commentary towards the dominant social structure.

This new preacher of the masses—the Hip-Hop MC—remains undertheorized and little explored in homiletics. I argue that one reason many "preachers of the masses," or representatives the majority of the African American experience, remain under-explored within the literature of African American homiletics is because of a deep, unspoken, and abiding influence of the Talented Tenth imagination. Du Bois' successful propagation of the Talented Tenth ideology within the broader African American society, in part through education, continues to inform and promote a Talented Tenth model of leadership unconsciously. The evidence of a Talented Tenth imagination within African American homiletics is the conscious or unconscious production and reproduction of images of the ideal preacher strongly bearing the markers of Talented Tenth educational and social formation. If the contours of the Talented Tenth imagination inhibit the recognition of the identity and ingenuity of the preacher of the

[24] Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip-Hop* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 6.

masses, then it would be even more challenging for white homileticians to detect and theorize about the genius and wisdom of the unlettered bards of African American culture.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Du Bois was a foundational person in the field of sociology. He brought his own identity and a wide array of academic disciplines to bear upon the scholarship of African American experience. In many ways, Henry H. Mitchell put forth a homiletic method for African American preaching, modeled a similar example in the field of homiletics. Du Bois' perspective on the African American condition by an African American researcher changed how the field of sociology understands itself and may have inspired Mitchell's homiletic intervention. Before Mitchell, white academics in the field did not adequately consider the African American experience and its implications for preaching. The leading white homileticians of Mitchell's time, the Talented Tenth of the white preaching conversation, were actively pursuing projects of importance to white churches and white cultural contexts. The inability of white homileticians to perceive African American preaching reflected a larger white inattentiveness to African American life. In like manner, African Americans shaped in a Talented Tenth imagination may have struggled to recognize present and emerging preachers operating amongst the masses. In effect, both African American and white homileticians, shaped by similar imaginative forces, would struggle to see certain types of African American preachers constantly bubbling up amongst the ninety percent.

Like many scholars of his generation, Mitchell was influenced by Talented Tenth formation through the scholarship of Du Bois. A significant contribution of Mitchell is providing a homiletic method for the Talented Tenth preacher image posited by Du Bois. Mitchell placed African American preaching in conversation with white homileticians helping to expand the field of homiletics and validate the tradition of African American preaching. This activity was

occurring within the literature of the graduate school environment and at leading religious institutions—that is, the traditional spaces for Talented Tenth ministerial formation. These same spaces are "ivory towers," or a symbol that is distant from the masses of people who come to hear these preachers.

Du Bois' influence on African Americans through the propagation of the Talented Tenth is operative and observable in promising and limiting ways within the literature of African American homiletics. The concept of the Talented Tenth did positively impact the formation of African American preachers by producing preachers like Gardner C. Taylor, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Samuel DeWitt Proctor, while simultaneously lifting them as images of preaching excellence. Their sermons in conferences, seminary classrooms, and preaching books seeking to represent an assessable image of African American people to the white world. The influence of their preaching continues to uplift many African American preachers in the seminary setting, help set standards for who or what is excellent, and redefine what is "the best of the African American tradition." However, as these preachers remain internationally respected after their deaths, their accomplishments may be harder to recognize by the succeeding generations of African American preachers and the masses they represent.

A limiting aspect of the Talented Tenth imagination is observed in the strenuous advocacy and idealization of the Talented Tenth preacher by Du Bois and other African American academics. Du Bois' construal of the unlettered descendant of the enslaved preacher as a threat to African American uplift displayed the limitation of the Talented Tenth imagination. The ways of indigenous knowing and being promoted by Talented Tenth may not be considered as "the best of the tradition" by many academics and their scholarship. All the while, operating beyond the original boundaries of Talented Tenth thought, new figures and images are

continually emerging, and therefore moving the masses. If the Hip-Hop MC is a newer manifestation of the Du Boisian preacher and a preacher of the masses, then addressing the historical and present dimensions of the Talented Tenth imagination is necessary. A broader discussion of the Hip-Hop preacher is in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

I will argue that, for the following reasons, the "Talented Tenth" image of the African American preacher is waning in its relevance. Its decline may disclose that this image no longer well serves African American homiletics as the only manifestation of the expansive Du Boisian theorized post-plantation preacher: First, the "Talented Tenth" image of African American leadership, including clerical leaders, were the products of a particular season in American history and culture, namely and roughly from Emancipation (1865) to the modern civil rights movement ending in the early 1970s. From the time of the civil rights movement until now, new manifestations of African American culture have arisen with their images of leadership and forms of communication and expressions of power and relevance. Many younger African American preachers no longer look exclusively, as did previous generations, to model themselves after Martin Luther King, Jr., Gardner C. Taylor, and similar preachers, whom I will show, are Talented Tenth preachers.

Second, Henry H. Mitchell, Cleophus LaRue, Kenyatta Gilbert and other leading homiletics writers of the civil rights generation came of age in a racially segregated context. The racial struggle was the dominant issue of the 20th century, a period predicted by Du Bois as being defined by trying to solve the problem described as the tension between Black and white characterized as the color line. One hundred years after Du Bois wrote *The Souls of Black Folk* and forty-eight years after Mitchell began writing in the field of homiletics, the dominating influence on popular African American culture is not the leadership of educated Black elites;

rather, I argue that it is the figure of the MC of Hip-Hop culture. In terms of economic and cultural impact, MC's have moved beyond the streets of American cities and have become a global force."[25] Thus, following religious scholar Anthony Pinn, Monica Miller, and Bun B, and I contend that Hip-Hop is a type of non-church religion, or a form of the "religion of the slave," theorized by Du Bois in *Souls*.[26] The Hip-Hop MC is the culture's preacher.

Born of the deprived and dilapidated urban context, and operating outside of Talented Tenth churches and schools, Hip-Hop artists have built a variety of spiritual communities beyond the traditional boundaries of the church.[27] The Hip-Hop MC operates in the same domains as the classic Du Boisian preacher—the artistic domain, the healing domain, the justice domain, and the priestly domain. The Hip-Hop MC may be a voice that can speak to generations who no longer worship at the altars of churches and those who never had an interest in established religion.

One name that has been given to those who no longer profess belief in established religion, but continues to believe in God, is the "Dones." Joshua Packard, writing for *Christianity Today* says,

> The Dones are those disillusioned with the Church. Though they were committed to the church for years—often as lay leaders—they no longer attend. Whether because they're dissatisfied with the structure, social message, or politics of the institutional church**,** or the church no longer meets their needs, they've decided they are better off without organized religion.[28]

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[25] For a discussion of Hip-Hop as a global force see Jeff Chang's "It's a Hip-Hop World" online at http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/12/its-a-hip-hop-world/ (accessed November 4, 2017). For a discussion on Hip-Hop as a religion, see Christopher Driscoll's article, "What's This 'Religious' in Hip-Hop Culture?" *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* 40, no. 3 (2011).

[26] Monica R. Miller, Anthony Pinn and Bun B, eds., *Religion in Hip-Hop: Mapping the New Terrain in the US*, (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2015).

[27] Ibid.

[28] Joshua Packard, "Meet the 'Dones,'" *Christianity Today*, July 17, 2015. http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2015/summer-2015/meet-dones.html (accessed January 9, 2017). Also, see Joshua Packard. *Church Refugees: Sociologists reveal why people are DONE with the church but not their faith.* (New York, NY: Group Publishing, 2015).

Then there are termed the “nones.” In a Pew Research Center study, “nones” are defined as a “category that includes people who self-identify as atheists or agnostics, as well as those who say their religion is “nothing in particular.”[29] They now make up 23% of U.S. adults, up from 16% in 2007.[30]

The language of “dones” and “nones” are modern names for shifting American attitudes about religion. The MC connects and communicates with the "none" and the "dones," a growing swath of the masses ranging from irreligious to tepidly faithful." Though the drifting away of middle-aged older adults who often supported churches may constitute the "dones," these attitudes are not exclusive to them. Many are deciding against religion younger, earlier, and quicker than before. These disaffected people still constitute a broader popular culture where the MC is the preacher to the masses.

The fashioning of new images of faith and new preachers often results in clashes with previous images. Established religions have waged war when new preachers arrive on the American historical scene. In America, the war was waged on Catholics, Mormons, and Episcopalians, to name just a few groups whose preacher and religious rituals were bashed and seen as outliers in America.[31]

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Michael Lipka, "Religious ‘nones' are not only growing they are becoming more secular,” *Pew Research Center*, November 11, 2015. http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/11/religious-nones-are-not-only-growing-theyre-becoming-more-secular/ (accessed January 9, 2017).

[31] See Harry Partin and Robert Ellwood, *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1987). Also see Eugene Gallagher and W. Michael Ashcraft, *Introduction to New and Alternative Religions* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishing Group, 2006).

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1, titled “Washington, Du Bois, and the Uplift of Black Folk” outlines the differences in political strategies between Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois as each sought to provide approaches to African American uplift amidst the nascent development of Blacks in America under European American domination. A small segment of African American thought leaders supported the development and propagation of the Talented Tenth ideology amongst the folk by embodying complicated commitments to African American uplift led by the educated elite. A line, though not always straight, can be drawn from the efforts to overcome bigotry and intellectual minimization by white society to the championing of a Talented Tenth idea by W. E. B. Du Bois and others, who believed in the intellectual capacity of African Americans and wrestled with ways to uplift and educate all Blacks.

The problem of revealing and veiling aspects of the preacher in African American culture is pervasive in the field of African American preaching because the influence of the Talented Tenth on African American preaching has yet to be identified within its scholarship. This dissertation includes the preachers of the masses and the Hip-Hop MC as preachers who operate in the four Du Boisian preacher domains (priest, physician, judge, and bard) and does so in a way that newly contributes to the literature.

Chapter 2, titled "Detecting the Talented Tenth Idea in African American Homiletics" will construct a portrait "respectability" in the literature of African American preaching in the academy. It reveals the formation of the Talented Tenth preacher in African American homiletics. Black homileticians engaged in different angles of research within the *matrix o* termsf "white respectability" in the academy.

Chapter 3, titled “Beyond the Talented Tenth: Ministers, Minstrels, and Preachers of the Masses as Homiletic Precursors to the Hip-Hop MC,” reveals some of the preachers of the masses of the Black church after Reconstruction up to the civil rights movement as precursors for the emergence of the Hip-Hop MC as a preacher.

It also further investigates the problems presented by white respectability and double-consciousness — historian Curtis J. Evans work *The Burden of Black Religion* is instructive as he argues that Black religion, particularly in discussions of emotion, was often interpreted as a symbol of Black ‘progression’ or ‘regression’ by whites and those of the Talented Tenth class of Blacks. Due to the ways Du Bois and others theorized the importance of the African American preacher to the institution or social sphere called the Black Church, the burden of Black religion would inevitably become the burden of the Black preacher. The Black folk preacher who would often embody or intone emotion in their sermon. Therefore, the Black preacher bore the burden of racial respectability. This burden implies that folk preaching is often unattended in the constructive and instructive projects on the practice of preaching. Talented Tenth preachers are often models in constructive works of homiletics theory. The folk preacher tradition via the preacher of the masses that would often embrace musicality in their sermons remains neglected. This chapter explores topics such as the practice of whooping, conversations about the innate religiosity of Black people, and the politics of respectability. These topics influence how African American preachers are understood.

Chapter 4, entitled "Connecting C. L. Franklin to C. L. Smooth: The Hip-Hop MC as the New Preacher of the Masses" connects the Hip-Hop MC to the tradition of other manifestations of the African American preacher. The tradition of conjure where the conjurer would utilize words to create new realities through helping or harming intent is an area of focus. The Hip-Hop

MC engages in rhetorical conjure in much the same way. The MC is a product of the urban condition of northern cities of the 20th century where other religious traditions beyond mainline Protestantism and systems of belief flourished like the Five Percent Nation (Nation of Gods and Earths). The MC connects to the emotion, tonality, rhythm, and rhyme of the folk preaching tradition with many of those same aspects are discernable in the urban context where what noted sociologist Arthur H. Fauset terms "Black sects and cults."[32]

Chapter 5, "The Preacher as MC" explores the implications of the Hip-Hop MC when it is employed as an organizing image for the preacher. The MC draws self-identity and self-understanding from other African American preachers and influences beyond traditional Black church and Talented Tenth structures, along with traditional understandings of the African American Church preacher, to form a unique manifestation of the Du Boisian preacher.

This chapter places the image of the Hip-Hop MC in conversation with an image of the preacher, which the author believes has generative possibilities—namely the preacher as "witness" found in Thomas G. Long's influential work *The Witness of Preaching* and the "fool" offered in *Preaching Fools* by Cilliers and Campbell.

Building on a critical engagement of the understanding the image of "witness" and its implications, a Talented Tenth image of the preacher displays spaces for comparison and contrast as the Hip-Hop MC as operates as a "foolish witness" to Talented Tenth sensibilities. By taking inventory of these influences, this chapter aims to display how the MC has the potential to transcend traditional racial constructions that buttress these dominant preacher images to reveal its potential to become a controlling image that resonates in a postmodern, post-soul context.

[32] Arthur Huff Fauset, Black *Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971).

I conclude my argument with Towards the Reimagination of African American Homiletics. The Hip-Hop MC, born of the urban context, approaches the world and proclamation by using skills and perspectives uniquely honed to communicate and educate effectively in the urban context. The teaching of preaching and the underlying assumptions that undergird preaching should be reimagined, in light of a rapidly increasing and diverse urban context, as we broach the conversation of setting a preliminary trajectory for future academic study and practical exploration.

Style

The literature in Black homiletics and culture has consistently considered the style of the Black preachers of the masses to be unlearned, overly emotional, and simplistic while elite (Talented Tenth) Black preachers are perceived as countering the stereotype. Conversely, they operate as composed and erudite orators who exhibit the best of Black thought. Introducing the concept of style in Black homiletics may undermine the binary between the Talented Tenth preachers and the preachers of the masses. Ministers not trained in seminaries and colleges have historically preached in styles often considered to be styles of the masses. These styles include whooping, tuning, and moaning.

The influence of the Talented Tenth idea (the belief that select educated preachers are to represent the masses of Black preachers) is pervasive in African American homiletic thought. It brought African American preaching and the Talented Tenth preacher into the view of existing white discourses in preaching. While this approach was a beginning, it left behind the preachers of the masses and future preachers such as the Hip-Hop MC. By establishing the contributions and the preaching prowess of the preachers of the masses and by showing the formation of the Hip-Hop MC as a most recent iteration of the African American preacher, it is possible to re-

imagine African American homiletics. This re-imagining includes viewing the preachers of the masses and the Hip-Hop MC preacher as generative images for the fiel

Chapter 1

Washington, Du Bois, and the Uplift of Black Folk

The Washington and Du Bois Debate

Before the conclusion of the Civil War, small groups of elite whites were actively organizing to decide how to mold the active lives of the African American masses, who mainly populated the southern United States. Education would be a chief mechanism for how a small group of whites, along with the compliance of a cadre of African Americans, created a new social imagination amongst the masses of African Americans. The Civil War and its aftermath drove the creation of systems of education in the Southern United States.[1]

The development of African American education occurred through the establishment of educational funds, the building of schools,[2] and also, the creation of missionary societies for religious instruction. Seemingly benign, the complex motivations of these white groups were aimed at establishing systemic and persistent mechanisms for white control. Debates among leading whites and a small group of educated African Americans about a concept framed as the "Negro Question" or "Negro Problem" concerned the most effective and advantageous route for the advancement and uplift of Black folk. This conversation intensified in the United States and continued from 1895-1915.

At the center of the debate during this period were none other than the first leader of Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University), Booker T. Washington, and the younger, Harvard-trained scholar, W.E.B. Du Bois. It is the historical disagreement between these two

[1] See William H. Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1964* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001).

[2] See Stephanie Deutsch, *You Need a Schoolhouse: Booker T. Washington, Julius Rosenwald, and the Building of Schools for the Segregated South* (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2015).

intellectuals that foregrounds the overall intentions of this chapter. During this debate, and observable in this chapter, are how an African American leadership class came into being with little input from the African American masses.

Washington and Du Bois are persons of complicated actions and ideas concerning African American uplift. For the sake of debate, these men and their ideas relative to Black uplift have been oversimplified, having the texture of socio-political nuance eroded for the sake of simple categorizations. The legacy of Washington is a prime example. These men were not the inventors of the ideas that they propagated and for which they became known. Quite to the contrary, we can define these men by the style of education they received and the sources of funding that nurtured and propagated such beliefs.

Upon Washington's death, Du Bois' propagation of a top-down leadership plan for African American uplift through an elitist conception of Black heroics became the dominant social image for the formation of college-educated African Americans. The vestiges of the Talented Tenth philosophy influenced the curricula of growing Black colleges and, as will be shown in this dissertation, also inspired the cultivation of the Talented Tenth preacher.

This chapter challenges the misrepresentation of Booker T. Washington as an accommodationist and shows that he focused on the livelihood of the *Black masses*. The predominance of Talented Tenth thought consciously or unsuspiciously distorted Washington's contributions, namely a fervent connection to the uplift of the African American masses.

Later scholars of African American preaching would historicize and theorize Black preaching through a similar Talented Tenth framework as that used by Du Bois. Beginning with Henry H. Mitchell, the premier Black scholar of homiletics in the last part of the twentieth century, African American scholars have developed a homiletic method to support the formation

of the Talented Tenth preacher in seminaries and academic literature. Mitchell strengthened the field of homiletics and established African American homiletics as a respected site of preaching wisdom. Like Du Bois before him, Mitchell's Talented Tenth homiletic framework subsequently engendered a trickle-down, one-sided historicizing of Black preachers who fit within Du Bois' prejudice. By taking up not just Washington himself—but Washington's purview of focusing on the Black masses—African American homiletics will take better notice and proper historical treatment of Black preachers who do and did not fit within the confines of Du Bois' rubrics for Black leadership. Once African American homiletics does away with another vestige of the Talented Tenth idea, namely its elitist historicizing, it will be able to acknowledge the contributions—past and current—and Black voices that were steeped in the community for whom and to whom they were preaching.

Complicating the Accommodationist Label of Booker T. Washington

The political strategy of racial pragmatism centering on the experience and development of the masses commonly associated with Booker T. Washington was rooted in slavery. Washington knew the everyday realities of slave life because he was born enslaved. Washington was born into slavery in Hale's Ford, Virginia in 1856 to an enslaved woman named Jane and her husband, a freedman named William Ferguson, who escaped to West Virginia. Growing up during the Civil War and building a life in its aftermath, Washington attended Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Hampton, Virginia and worked in various capacities on campus while earning his education. Washington served as a teacher at Hampton until he was recommended by his boss, Hampton Principal Samuel C. Armstrong, to lead a new institution in Alabama named Tuskegee. This institution started in part due to the influence of a slave named

Lewis Adams.[3] After the death of abolitionist Frederick Douglass in 1895, Washington's influence as a teacher, orator, and race leader propelled to new heights.

Washington's significant influence did not immunize his ideas from numerous misunderstandings, particularly regarding his intentions concerning the education of freed Black folk. Historically, some have argued that Washington devalued liberal arts and sought to create a society where Black folk were trained only for agriculture.[4] However, Washington was not against liberal arts or classical education. He was not against any form of educational advancement for Black folk. Washington saw the agricultural industry and a liberal arts education as equally invaluable for the freed Black person; however, he viewed liberal arts education and training as less than practical, and less than advantageous in the South after the failures of Reconstruction and in the throes of what historian Rayford Logan called "the nadir of American race relations."[5]

Washington was, however, concerned about the masses of Black people who were not intending to center their lives and livelihood on liberal arts. Washington focused on the masses of Black folk who would become beneficiaries of living a self-sufficient life. Washington sensed that African Americans working and toiling on their land, with their own hands, and benefiting

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[3] Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: Volume 1: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 113.

[4] William Monroe Trotter, the Black intellectual who started "The Guardian," was a known critic of Booker T. Washington. See the second chapter of Stephen R. Fox, *The Guardian of Boston: William Monroe Trotter* (Cambridge: Athenium, 1970), 31.

[5] Rayford Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901* (New York: Dial Press), 1954. Logan argues that the year 1901 was the "nadir of race relations." He also contends that the repealing of almost all legal and social opportunities afforded to African Americans after the Civil War eventually clawed back. Legal disenfranchisement, a pandemic of lynching, and systemic economic exploitation placed the future of African Americans as a people in doubt. Logan positions 1901 as the lowest point of race relations. Other scholars contest this date, but the overwhelming consensus of scholars argue that, at some point, race relations did bottom out in America, namely because of white reticence to fully enfranchise African Americans after generations of disempowerment.

from their labor would provide lasting empowerment and a base for later political and social integration. Washington was, by upbringing and current context, racially pragmatic. However, for Southern whites who created and sustained a way of life predicated on complete African American disenfranchisement, even Washington's most practical proposals for African American education and organization would be ripe for distortion.

The misrepresentation of Washington as deciding against a broad education for African Americans and functioning as an accommodationist stems mostly from how white planters and Southerners distorted his beliefs into the rhetoric that fit their agendas. Believing that Blacks were innately intellectually inferior to whites, James D. Anderson, in his book, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935,* addresses how segments of the white planter community and Northern philanthropists, along with a segment of the Black community, tried to use training in agricultural/blue collar-focused schools to ensure that Black folk were trained only to work with their hands:

> The Hampton-Tuskegee curriculum of industrial education was central to the philanthropists' educational ideology, not as a means to reconcile white supremacists to the idea of Black public education, but as a program to reinforce the existing structure of the South's political economy and make it run more efficiently…Therefore, the twin slogans of the Southern education movement were universal schooling for all, Black and white, and the Hampton-Tuskegee style of industrial education for Blacks.[6]

Although African American religious denominations formed schools, and eventually colleges and universities, many of those currently populated by African Americans were not founded by them. The Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute is no exception. The American Missionary Association (AMA) was a Northern abolitionist group who, with many objectives, committed significant resources to the education of African Americans. After service in the Union army,

[6] James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 82.

Samuel Chapman Armstrong worked in the area of African American education, founding Hampton Institute.

Built on a commitment to the cultivation of industry and labor, Armstrong designed the curriculum of Hampton Institute as a space for large African American leadership formation. Armstrong expressed that this is a concept of "head, heart, and hands."[7] The concept displays how a concert of actions—the synchronicity of head, hands, and heart—expresses a complete orientation for leading the masses towards the soil for their sustenance and potential empowerment. The system of slavery robbed African Americans of the ability to receive a tangible benefit from their labor. After emancipation, Hampton's curriculum sought to make those same skills more efficient and scientific for the production of agricultural resources while simultaneously offering these newly educated African American leaders a path toward limited self-development.

The Hampton educational model, which later became known as the "Hampton-Tuskegee model" of education because of Washington's application of its methods at then Tuskegee Institute is identified by emphasizing courses in agricultural technology, home economics, morality, manners, writing, mathematics, and religion all while discouraging the exhibition of African folkways and attitudes which could lend themselves to social unrest.

In tandem with the idea that Blacks were inherently more religious and less intelligent than whites, from 1898 to 1914, members of the Southern planter class and philanthropists were devising ways to educate Blacks so that schools would "achieve the proper racial hierarchy by

[7] David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 45.

teaching Black youth to "work with their hands," have "few wants," and stay in their "natural environment."[8]

Amid this discussion, Booker T. Washington's popularity among the Black masses, Northern philanthropists, and businesspeople began to grow. As the prized pupil of Armstrong and African American embodiment of the "head, hands, and heart" mantra, Washington became the chief propagator of this form of uplift. Meanwhile, a small group of Northern, classically-educated African Americans was concerned with the increase in Washington's influence and the substance of his argument. Washington's cultivation of the type of racial uplift that, for them, seemed to accommodate the status quo of agricultural indebtedness, was unacceptable.

The nuances of Washington's educational philosophy and pragmatism are most noticeable in his most famous oration, the "Cotton States and International Exposition Speech." Delivered on September 18, 1895, in Atlanta, Georgia; Washington declares:

> Ignorant and inexperienced, it is not strange that in the first years of our new life we began at the top instead of at the bottom; that a seat in Congress or the state legislature was more sought than real estate or industrial skill; that the political convention or stump speaking had more attractions than starting a dairy farm or truck garden.[9]

While reading Washington's speech, one must be careful to not place too much stock in the way he describes Black folk. He is merely addressing a white Southern population in ways that can convince them to donate to his school so he can help prepare the masses to earn a living and financially come "up out of slavery." Moreover, we must remember the broader social context of this speech. The national mood of white people, especially in Southern states, was not hospitable. They were violently resistant, to the point of mass terror campaigns, even to nascent attempts of

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[8] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South,* 82.

[9] Alice M. Bacon, *The Negro and the Atlanta Exposition* (Baltimore: The Trustees, 1896), 12-16.

African American enfranchisement. Washington, the president of an African American educational institution lodged in rural Alabama, needed to strategically support broad-scale African American uplift while mollifying the growing angst and anger of whites, both poor and rich, in his immediate vicinity. Washington understood that empowering the masses with practical tools was a critical step towards overall enfranchisement. Moreover, as such, his words needed to stress African American self-development apart from immediate political or social gains while maintaining a loose but necessary relationship with whites.

Promulgating industrial-focused education, racial separation, and what many viewed as a passive role by Negroes in advocating for their civil rights, Washington said:

> Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the *masses of us* are to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labor, and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life; shall prosper in proportion as we learn to draw the line between the superficial and the substantial, the ornamental gewgaws of life and the useful. No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much *dignity in tilling a field* as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top. Nor should we permit our grievances to overshadow our opportunities. [emphasis mine][10]

A small group of educationally elite African Americans believed that Washington was bartering present economic development for the negation of political and social power. Washington's path to national and international prominence attributed to the many ways his hands were active in the dirt while farming, while still displaying the industriousness to build a school that would eventually develop into a respected research university in the Jim Crow-regulated south. Washington argues that both actions, "writing a poem" and "tilling a field," manifest imaginative capabilities that demand equal dignity and support from whites and African Americans alike.[11]

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[10] Ibid., 12 – 16.

[11] Ibid., 16.

Reasoning that the ability to completely control one's means of sustenance through mastering the best techniques of agricultural science, yet also ensuring self-determination by developing the knowledge and experience to build a home, make clothes, fix machinery and master trades and competencies, Washington's plan would prepare African Americans in the functional actions of business. An African American community that is self-sufficient will produce formidable thinkers, artists, and activists because they would be independent of white control.

Washington expresses a concern that may be valid for today. If the small class of African American leadership would too quickly desire to become in education, culture, and curriculum like the influential and elite whites of America, they may lead themselves to practical irrelevancy. Washington saw the folly in *channeling* the few educated members of the community to concentrate exclusively on philosophical pursuits and productions of literature for recognition in white culture.

Washington was concerned that with a lopsided focus on the cultivation of educated African Americans to the development of "writing poems," African Americans could become a people led by vagabond poets, persons skilled in matters of abstraction but sadly, disconnected from any legal or economic relationship to the land. African American leaders would run the risk of becoming ignorant of their indigenous legacies and traditions of self-determination. Washington rightly noted that the masses of African Americans, then and now, would not be the professional class. However, Washington did not resist, to the degree that his opponents would claim, a liberal arts education altogether. He argued for an effective counterweight to the formation of African American leadership and the need for a robust educational model that would develop pride in time-tested means of survival and sustenance. He believed that those cultural inheritances would come collective strength and artistic expression.

Washington's complex personal story, along with his deep formation in an industrial and agricultural education system, provided a formidable program of racial pragmatism that centered the realities of the masses of recently emancipated persons. Washington's program appeared too much like slavery for educated Black elites in the north. For many affluent whites, his approach was worth their support. Thus, the label of accommodationist remains affixed to the image of Booker T. Washington to this very day.

A biographer of Washington, Robert Norell, offers a different historical assessment of Washington than that of the usual accommodationist depiction. Norell writes, "Having conditions forced on him, with the threat of destruction the cost of resistance, does not constitute an objective definition of accommodation. It is coercion."[12] After Washington's Atlanta Exposition speech, "Northern whites [and Southerners] regarded Washington as the leading expert on Black life in the South, and it was largely through his role as an exponent of industrial education at Tuskegee Institute that philanthropic largesse channeled from the North into various Black organizations and educational institutions."[13] While Washington delivered his speech in Atlanta, a young Du Bois sat listening, seemingly enjoying it, even writing a note to Washington praising it.[14] Things were cordial between the two, even though Du Bois believed that the educational philosophy of Washington was damaging to the uplift of Black folk.

[12] Robert Norrell, *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (Boston: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 439.

[13] Curtis J. Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 95.

[14] David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois, 1868-1919: Biography of a Race* (New York: H. Holt, 1994), 175.

W. E. B. Du Bois as Image of Racial Protest

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois was born in Great Barrington, MA in 1868 during the wake of African American emancipation. The night before the March on Washington in 1963, Du Bois died in Accra, Ghana.[15] Du Bois' life context shaped the conception of protest associated with him by African Americans. Du Bois received his B.A. in 1888 from Fisk University, a second B.A., and an M.A. from Harvard in 1890 and 1892, respectively. After studying two years at the University of Berlin, he received his Ph.D. from Harvard in 1895, making him the first African American in Harvard's history to do so.

Concerning Du Bois' impressive academic career, he was a professor of Greek and Latin at Wilberforce University in 1894 to 1896 and an assistant instructor of sociology at the University of Pennsylvania from 1896-1897. At Atlanta University, he was a professor of economics and history from 1897 to 1910 and chairman of the Sociology Department from 1934 to 1944.[16] He served as the editor of The Moon journal in 1906, the Horizon journal from 1907 to 1910, the Crisis magazine from 1910 to 1934 and the Phylon magazine from 1940-1944.[17]

Outside of academia, Du Bois also contributed his time and effort to social justice work as the "principal founder of the Niagara Movement and subsequently helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) that waged a sustained battle against lynching and discrimination."[18] Lending his immense talents to protesting for the rights

[15] Phil Zuckerman, "Introduction to W.E.B Du Bois," *Du Bois on Religion,* ed. Phil Zuckerman (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 3.

[16] Du Bois, *Du Bois on Religion*, 3.

[17] Ibid., 3.

[18] Ibid.

of African Americans inextricably linked Du Bois with a protest tradition framed in counter distinction to Washington's image as an accommodationist.

Henry Louis Gates, one of the editors of the centennial edition of Du Bois' *Souls of Black Folk (Souls)*, said of Du Bois:

> Few African Americans shaped the course of African American history more centrally in the twentieth century than did William Edward Burghardt Du Bois. Indeed, if one were challenged to identify a Black "Person of the Century," one would be hard-pressed to identify a candidate more compelling than Du Bois. As a scholar, journalist, a creative writer, and a political activist, no one did more to give full voice to the American Negro than did W. E. B. Du Bois, the first African American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard.[19]

Gates notes how Du Bois operated with general proficiency in an array of fields, disciplines, mediums, and venues. Washington, Du Bois' senior, became the most influential African American at the time through a similar mastery of skills. Washington's international influence and Du Bois' undeniable intellect, considered alongside the fractionally small number of college-educated African Americans at the end of the 19th century, ensured that Du Bois would come in contact and eventually work with Washington in his career. Washington served as editor of the book, *The Negro Problem* (1899), in which an article by Du Bois titled, "The Talented Tenth," was first featured. They also contributed to a book titled *The Negro in the South* (1907) which published four years after *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois and Washington had a cordial, working relationship. Most of the work of Du Bois concerned the long-term role of Negroes in America and how they could achieve total equality despite white supremacy. Du Bois' concern focused on understanding what has been labeled as the "Negro Problem."

[19] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk (A Norton Critical Edition)*, vii.

The Negro Problem within the Diseased White Racial Imagination

In the book, *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery*, the authors write,

> Slavery has long identified in the national consciousness as a Southern institution. The time to bury that myth is overdue. Slavery is a story about America, *all of America*. The nation's wealth, from the very beginning, depended upon the exploitation of Black people on three continents. *Together, over the lives of millions of enslaved men and women, Northerners and Southerners shook hands and made a country*.[20] [emphasis mine]

The concept of the Negro Problem or Negro Question is an imaginative construction of those who claim a white identity. A consequence of a white identity constructed around ideas of racial supremacy is the inconsistent ways in which African Americans would be allowed to exist within the national consciousness. This problem or question is rife with the realities of Northern and Southern economic compromise concerning African American enslavement and disenfranchisement. The framing of African Americans as a question or problem displays deep socio-political complexities exhibiting what Willie Jennings calls a "diseased social imagination" active within the Southern and Northern consciousness towards African Americans.[21] The development of the Negro Problem concept is not a socio-historical, theological, or ideological anomaly; in fact, this concept reveals deeply ingrained issues within the American social imagination. Issues of complicity and complexity within the broader American social imagination impacted how African Americans were conceptualized, labeled, and treated, primarily based on the labor needs of America's burgeoning market economy. Whites in America

[20] Anne Farrow, Joel Lang, and Jenifer Frank, *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005), xxix.

[21] Willie Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 6.

needed to form a shared consciousness to morally and theologically justify the nation's allegiance to the institution of slavery.

The issue of complexity stems from the historical context of the politically tenuous nature of the American social experiment during the latter portion of the nineteenth century, especially after the Civil War. The North and the South would seek to reconstitute America through the "shaking of hands," ultimately at the expense of African American humanity and progress.[22] The complicity of a unifying economic system that was severely dependent upon the labor of enslaved persons and the complexity of incorporating the Confederate South back into the United States informed the national consciousness in matters concerning race in ways that are ideologically and theologically diseased.

The Negro Problem is a complex concept resistant to oversimplified considerations. At the core of what is wrong or diseased about Western Christianity, as theologian Willie James Jennings argues, is not its ritual practices or its theological tenants. Any attempt to "narrate exactly what is missing, or what thwarts the deeper reality of Christian social imagination," for Jennings, is incomplete without conceding that "Christianity in the Western world lives and moves within a diseased social imagination."[23] If imagination, both personal and social, is a "deep theological architecture that patterns early modern visions of peoples, places, and societies," then it is difficult to "sense what was turned horribly wrong theologically."[24] What is horribly wrong, Jennings states is how the practices of Christianity seem "ill,"[25] conveying a

[22] Farrow et al., *Complicity*, xxix.

[23] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 6.

[24] Ibid., 6.

[25] Ibid., 3.

“strangeness” that is “embedded” and “inexplicable.”[26] This implicit strangeness operative within the diseased social imagination is a “constellation of generative forces that have rendered people’s social performance of the Christian life anemic.”[27] The articulation of a sincere Christian theological commitment that is "enclosed in racial and cultural difference, inconsequentially related to its geography, often imaginatively detached from its surroundings of both people and spaces, but one yet bound to compelling gestures of connection, belonging, an invitation," for Jennings, displays how "we were operating out of a history of relations that exposed a distorted relational imagination."[28]

Jennings detects that the Christianity of America exists within a social imagination whose theological pronouncements exist disconnected from correlating action. On the one hand, this shared state of imagining is existentially detached from person and planet, but on the other hand, fervent in expressing rhetoric. It is in this chasm of imagination, stuck between theological ascent and existential aloofness that many white Christians find themselves.

More alarming for Jennings is that "Christian theology now operates inside this diseased social imagination without knowing how to discern how its intellectual and pedagogical performances reflect and fuel the problem, further crippling the communities it serves.”[29] What is missing, Jennings continues, “is the ability to see the profound connections between an embrace by very different people in chapel and theological meditations articulated in the

[26] Ibid., 3.

[27] Ibid., 6.

[28] Ibid., 4.

[29] Ibid., 7.

classroom, between connecting to the earth, to strangers, and the possibilities of identities formed and reformed precisely in and through such actions."[30]

Starting with a shared imagination, Jennings' insights about what could be ailing the "anemic" practical actions of Christians are essential for present consideration. White people in America operate within a diseased social imagination of racial superiority toward African Americans or people who were once called Negroes. The effort to address the Negro Problem, primarily through education—understood to be the sharing of knowledge, or in the case of recently emancipated persons, the indoctrination of systemic servitude—submits the masses to the inculcation of the same illness of imagination. An imagination operating counter to the efforts of African American uplift, especially from another African American, would be evidence of the same disconnection of identity that is inherent in the ideologies of abstraction and disconnection of whites.

The symptom of this illness, namely detachment from its surroundings of both people and spaces, begins to leaven the entire society, both Black and white. The eventual outcome of a society that continues to deny the reality or the severity of white supremacy, both in its personal and structural realities, is collective blindness. It is a blindness that is, in fact, a disconnection from the fullness of the imagination by an inability to detect or envision "profound connections" between persons, places, and their inextricable relationship to identity.[31] The disease of white supremacy distorts imaginative connections with person and place, and ultimately skews the very idea of self, which in this case would be whiteness—who is white, who is not white, and what history and destiny do white people share?—which can cause a disconnection from reality and

[30] Ibid., 7.

[31] Ibid., 7.

disaffection for self and others. Unable or unwilling to accept the full culpability of benefiting, whether directly or indirectly, from international human trafficking and enslavement, white political and economic elites and the white masses of many ethnic varieties were also enslaved by their need to enslave others.[32] The side effects of a diseased social imagination are evident in how from a legal perspective African Americans were designated as property. Their group identity was distorted into a question to answer or a *problem t*o solve.

By placing the identity and future possibilities of African Americans within the form of a question or framing the survival of the masses as a problem to be solved, whites operate within the same chasm of imagination, subjecting their self-identity and survival to how they visualize and conceive the attributes of being Black. This allows white supremacy to function as the invisible architecture of the American social mind. The significant question becomes, how does a white nation espousing religious liberty and Christian mores reconcile the perpetually troubling need for African American enslavement and the even more inhumane and deplorable strategies to sustain it? The answer is simple: it does not.

Du Bois did address the larger question of the Negro Problem by engaging in landmark sociological studies tracing the historical and social causes of the present condition and future outcomes for the African American masses.[33] Du Bois, in his article, *The Study of the Negro Problem*, discussed what he believed was the bottom line regarding Negroes in America: "This constitutes the second class of Negro problems. The rest, as has been said, on the widespread

[32] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970).

[33] W. E. B. Du Bois. "The Study of the Negro Problems." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 11. Sage Publications, Inc., January 1898, 1-23.

conviction among Americans that no persons of Negro descent should become constituent members of the social body."[34]

Since African Americans were understood to be a problem, the burgeoning field of sociology began attempting to solve the looming issue of African Americans scientifically. As academic shorthand for this existential tension, it was named the "Negro Problem" or "the "Negro Question." In short, what does the country do with a now landless, largely illiterate African American population who are needed to maintain the stasis of international business markets and the material flourishing of America? Thomas Nelson Page, writing in 1904, framed the "Negro Problem" as a question in his book *The Negro: The Southerner's Problem*, "Among the chief problems which have vexed the country for the last century and threaten to give more trouble yet in the future is what is usually termed 'The Negro Question.'"[35]

Du Bois and the Negro Problem

For Du Bois, the Negro Problem or Negro Question is not abstract. It is personal and concrete. The opening chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk* begins with W. E. B. Du Bois wrestling with an ontological question posed by an anonymous "they" who come from "the other world" of white society. The indirect question that Du Bois discerns is "How does it feel to be a problem?"[36] Du Bois recognizes the question amid the superfluous conversation offered in its place and refuses to answer it.

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[34] Du Bois, "The Study of the Negro Problems," 8.

[35] Thomas Nelson Page, *The Negro: The Southerner's Problem* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1904), 3.

[36] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (New York: Penguin Press, 1903), 3.

As Du Bois chronicles his experience as an African and an American, he realizes that all are not equal, and like millions of other Africans in America, he is indeed "an outcast and stranger in his own house."[37] Du Bois experiences "double consciousness."[38] He explains double consciousness as a "measuring of one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,– an American, a Negro: two souls; two thoughts; two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."[39] For Du Bois, it was at that moment in the schoolhouse in New England where he encountered the disassociation and dislocation that informed his theorization of African American double consciousness. He felt a division of self at a cellular, even spiritual level. Double consciousness is the consequence of being the *object* of the Negro Problem.

The privilege of acquiring a world-class education was not an elitist exercise for Du Bois. The early motivation for Du Bois was to combat the ignorance that he felt lay at the core of how whites approached the Negro Problem. Early in Du Bois' career, he believed that knowledge based on scientific investigation would cure the ignorance that lay at the basis of faulty thinking about race and the Negro problem.[40] Du Bois occupied the unique positions of an international scholar, writer, and teacher. He thus felt compelled to address a "problem" and provide the "answers" that would ultimately define the future of all African Americans, including himself.

Du Bois did address the larger question of the Negro Problem by engaging in landmark sociological studies tracing the historical and social causes of the present condition and future

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[37] Ibid., 5.

[38] Ibid., 5.

[39] Ibid., 5.

[40] Ibid., 149.

outcomes for the African American masses.[41] Du Bois, in his article, *The Study of the Negro Problem*, discussed what he believed was the bottom line regarding Negroes in America: "This constitutes the second class of Negro problems. The rest, as has been said, on the widespread conviction among Americans that no persons of Negro descent should become constituent members of the social body."[42]

The Negro was a "problem" for America and experienced problems in America. Therefore, it would be nearly impossible for those called Negroes to become full members of a society that situates them above an animal but below a white person. Negroes could neither expect equal treatment under the laws and regulations of the country nor could they reasonably believe that either the Constitution or the Bill of Rights applied to them. It did not matter that they helped to build America. They sweated, bled, and died in every war fought by this country.

So, with this motivation, Du Bois sought to directly address and redress the "Negro Problem" and its supporting tenet, "the Color Line."[43] He held the belief that education in general, and a well-rounded liberal arts education for a Talented Tenth in particular, would help to achieve racial uplift for Negroes. Education would also assist Negroes in the process of material navigation and advancement within an America that was diseased by white supremacy. Hence the disagreement between Du Bois and Washington.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Washington and Du Bois would shape the future of the African American experience by advocating for ideological strategies to navigate the material and imaginative terrain of the broader diseased American social imagination for racial

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[41] Ibid., 3-8.

[42] Ibid., 9.

[43] Ibid., 1.

uplift. These men did not exist apart from the white diseased social imagination; in fact, they were also profoundly enmeshed in and subject to the complex realities of race, class, labor, capitalism, and what it means to be an American.

For both men, education held the promise of any realistic hopes for African American advancement. Washington and Du Bois set forth seemingly divergent educational agendas that would set the trajectory for the current ideological climate of the African American social imagination. Washington and his wealthy supporters advocated for the "Hampton-Tuskegee Plan" of education that would focus on industrial education, political conservatism, and a *de facto* acceptance of a race-based social caste system. This program of education would serve as a means to gain future access to economic security and American progress. Meanwhile, Du Bois and his supporters argued for a liberal arts education, more immediate access to American political and social equality, and fervent political activism as the ideal formative process for African American advancement. The social and educational approach propagated by Du Bois as the "Talented Tenth" is a direct result of Northern educational philanthropists who wanted to produce a professional class of educators, clergy, scholars, and social leaders who would help assimilate a large number of Southern illiterate African Americans into the American social and economic system.

The Talented Tenth Idea: A Complicated Response to the Negro Problem

Socio-Historical Context

The idea of a “Talented Tenth” was modeled after the general societal architecture of white society, whereby a concentrated cluster of intellectuals, businessmen, religious professionals, lawyers, and influential families exercised control over the majority of uneducated

folk. The end of the Civil War through the dawning of the 20th century was difficult for many poor whites, especially those whose labor options were threatened by newly emancipated African Americans. The wealth of America concentrated in the hands of a European American industrial and banking elite who exercised direct pressure upon the course of American politics to manage the white masses.

Therefore, the "Talented Tenth" was not a new idea conjured by Reverend Henry Lyman Morehouse, former general secretary of the American Baptist Home Mission Society. His coining of the term and lifelong commitment to impressing this approach upon the African American social imagination would bear his mark in the field of education. Atlanta Baptist Male Seminary, a school, initially oriented toward a commitment to form educated African American clergy and preachers, was renamed Morehouse College. This institution, still in existence, would come to nurture a cadre of preachers and other college-educated leaders bearing the intellectual marks of the Talented Tenth aspirations of Henry Morehouse and his supporters.

In 1896, on the heels of Washington's speech in Atlanta, Morehouse shared the vision for shaping the African American social imagination by saying, "Industrial training is good for the mind; the tenth man ought to have the best opportunities for developing the intellectual part of himself."[44] The term Talented Tenth as advocated by Morehouse makes rhetorically accessible an imaginative world for African American development similar to Samuel Armstrong's advocacy of a curriculum of "head, hands, and heart." The small group of European American elites who shaped the original architecture of the white Northerners—elites and non-elites

[44] Henry Lyman Morehouse, "The Talented Tenth," *The American Missionary*, 50, no. 6 (June 1896): 182 – 183. Morehouse originally published the essay (under the same title) in the periodical, *The Independent*, 48 (April 23, 1896): 1.

alike—also sought to establish a parallel social construction, the Talented Tenth, within the broader African American imagination, especially for the masses in the South. The Talented Tenth universal concept active within the white racial imagination would structure how whites would imagine and engage in social relations to racial groups. The condescended economic and political clout of the northern European American monied aristocracy represented in all intents and purposes the mold of the Talented Tenth. It would also become the system of assimilation to which African Americans would aspire as they sought to gain access to social progress, social access, and symbolic success. The creation and development of an African American Talented Tenth class was a socio-political necessity for white northern elites as a means of fashioning mechanisms of social order through the creation of a class of African Americans who would operate as a necessary buffer between themselves and the African American masses.

The African American Talented Tenth class did not enter this ideological formation as equal partners or empowered recipients. Generations of enslavement did not produce a wealthy class of African Americans, though some freed persons in the North experienced some material success. The mechanism of education would be the primary system to build a class of classically-educated professionals and business people who would, by educational assimilation, be the leaders of the masses of African Americans. Created to function as a collective identity between the folkways and customs of the masses of poor African Americans and the complex interests of white elites, the Talented Tenth class became race managers, negotiating the competing interests and influence of a tempestuous social context. This professional class, coined the Talented Tenth, would somehow eventually gain economic and social advantages through access to elite white education and culture.

The Talented Tenth concept became embodied in African American culture. A Talented Tenth idea rooted in Northern Anglo-American culture, and the values active within African American bodies, formed a unique social creation (double consciousness) within African Americans. Much like the Three-Fifths Compromise valuing an African American between a beast and a full person, this new, complex identity situated Blacks strangely within the American imagination. African Americans of the Talented Tenth ilk were conceived in racial liminality having to operate between the limited exposure to elite whites and the daily realities of the Black masses.

Du Bois and the Talented Tenth

Washington did not invent the "Hampton-Tuskegee system" of industrial education, but through his fierce advocacy, his name remains linked with it. Similarly, Du Bois, not Morehouse, became known for the use of the term Talented Tenth. Du Bois first employed its usage in a 1903 article in which he said:

> The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is a problem of developing the best of this race that they may guide the masses away from the contamination and death of the worst in their own and other races.[45]

Du Bois became its chief propagator amongst African Americans because he viewed this strategy as the best way to achieve racial uplift and garner support from Northern white philanthropists. Du Bois, making his case to African Americans and whites alike, fervently believed at the time that the college-educated leader would be the salvation of the masses. The institution of education would educate and form new generations of leaders who would represent

[45] Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth," 33.

"the best of this race." Reaffirming the correlation between the Talented Tenth concept and "exceptional men," Du Bois implies that what is exceptional, or the ideal image of a representation of the Black race, is an African American version of the exceptional men of the white race.[46] These elite persons will save each race and ultimately, humanity. The parental guidance the elite class will provide the masses, Du Bois argues, will save the masses from themselves. Du Bois is clear that the Talented Tenth of the Black and white race, particularly the Black race, have a role, even a responsibility, in the management and leadership of the masses of African Americans.

It is also important to revisit the framing of these strategies of uplift as a "debate." Du Bois, in agreement with Washington, did not disregard the need for economic self-determinism through the mastery of vocational, technical, and agricultural techniques. Du Bois was not arguing that African Americans should avoid engaging in this form of education and racial empowerment. Borrowing Morehouse's language, the agricultural education of the nine-tenths who constituted the masses was not the issue. He was arguing for the opportunity of those identified as the one-tenth, who have aptitudes in the liberal arts, to have the means to cultivate those talents. Many Southern white elites and the masses they managed found the proposition of African Americans gaining access to an elite education (even a minuscule amount) threatening to their coordinated propaganda of Black racial inferiority. African Americans would again become evidence to debunk the myths spun by the diseased social imagination of whites and possibly undo their tenuous grip on socio-economic domination.

The nature of the "debate" is a crucial point of emphasis in this discussion. Washington and Du Bois did offer and embody different strategies for uplift, representing competitive ideas.

[46] Ibid., 33.

However, in reframing Washington beyond his being an accommodationist, it is possible to see how Washington and Du Bois were, together, offering a holistic plan of uplift. If analyzed separately, both attempts to uplift the Black masses are complicated and left wanting. However, if viewed as two interlocking approaches, a viable strategy for African American empowerment, even liberation, emerges. They are establishing a formidable economic base connected to the cultivation of land and the industrious habits of business while supporting efforts for social and political enfranchisement. Valuing the liberal arts would be a practical and theoretical blueprint for a formidable demonstration of group empowerment.

However, white people in general, and elites, in particular, would empower African Americans only up to a point. During the Civil War, African Americans in the South constituted almost half the total population due to the incessant need for the reproduction of enslaved persons to regenerate the labor market. Making up a significant portion of the population, if a critical number of African Americans became empowered on American soil, it would have inevitably shifted national power relations. If the masses of African Americans had become sustainable in economic production and industry, while making significant intellectual and cultural contributions apart from white control, then the myth of white supremacy and the economic ties of direct and indirect profiting from Black bodies would also have been threatened.

In short, it would be wise to rethink the approaches of Washington and Du Bois as aspects of a broader, single methodology of uplift, which was continually being thwarted *and* supported by a national white imagination diseased by concepts of Black inferiority instead of a debate about which image or strategy was best. The collective African American social imagination was being divided and managed by competing white interest groups, who, acting out

of their diseased social imagination, would not fully empower a people they sought to keep under control. The Talented Tenth idea and subsequent social class became, in image and action, a complicated response to address the Negro Problem.

The Politics of Racial Respectability as Embodiment of a Diseased Social Imagination

The complex Talented Tenth idea and its day-to-day manifestations are profoundly entangled and evident in what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, in her book *Righteous Discontent*, terms "a politics of respectability."[47] She exposes the internal conflicts and class tensions mired within the Talented Tenth concept. She also questioned whether Blacks would ever be able to prove to whites that Blacks are decent, educated, Christian, well-mannered people, worthy of respect from white folk—a necessary component of the Talented Tenth plan. Speaking about the period in which Du Bois used an earlier conceptualization of the Talented Tenth idea, Higginbotham proffers:

> On the one hand, the politics of respectability rallied poor working-class Blacks to the cause of racial self-help, by inspiring them to save, sacrifice, and pool their scant resources for the support of Black-owned institutions. Whether through white-imposed segregation or Black-preferred separatism, the Black community's support of its middle class undoubtedly accounted for the development and growth of Black-owned institutions, including those of the Baptist church.
>
> On the other hand, the effort to forge a community that would command whites' respect revealed class tensions among Blacks themselves. The zealous efforts of Black women's religious organizations to transform specific behavioral patterns of their people disavowed and opposed the culture of the "folk"—the expressive culture of many poor, uneducated, and "unassimilated" Black men and women dispersed throughout the rural South or newly huddled in urban centers...[48]

[47] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 14.

[48] Ibid., 14-15, 187.

By the era about which Higginbotham writes (1880s-1920s) the Talented Tenth idea, a response to the Negro Problem, was embodied in African American life. This new class indeed exhibited symptoms of the more critically diseased imagination of whites through conflicting behaviors towards the African American masses, who were the source of white angst. Leading the African American folk in efforts of collective self-determination while those same folk financially supported the new Talented Tenth professional class proved to be a relatively complicated formula for progress.

As Jennings warns, distortion and detachment are symptoms of a diseased imagination.[49] Operating from a lens of white cultural supremacy, Higgenbotham states that African American Talented Tenth women sought to "transform certain behavioral patterns"[50] of the folk. The constructive goal of racial uplift was not neutral in its agenda as this group "disavowed and opposed"[51] folk culture, expressions, and ways of being. The concept of racial uplift would operate dually concerning the politics of respectability and the Talented Tenth idea.

On the one hand, the Talented Tenth concept made the African American masses targets for social conversion. On the other hand, it helped mobilize the African American masses into patterns of industriousness through images of success and aspiration. The widening of the culture gap between the African American elites (the Talented Tenth class) and the poor masses made efforts for racial uplift tricky because African American folkways were the target of conversion and aspersions.

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[49] Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 7.

[50] Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 14.

[51] Ibid., 14.

His efforts, Du Bois initially believed, would increase the speed at which Negroes would gain societal acceptance. He believed that whites were unaware of the brilliance of the Negro Talented Tenth. He wrote,

> You misjudge us because you do not know us. From the very first it has been the educated and intelligent of the Negro people that have led and elevated the mass, and the sole obstacles that nullified and retarded their efforts were slavery and race prejudice; for what is slavery but the legalized survival of the unfit and the nullification of the work of natural internal leadership? Negro leadership, therefore, sought from the first to rid the race of this awful incubus that it might make way for natural selection and the survival of the fittest.[52]

Du Bois misjudged the extent and perhaps the nature of racism that existed in America; many whites would never perceive Blacks as fit, not even those who comprised the Talented Tenth, thus the ever-present shadow of double consciousness. In addition to double consciousness, class tensions and the infestation of the social imagination that the Talented Tenth idea caused among Blacks, there is an additional limiting aspect of this idea. It is the sense that the Talented Tenth idea is an example of what Englebert Mveng calls *anthropological poverty*:

> First of all, the fundamental problem remains the foundations of Western anthropology, which would impose themselves upon the world. The concept of the human being that the West seeks to export to us is based on domination, power, death, struggle and so on – the triumph of death over life…There is a type of poverty that I call "anthropological poverty." It consists in despoiling human beings not only of what they have but of everything that constitutes their being and essence—their identity, history ethnic roots, language, culture, faith, creativity, dignity, pride, ambitions, right to speak…we could go on indefinitely.[53]

For Mveng, Western anthropology, of which America is an heir, emphasizes diseased imaging of the person. "Despoiling," or the complete destruction of the entire essence of a human being by emphasizing concepts of "domination, power, death struggle, and so on – the triumph of death

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[52] Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, and others, *The Negro Problem* (New York, James Pott & Company, 1903), 54.

[53] Englebert Mveng, "Third World Theology –What Theology? What Third World? Evaluation by an African Delegate," in *Interruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology*, eds. Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), 220.

over life"[54] is how the American social imagination (diseased by white racism) reconciled the image of the African American. An outworking of this anthropological poverty is the white social imagination despoiling the image or distorting the nature of African Americans to a non-human form, which allows for their unnatural objectification and the need for "its" brutal subjugation by any means necessary.

Such actions would be justified under the European American idolatrous relationship with the concept of "Manifest Destiny," or subduing persons and land under the supposed auspices of God's providence. Despoilment then becomes a weapon of psychological warfare, neutralizing African American community and group capacity through the erosion of pride in the common bond of their African heritage. If one's African-ness is an anthropological problem, then a response would be detaching from that cultural or racial setback through an escape into ideas of assimilation into white culture, and debasing indigenousness African and African American folkways. The process of controlled assimilation operated as a mechanism for despoiling the idea of Blackness, rendering radical African American approaches outside of respectable action and discourse. Thus, despoilment wages ideological warfare on the object, which in turn causes "it" to war against itself.

Anthropological poverty, or the totalizing cycle of dehumanization, was also at work upon and among African Americans. With efforts led by middle-class African American women, the Talented Tenth imagination was at play within a class of people who came to understand the masses as an adversarial entity, or more concretely, who viewed their folkways or "folk self" as a problem. The Talented Tenth class became cultural missionaries seeking to civilize and refine the people. The African American masses—everything about them—especially the folk cultures

[54] Ibid.

that they embodied, were under threat of despoilment by their people, reinforcing "double consciousness." There is a legacy of imaginatively despoiling Black folk with the Talented Tenth concept, and this limitation continues to manifest itself to this day. This is especially the case, as will be discussed later, in how the African American faith community selects its ministry exemplars for placement with academic literature.

Those same forces distorted Washington's strategy for uplift by manifesting within African American society. Blacks were split by forces that intentionally made Black flourishing a matter of working with one's hands or using one's head while never seeing either group as worthy of equality. In 1915, Washington died. However, the drive for a pragmatic program of racial uplift for the masses did not die with him. The founding of the Universal Negro Improvement Association by Marcus Garvey in 1914 would extend Washington's program of racial, socio-economic pragmatism for the Black masses on several continents.

Vestiges of the Talented Tenth: The Formation of the Talented Tenth Preacher

African American Religious Education

The industrial model represented by the Hampton Institute and Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee never became the primary model for Black education. The African American masses also felt the loss of this emphasis. Most Black schools agreed with Du Bois that African Americans needed a full liberal arts education. An analysis of curriculums writes James Anderson "reveals that most Black colleges relegated industrial education to a subordinate role."[55] Anderson also notes the following of the training for most Blacks in the nineteenth and early twentieth century:

[55] James D. Anderson. *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, 66.

> Most Black colleges were under the direction of four major mission societies: the American Missionary Association, the Freedman's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church…The African Methodist Episcopal church, the Colored Methodist Episcopal church, and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion church established nearly all of the major colleges controlled by Black organizations, and their combined voice mainly articulated the educational policy of the Black community. These institutions never adopted the Hampton-Tuskegee pattern of Black technical education, and they gave low priority to all forms of industrial training…Sherer [Robert, G.] concludes that Washington and the Hampton-Tuskegee Idea "were outside the mainstream of Black educational thought."[56]

Among the Black colleges under mission societies, the traditional liberal or classical curriculum remained dominant throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[57] The missionary societies and Black leaders who believed in the Talented Tenth theory were in one accord in the early twentieth century relative to educating Blacks.[58] The importance of Northern white philanthropy and the religious impulse of mission societies is often understated. The efforts of the American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS) and others would eventually forge the image of the Talented Tenth preacher upon generations of African American clergy.

Mission societies such as ABHMS, the American Missionary Association (AMA), and efforts by Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and other denominational entities created schools predominantly in the south for the education of African Americans before and after the Civil War.[59] Later, industrialists, including John D. Rockefeller, through the General Education Board (GEB), and Andrew Carnegie through the Carnegie Foundation, would significantly support African American education, which deepened the influence of the Talented

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[56] Ibid., 66-67.

[57] Ibid., 66.

[58] Ibid., 244.

[59] Eric Anderson and Alfred A. Moss. *Dangerous Donations: Northern Philanthropy and Southern Black Education, 1902-1930* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 4.

Tenth idea in education.[60] Atlanta Baptist Male Seminary was renamed Morehouse College after Reverend Henry Morehouse for his sizeable influence upon the school. And, similarly, the Atlanta Female Baptist Seminary was renamed Spelman College after Laura Spelman Rockefeller, John D. Rockefeller's wife. Other philanthropic organizations such as The Jeanes Fund, the Phelps-Stokes Fund, the Julius Rosenwald Fund, and the Peabody Fund among others, funded African American education and wielded significant influence in the propagation of the Talented Tenth concept.[61]

The disease of the white racial imagination producing the concept of race and its corresponding myth of white supremacy structured a Talented Tenth socio-economic hierarchy. This model provided a distorted archetype for oppressed and excluded ethnic and racial minorities to assimilate into and reproduce within their groups.

The formation of a Talented Tenth class of African Americans enlivened the rise of Black Baptist colleges and represented the philosophical basis upon which missionary educators sought to transform Black America. Whether due to its ecclesial autonomy and polity, the flexibility of style in worship, the opportunity for African American control, or other factors, according to Higginbotham, the Baptist church became emblematic of Talented Tenth life.[62] This hopeful possibility of a relationship with what was then the largest African American denomination, and empowerment, may very well be what Du Bois originally intended—a group of educated leaders leavening the whole—in this case, a whole denomination.

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[60] Anderson and Moss, *Dangerous Donations,* 4.

[61] Ibid., 4 – 5.

[62] Ibid., 14.

The Baptists were aided by the American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS). For ABHMS, according to Higginbotham:

> [T]he explicit goal of preparing Blacks for citizenship entailed an alliance with Black leaders who had imbibed white middle-class values and commanded respect and following of their own people…The Talented Tenth would guide the Black masses along the journey up and away from the heritage of slavery. This constituted the very goal of uplift—a goal at once progressive and conservative.[63]

Higginbotham also notes that the Talented Tenth would function in two ways: they would be Black missionaries of middle-class white culture to the Black masses *and* become a buffer between white society and the Black masses.[64] To accomplish these aims, the ABHMS-funded colleges, became "assimilation apparatuses" for the middle-class and access to elite white American culture. The output of these assimilation apparatuses is to produce the ideological ideal of a "colored American Yankee" or "Anglo Africans."

E. Franklin Frazier also addresses the education of African Americans concerning the Talented Tenth idea in his book, *Black Bourgeoisie*. Frazier contends that "it has turned out that Negro higher education has become devoted chiefly to the task of educating the Black bourgeoisie."[65] The desire by Frazier to engage in a sociological study of the educated Black elite's "standards of behavior and values" is tied to his understanding of how this class or caste of Blacks evolved.[66] This "isolated social world of this segment of the Negro population, which has come into existence as a consequence of racial discrimination and racial segregation" was "educated to be this way."[67]

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[63] Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 25.

[64] Ibid., 26.

[65] E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1957), 84.

[66] Ibid., 23.

The creation of a Black bourgeoisie that could become Talented Tenth leaders, who were able to acquire an education in the schools supported by Northern philanthropy, had specific import for Black preachers. "Officials of the ABHMS termed thorough instruction Christian Education, [which meant college-level training] important."[68] George Sale, the superintendent of education for ABHMS, said in 1910, "Still the faith of our schools is that 'life is more than meat' and the measure of the man is not the hand, however skillful, but the mind and the heart, and so we put the spiritual and intellectual first."[69] Higginbotham notes the AHBMS emphasis on influencing the opinion of the masses, "Attempting to win over the masses, the educated Black Baptist ministry and laity distinguished their goals and their message of salvation from those of the untrained ministry."[70] This shift from the "illiterate, old-time folk preacher" to the minister of college training "was particularly notable among the Black Baptists, because of its schools founded by the ABHMS."[71] With the rise of the Talented Tenth influence and those advocating for college-educated preachers, illiterate, Black folk preachers, who anchored the early African American proclamation tradition, became the competition to be subverted.[72]

This subversion of folk preachers emanated from the same mechanisms of white control often used against African Americans in the early twentieth century—namely through literacy. Education and the enfranchisement possibilities of literacy began to erode the pervasive influence of non-formally trained preachers who faced judgment according to this new standard.

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[67] Ibid.

[68] Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 30.

[69] George Sale. "Our Part in the Solution of a Great Problem," in *An Era of Progress and Promise 1863-1910*, eds. W.N. Hartshorn and George W. Penniman (Boston: The Priscilla Publishing Company, 1910), 70.

[70] Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 43.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Washington, *The Negro Problem*, 54.

The tension between the folk and the literate or "learned" is a long-running reality. The Talented Tenth idea aimed to provide an excellent classical education and opportunities for cultural assimilation to a small, socially elite group of African Americans with 10% serving as a representative number. The Talented Tenth class never reached ten percent of the African American population. The masses, including most preachers, endured without formal education. A large Talented Tenth educated class of Blacks never emerged; by the 1930s, "the relative proportion of professional to all working Blacks remained the same as in 1890…The Talented Tenth as a proportion of the workforce existed only in theory."[73]

The Talented Tenth was not one-tenth of the African American population. The actual leadership class was closer to a fraction of one tenth.[74] The American imagination, both white and Black, was shaped by a handful of people, mainly funded by whites, and often articulated by African Americans. Black folk found an uncomfortable but necessary racial compromise in the imagination of the nation's leaders. Conversely, those educated found themselves thrust into the center of public conversation and action concerning the future possibilities of Black life under white control.[75]

The project of African American uplift is a complicated venture. Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois offered overlapping strategies with different points of emphasis for uplift. As the influence of Washington waned after his death, Du Bois' constant propagation of the Talented Tenth idea in myriad forms and methods helped shape the education of generations of

[73] Higginbotham, Righteous Discontent, 40-41. James D. Anderson in *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* writes, "However aggressively missionary and Black religious leaders defended the wisdom of providing classical liberal education for the "Talented Tenth," they admitted to themselves that they had fallen far short of their goal, and they saw no light that the end of the tunnel." p. 245.

[74] W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth: Memorial Address," *The Boulé Journal* 15, no. 1 (October 1948). Reproduced online by Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, https://www.sigmapiphi.org/home/the-talented-tenth.php.

[75] Washington, *The Negro Problem*, 54.

African Americans. The Talented Tenth concept molded the cultural tastes, religious practices, ideological worldviews of a group of African Americans, which profoundly impacted personal and social relationships with the “illiterate” Black masses.

The professionalization of clergy signaled a shift in African American life as the masses and learned engaged in different systems of educational and social formation. These educational systems would then send this college-educated clergy back into the community to serve the folk. The folk, on the other hand, had limited encounters with European American "fine" culture or knowledge having little schooling themselves. How does this new Talented Tenth preacher minister to the folk? The Talented Tenth preacher was embarking upon a difficult journey being "Negro Yankees" preaching to the African American Southern masses.

The Formation of the Talented Tenth Preacher

As we saw in the previous section, the formation of the African American preacher has been and continues to place significant emphasis on Talented Tenth ideology. The centrality of the African American church as the sole institution where African Americans enjoyed leadership and control and its function as the hub of community life made the preacher a crucial social identity, and quite possibly, its central figure. The increased effort to form the identity of the preacher towards a Talented Tenth orientation further thrust this role into the center of the public square. At stake, both for Washington and Du Bois, were the questions how and if African Americans would exist in the United States.

College-bred or seminary-trained Black clergy, whom this dissertation labels Talented Tenth preachers, modeled how generations of preachers would come to understand themselves and set the standard for what qualified as an acceptable image of racial uplift. Would the

preacher be an ideological revolutionary or a social integrationist? The Washington-Du Bois debate framed the struggle and direction of the Talented Tenth preaching imagination. The Talented Tenth concept reproduced and disseminated the ideologies and "reigning values of middle-class Protestant America, but it nevertheless expressed a race consciousness that united Black men and women in a struggle for racial dignity and self-determination."[76]

Du Bois contributed significantly to the fields of sociology and history among other disciplines. Du Bois' influence on homiletics remains largely underexplored.[77] His theorizations of the Black preacher and its educational formation are significant. Du Bois stresses in *The Negro Problem* that Talented Tenth-oriented African American ministers must supplant folk preachers as leaders among the African American folk.[78] Du Bois was pessimistic that highly effective but unlearned preachers would be effective conduits of integration and social progress. The white and Black elite recognized the socio-political volatility of the poor masses and how folk preachers had led great rebellions. The preacher was dominant and interested parties wanted to mold him to do their bidding.

The power of the Black preacher is rooted in its socio-historical context. Du Bois provides a sketch by saying:

> It was a terrific social revolution, and yet some traces were retained of the former group life, and the chief remaining institution was the Priest or Medicine-man. He clearly appeared on the plantation and found his function as the healer of the sick, the interpreter of the Unknown, the comforter of the sorrowing, the supernatural avenger of wrong, and the one who rudely, but picturesquely expressed the longing, disappointment, and resentment of a stolen and oppressed people. Thus, as bard, physician, judge, and priest,

[76] Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 45.

[77] Richard Lischer, *Theories of Preaching: Selected Readings in the Homiletical Tradition* (Durham: Labyrinth Press, 1987), 280 – 290. Richard Lischer includes Du Bois' theorization of African American folk religion as a necessary reading in understanding the context for preaching, particularly in the African American tradition.

[78] Washington, *The Negro Problem*, 54.

> within the narrow limits allowed by the slave system, rose the Negro preacher, and under him the first American institution, the Negro church.[79]

European American power structures systematically dismantled African religious systems repressed tribal languages, and drastically altered original African family structures. Accordingly, the work of the African preacher in America would need to be constructive. The first Black preacher was fashioned to meet the needs of the enslaved persons out of the "chief remaining institution" of the Priest or Medicine-man, who functioned at the center of African communal life and later appeared on the plantations of America. To effectively lead diverse groups and cultures of enslaved Africans and subsequent generations of African Americans, the preacher operated in four domains essential to African American survival.

These domains are the bard, the physician, the judge, and the priest. The bard "rudely, but picturesquely expressed the longings, disappointment, and resentment of a stolen and oppressed people."[80] The Physician functioned as the "healer of the sick."[81] The judge operated as "the supernatural avenger of wrong."[82] The priest "interpreted the Unknown" and "comforted the sorrowing."[83] The preacher operated within these domains to guide and care for what was, at the time, a heterogeneous mix of enslaved Black people from across West Africa. The Preacher, by Du Bois' estimation, is an embodiment of the needs of the people. The preacher, being the center of religious and social life, must find ways to speak to these realities with depth, care, passion,

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[79] Du Bois, *Souls*, 159 – 60.

[80] Ibid., 159.

[81] Ibid., 159.

[82] Ibid., 159.

[83] Ibid., 159.

and concreteness. The African American folk preacher addressed these issues in practical ways, and through sermons and helped make sense of the absurdity of the enslaved condition.

In *Souls*, Du Bois describes the power of the preacher, and with his explanation provides one of the most enduring descriptions of early African American church life. Du Bois states:

> Three things characterized this religion of the slave - the Preacher, the Music, and the Frenzy. The Preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil. A leader, a politician, an orator, a 'boss,' and intriguer, an idealist, -- all these he is, and ever too, the center of a group of men, now twenty, now a thousand in number. The combination of a certain adroitness with deep-seated earnestness, of tact with consummate ability, give him his preeminence and helps him maintain it. The type, of course, varies according to time and place, from the West Indies in the sixteenth century to New England in the nineteenth, and from the Mississippi bottoms to cities like New Orleans or New York.[84]

Du Bois theorizes the preacher as a unique development of Africans in America. From the fragments of African culture and the forced religious and cultural practices of human chattel owners, African Americans created the tenants of a new religion. At the center of this religion is the preacher. In theorizing the preacher, Du Bois states that his roles were "leader, politician, orator, 'boss,' intriguer, and idealist."[85] The preacher operated in a myriad of intersecting and diverging roles simultaneously due to the social and physical restrictions of slavery. The preacher's roles were not abstract because they came to life through addressing the needs of the masses with "a certain adroitness," "a deep-seated earnestness," and "tact with consummate ability." Beyond providing domains whereby the preacher could be understood, Du Bois argued, "[t]he type, of course, varies according to time and place, from the West Indies in the sixteenth

[84] Ibid., 155.

[85] Ibid., 155.

century to New England in the nineteenth, and from the Mississippi bottoms to cities like New Orleans or New York."[86]

Manifestations of the Black preacher are contextually and geographically specific. The preacher can appear anywhere and at any time within the African diaspora because of the continuity of harsh existential conditions and macroeconomic contexts. This preacher, because of its creation by the masses in every context, exhibits an organic influence through relationships. The preacher is not static; it is as dynamic as the threats to African American existence. For Du Bois, a Talented Tenth preacher would lead people into Talented Tenth theo-ethical sensibilities and eventual racial uplift. Du Bois recognized the need for the formation of African American preachers in a Talented Tenth disposition because of the unique functioning of the preacher at the crux of African American life.

Unfortunately, the focus on Talented Tenth clergy and their formation often eschewed aspects of folk culture such as emotionalism, hand clapping, folk knowledge, folk language, drums, African Traditional Religions, and their manifestations. Talented Tenth perspectives, commitments, and imaginations accomplished much in making Black preaching visible, but also the idea of the Talented Tenth hindered the ability to recognize the contributions of the masses of preachers, who were not part of the Talented Tenth. The creation and propagation of the image of the Talented Tenth preacher occurred in colleges and universities, shaping African American preachers for generations.

[86] Ibid., 155.

Chapter 2

Detecting the Talented Tenth Imagination in African American Homiletics

The previous chapter highlighted the differences in political strategies between Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois as each sought to provide approaches to African American uplift. The Talented Tenth became an influential ideology within African American theological education. As ministers became professionals and higher education suited those ends, the preacher figure needed a homiletic method. A purpose of this chapter is to construct a portrait of the work of Henry H. Mitchell, the father of African American homiletical theory. It reveals the development of the Talented Tenth preacher in African American homiletics and the disagreements between Black homileticians as they wrote for what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham in her book *Righteous Discontent* terms "white respectability" in the academy.

Henry H. Mitchell, the Father of African American Homiletic Theory

Henry H. Mitchell was one of the earliest to place the Black preacher in homiletical literature. Before the writings of Mitchell, the academic conversations in the field of homiletics largely excluded African American perspectives. As Mitchell entered the discourse, as shall be discussed, he foregrounded a Talented Tenth image of the Black preacher and Black preaching in a manner that made it respectable to white scholars and to the white academic institutions that have historically shaped homiletic thought.

In any analysis of African American preaching, Henry H. Mitchell is an influential voice of its theory and practice. His influence is such that even the agreements with his assertions and critiques of his conclusions created space for further expansion of the field of African American

homiletics. His seminal works in Black preaching added intellectual tools that aided in additional modern constructions of the African American preacher figure.

Mitchell began writing during the rise of the Black Power, Black Nationalism movement in the 1970s. This was a time when many oppressed and marginalized groups were demanding—through various media and in various forms —a decrease in hegemonic Eurocentric perspectives. Often muted, ignored, or tepidly engaged, the scholarship of people of color often found itself on the academic margins.[1] Due to the vastness of Black preaching traditions and the ways they are experienced in diverse places, Mitchell was incapable of writing a complete homiletic method that represented *all* African Americans. However, anyone writing about Black preaching must begin with or include Mitchell. He is a necessary footnote.

Mitchell's assessment of Black preaching is rooted in class and race politics, as shown below. Also included in this discussion is Mitchell's assessment of how Blackness operates within a liberal tradition, while often exhibiting theologically conservative social views.[2] His approach to describing and conjuring the Black preacher for public viewing and inspection is that of a late middle-age (he wrote his first homiletic text when he was 48 years-old) educated, middle-class, Black, male steeped in Talented Tenth ideologies.

Mitchell's approach to African American preaching is cultural (linguistic) and theological (hermeneutical). Because language is a partner to hermeneutics,[3] Mitchell posits that language, especially the language of the people, ("poetic," "metaphorical," and familiar to them), is a key

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[1] Lois Benjamin, *The Black Elite: Still Facing the Color Line in the 21st Century*, 2nd ed. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005). Specifically, see chapter four.

[2] Raphael G. Warnock. *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety and Public* Witness. (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

[3] Hans–Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd Revised ed. Translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum Press, 2004), 385-386.

to Black preaching.[4] The Black preacher, according to Mitchell, must seriously consider context because from context comes language, and from language comes reception.[5] Mitchell's racialized understanding of the Black preacher makes expressively clear that Blackness, rhetorical skill, emotion, and celebration are indigenous to African Americans, though not innate.[6]

Henry H. Mitchell was born in 1919 in Columbus, Ohio to Reverend Orlando and Mrs. Bertha Mitchell. He was one of four children born to the couple.[7] He received his bachelor's degree from Lincoln University. Founded in 1854, Lincoln was the first degree-granting educational institution for African Americans. Mitchell would earn his Bachelor of Divinity (B.D.) from Union Theological Seminary of New York. He also received a Th.D. degree from Claremont School of Theology in Berkeley, CA and a Masters in Linguistics from California State University. Early in his ministerial career, he pastored the Second Baptist Church in Fresno and the Calvary Baptist Church in Santa Monica, California.[8]

In 1969, Mitchell became the first Martin Luther King, Jr. Professor of Black Church Studies at the consortium of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School. He later served as a professor of religion and Pan African Studies at California State University, and academic dean and professor of history and homiletics at the Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University. Additionally, Mitchell served as the founding director of the Ecumenical Center for

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[4] Henry H. Mitchell. *Black Preaching* (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1970), 29, 43.

[5] Ibid., 95-98.

[6] Ibid., 163-165.

[7] Martha J. Simmons, ed., *Preaching on the Brink*: *The Future of Homiletics (Essays in Honor of Henry. H. Mitchell)* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 17.

[8] Ibid., 20-22.

Black Church Studies in Los Angeles. Further, Mitchell was a visiting professor of homiletics at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, while leading a Doctor of Ministry cohort at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio.[9]

He authored the seminal work *Black Preaching* in 1970. After his delivery of the Lyman Beecher lectures in 1974, they were published as *The Recovery of Preaching* in 1977. Then, in 1990, he published *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art,* which was an amalgamation of his first two books. He next authored *Celebration and Experience in Preaching,* which explains his concept of sermon celebration. His most recent book, *A Word for All Seasons,* was published in 2012. He also has co-authored numerous books. Thus, Mitchell is one of the most prolific authors on the subject of Black homiletics and has therefore entered history as an unavoidable reference and formidable contributor to the literature on Black preaching.

Mitchell's explanation of Black preaching, its content, context, producers, and history, achieved respectability among white homileticians as evidenced by, among other things, his being the first African American to give the Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale Divinity School. The Beecher Lectures at Yale are recognized as the preeminent platform for those who teach and write about preaching and for those who preach.[10]

Henry H. Mitchell changed the overwhelmingly white field of homiletics with his book *Black Preaching*. This text is hailed as seminal in homiletics.[11] The 1996 festschrift dedicated to

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[9] The Mitchell Fund Legacies, http://www.mitchellfund.org/about-us/ (Accessed November 4, 2018).

[10] See Batsell Baxter's *The Heart of the Yale Lectures*. (Ada, Michigan: Baker Books, 1975) and Edgar Dewitt Jones' *The Royalty of the Pulpit*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951.

[11] Kirkus, which has a longstanding reputation for doing well-written book reviews, hailed Mitchell's book in 1970, https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/henry-h-mitchell/Black-preaching/ (Accessed December 4, 2017). Also see, Larry Witham's *A City Upon a Hill: How Sermons Changed the Course of American History* (New York: HarperOne (reprint) 2008), 270. And see Richard Lischer's *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on*

Mitchell, *Preaching on the Brink*, was edited by Martha J. Simmons. In it, she states that Mitchell made "four indisputable contributions" to homiletics: 1) Mitchell, more than anyone else, made Black preaching visible and respectable, 2) He conceived of the use of a behavioral purpose in sermons (giving attention to who hearers are as total beings and to what they do after hearing the sermon); 3) He was the first to advocate the need to conclude almost every sermon with a celebration (good news); and 4) Finally, he worked tirelessly to enable preachers to see that during the preaching moment, hearers need a picture or a story with which they can identify.[12]

Mitchell certainly added new insights and contributions to homiletics. The indisputability of Simmons' claims may be rightfully contested as very few things are true without question, but she accurately notes the correlation between Mitchell's homiletic and the role of respectability. This connection deserves deeper discussion. She is correct in asserting that Mitchell is a significant contributor to the field of homiletics and a cornerstone of the academic study of African American preaching. What often goes unnoticed is his emphasis on *respectability*. His efforts to make Black preaching respectable to white homiletics would be in line with the racial logic of Talented Tenth aims and objectives. The quest for racial respectability in homiletics is inherently complicated. Mitchell would, in many ways, theorize a confessional homiletic that is deeply indebted to his Talented Tenth formation.

The theorization of Black preaching and the ideal Black preacher would inevitably be shaped by the legacy of the ABHMS and the Talented Tenth idea. Mitchell crafted and placed in the literature the homiletic method of the Talented Tenth preacher advocated for by Du Bois

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Preaching, Augustine to the Present, in which Mitchell is the only Black homiletician featured, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 149.

[12] Martha J. Simmons, *Preaching on the Brink*, 25.

almost seventy years prior. Du Bois would cast a long intellectual shadow upon Mitchell's scholarship. Du Boisian themes of emotion, consciousness, and respectability become major themes for Mitchell to engage in order to build a homiletic for the Talented Tenth preacher.

Emotional Dissonance, Triple Consciousness, and the Politics of Respectability in Mitchell's Writings

Mitchell wrote his first two books having grown up with the notion of the Talented Tenth firmly implanted within Black culture. His understandings were rooted in the writings and public advocacy of W. E. B. Du Bois and Black colleges that were established by whites. Mitchell's first three homiletic texts reveal at least three issues of importance: emotional dissonance, triple consciousness and the "politics of respectability." All three issues overlap to inhibit Black homiletics in unintentional ways. These overlapping concepts, relative to Black homiletics, serve to hamper full Black inclusion of all types of African American preachers and preaching.

Emotional Dissonance in the Writings of Henry Mitchell

Emotional dissonance is a feeling of unease that occurs when someone evaluates an emotional experience as a threat to his or her identity.[13] In Mitchell's writings, his emotional dissonance is prevalent. For example, Mitchell, a Black man who says he is writing for Black preachers, does not complete the introduction to his first book without repeatedly explaining himself to white readers.[14] This is reminiscent of Du Bois as he opined that whites did "not know" Negroes and how smart they were but would see if they just gave them a chance to

[13] Joren Jansz and Monique Timmers, "Emotional Dissonance: When the Experience of an Emotion Jeopardizes an Individual's Identity," *Theory and Psychology* 12, no. 1 (2012): 79-95.

[14] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 12-13.

participate on equal footing.[15] Du Bois was writing to convince whites to spend money to educate Blacks and in like manner Mitchell was a missionary to white homiletics explaining the virtues of Black preaching. Throughout *Black Preaching*, Mitchell explains himself and sought the acceptance of his ideas concerning *Black Preaching* by making comparisons to whites.[16]

Additionally, in *Black Preaching*, and in *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (twenty years later) he refers to Black families as "ghetto families,"[17] as ghetto-handicapped Brothers,[18] and to their churches as Black-ghetto churches.[19] At the same time, he speaks up for Black liberation, he writes, "As a consequence, no Black man will ever be truly free—i.e., until the white man outgrows his tribalism and his prejudice."[20] Next, he lauds the Black Church**.**

> On the other hand, the commitment of many middle-class Black Christians to Black liberation inspires a paraphrase of a saying of Jesus (Matthew 16:17): "White faith and flesh and blood hath not revealed this vision of Black freedom unto thee." The very will to resist the diabolical assaults of white-racist, Christian America must surely mean that every expression with the experience of Black religion justifies its own free-standing self-concept—a unique kind of support of Black personhood.[21]

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[15] W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth," in *The Negro Problem*. Booker T. Washington, editor, (New York, NY: Fireworks Press, 1899, 2015.

[16] In *Black Preaching* Mitchell says, "In other words, the best way to be sure a learned Black (or anyone else who is theologically literate) knows what is being proposed is to suggest that the Black hermeneutic is parallel to the "new hermeneutic" of Gerhard Ebeling and others. 24. Next, he writes, "But I for one strongly believe that a Black man can consciously resist the white drift and retain his Black faith, while at the same time appropriating the best of white learning and technology for whatever benefits such things may hold for Black people, 35. Then Mitchell addresses worship practices. Instead of explaining Black worship practices, he contrasts them with the practices of whites, as if the Black church is one homogenous entity that can easily have its worship practices contrasted to those of whites. "The difference in the verbal response has already been mentioned. In addition to the wider variety of Black responses ("Tell it!" "That's right!" "Uh-huh!" "So true!" et cetera) as compared with the white emphasis on "Amen!", there is also the fact that only Southern or sect-groups whites now respond in this way at all. "48-49. He continues to explain Black preaching by comparing it to white preaching and to call upon concepts placed in the literature by whites (such as those by Ebeling), throughout the book.

[17] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 131.

[18] Ibid., 215.

[19] Ibid., 218.

[20] Ibid., 36.

Then, in *Black Preaching the Recovery of a Powerful Art*, he uses phrases such as the "ghetto gospel" when describing the preaching at some Black churches.[22] In the same text, Mitchell attempts to esteem Black preaching.

> When Black preachers have departed from the standard mixture of practical mysticism and pragmatic folk renditions of the Bible story, interpreting the scripture intellectually, they have risked loss of interest and audience. It is far easier to become an effective interpreter when the congregation will accept nothing less. If the hermeneutic style Black preachers have been forced to develop happens to spread outside the Black ghetto, it may yet make a contribution undreamed of by the Black ancestors.[23]

Why would Black preachers want a "forced hermeneutic style" to spread anywhere? Why does this style only exist in the ghetto? Did educated Blacks who did not live in the ghetto get an "unforced hermeneutic style?" Dissonance can clearly lead to confusion.

Perhaps the greatest emotional dissonance is shown by Mitchell as he attempts to speak well of the emotion shown in Black worship as he alternately denigrates Black worship.[24] Emotional dissonance makes his connection to Black preaching abstract and disembodied. The displaying of emotion was often a factor in delineating between educated clergy and clergy who did not have formal training.[25] Degrading Black emotionalism in worship by Mitchell[26] and others, such as Bishop Daniel Payne, who harshly argued against emotional displays by Blacks

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[21] Ibid., 37.

[22] Ibid., 20.

[23] Ibid., 21.

[24] Ibid., 29-30.

[25] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 43-44.

[26] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 91.

in worship,[27] is a form of race management—in this case managing the emotions of the race. The homiletical enterprise then becomes emotional curtailment or abolishment of the talk of the folk.

Mitchell talked positively about Black religion and its emotional vibrancy. However, perhaps his middle-class education and rearing[28] did not give him the emotional freedom to side with the folk when it came to allowing Blacks to choose the totality of worship they desired.

As Jansz and Timmers write, "An emotion is evaluated negatively when it is considered to imply a threat to the individual's identity."[29] From his first three books, Mitchell's professional identity is threatened by the unlettered preachers of the masses. Although he can laud them, he is certain to distance himself from them, too. Their ways of worship are to be given respect[30] while Mitchell also refers to these worshipers pejoratively as "ghetto folk."[31]

Janz and Timmers also contribute this on the subject of emotional dissonance: "This feeling occurs because the emotion is experienced subjectively as being at odds with the (professional) identity of the teacher. In other words, the sustenance of a professional identity *triggers* a feeling of dissonance, which is 'primarily communicated intrapersonally, but could also be communicated to a specific audience.'"[32] Mitchell felt dissonance at some level since he made changes, including changing the title, to a chapter titled "Black English" from his first book. This was not enough to stop him from using most of the same chapter in his third book

[27] Ibid, 43.

[28] Ibid., 77.

[29] Joren Jansz and Monique Timmers, "Emotional Dissonance," 83.

[30] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 43-44 and 190.

[31] Ibid., 131.

[32] Joren Jansz and Monique Timmers, "Emotional Dissonance," 85.

(*Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*) and from suggesting that he was right all along. He opines,

> By far the most controversial chapter in the first edition of *Black Preaching* was entitled, "Black English." Old and dear friends took issue with me, and classes still have trouble dealing with the very existence of communication which is actually unique to African American communities. On the other hand, two nationally distributed textbooks on communication printed the chapter in toto, and many more articles and journals took this chapter for law and gospel. In the community of linguists, a rather precise professional body, the final word had been spoken by an ethnic from within. The chapter stays---and is presented here following a brief introduction—with the changes and improvements that come with the twenty years since it was first published.
>
> Seminary-trained Blacks must be models of all things to all people, helping the cultures to come closer together by being instruments of translation of each to the other. They must be fluent in Black language, for this is fundamental to their calling, and yet they must also be fluent in *standard English* because they must communicate beyond their congregation [emphasis mine].[33]

With this non-apology and indicating that Black language is not "standard English," Mitchell makes clear that the apparent dissonance which caused him to mention the concerns raised by others is not sufficient to change his double-minded stance. Kenyatta Gilbert writes of this chapter in Mitchell's book *Black Preaching*, "few would consider this [Black language] a hallmark of Black preaching since there is no consensus about what constitutes 'Black language.'"[34] Mitchell even blamed his middle-class "standard" way of speaking for his California congregation not responding to him well.[35] Perhaps what Mitchell thought was a matter of dialect, was in reality, an emotional dissonance that separated him from the people in his preparation and delivery.

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[33] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 76, 81.

[34] Kenyatta R. Gilbert, *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 25.

[35] Ibid., 77.

His is a progressive but transactional movement that works to thwart the power of radical movements to change the foundation of the white-led homiletical system, which is characterized by cracking the door only to let in token Talented Tenth preachers. Hence, Mitchell keeps the hegemonic culture of whiteness intact.

Triple Consciousness

Double consciousness, a term made famous by W. E. B. Du Bois, is a psycho-social ailment suffered by Blacks due to viewing themselves and then gauging their opinion of themselves against whites who control the power levers of society. Without awareness of double consciousness, a distorted or incomplete Black preacher figure, ever seeking to respond to, as Victor Anderson says, the "Blackness that whiteness created,"[36] emerges in the theory of Black homileticians. Further, without this awareness, the sacrilege—the erasing or defacing of the Black preacher continues—as this preacher is lost amid the dizzying reach for Black wholeness and the quest to end Black erasure.

Double consciousness, although equally capable of causing emotional dissonance, comes to the writings of Mitchell and the Black community with a written and cultural history established by W. E. B. Du Bois and pushed forward by others. Du Bois is one of the few people cited in each of Mitchell's first three books. Mitchell knew what Du Bois had written about double consciousness.

For Du Bois, double consciousness forced Blacks into a psycho-social situation in which they only imagined freedom, worth, and value from the vantage point of those by whom they were

[36] Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism*, (New York: Continuum, 1995), 91-92.

brutally oppressed. Double consciousness, in Du Bois' estimation, creates an accursed state for Black people, barring them not from the kingdom of God, but from the kingdom of culture.

In trying to create a society with a race of elites who live a life dictated by education and the arts, Du Bois' Talented Tenth project becomes idealistic at the expense of the masses. And, it is the Black preachers of the masses, some of whom are organic intellectuals, poor and unlettered, who help uplift the masses in the community—without envisioning an elite Black society as their savior, they labor for the collective uplift of the masses. Du Bois knows that double consciousness is a damaging state of being. However, in addition to dealing with the dissonance and weariness created by double consciousness, as a larger Black middle-class was created and, more of the poor were societally discounted, the Talented Tenth idea would create triple consciousness—Blacks looking at themselves while assessing their thoughts via what whites believe about them, and Blacks looking at one another through the prism of class!

Mitchell expresses triple consciousness as he tries to uplift the efforts of the Black preacher. He writes about Black preaching (a Black man looking at himself) to be accepted by the white academy (writing about Black culture and gauging what he writes through the lens of white culture), and at the same time, he denigrates the rituals and folks of the Black faith community as he operates with a Talented Tenth lens (writing about Black religious life through the prism of class). Mitchell, operating within triple consciousness, illustrates a larger psychospiritual and socioeconomic reality which can disfigure individual or collective spiritual well-being.

To deny even one part of one's self is to risk initiating the process of self-annihilation. The lack of self-value learned from an external, diseased racial concept makes room for the Black personality to imbibe the white racial imagination, functioning as a type of spiritual

possession—the embodiment of white values in a Black body. The devalued sense of the Black personality is then being filled with the values and orientations of white culture and society; consequently, the imagination utilizes the body as the site to make manifest the aims, outcomes, and purposes of white supremacy. Within the pathology of white supremacy is the logic of the subjugation or annihilation of what is considered Black. This logic within white supremacy expressed in the Black personality, whether individually or collectively, will work towards that end, whether consciously or subconsciously. An imagination steeped in triple consciousness can devalue Black or African cultural heritage by placing self-identity in deference and service to a diseased social concept and social mythology seeking to reach everyone by emptying oneself of their unassimilated African-ness.

In addition to the examples above, Mitchell writes: "With none to espouse it, African-rooted or Black culture became progressively the sign of the lack of education. As the Black community stratified, the polarities were education, higher income, and white culture on the one hand and ignorance, low income and Black culture on the other."[37] However, he does not expound on whether making "African-rooted Black culture the sign of a lack of education" was in error.

After suggesting that Blacks would have leaned on their culture if they had been taught to do so, Mitchell then, for reasons that are not apparent, quotes AME Bishop Payne as Payne skewers Black unlettered folks and preachers "Up to that time they were regarded by the white community as the most ignorant, indolent and most useless body of Christians in the city. Payne's use of the word, 'ignorant' to describe his Brethren was free and frequent."[38] Next,

[37] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 79.

[38] Ibid., 81.

Payne speaks negatively of Black church practices.[39] Mitchell's response is, "Bishop Payne and others like him had good reason to want to suppress the extremes of conjuring, utter nonsense, and manipulative emotion that 'abounded' in Black Methodist and Baptist churches."[40] Mitchell does not provide evidence that the "utter nonsense," and "manipulative emotion," which he says 'abounded' in Black Methodist and Baptist churches, did so any more than nonsensical religious ritual practices abounded in white Baptist and Methodist churches. Triple consciousness impacted Mitchell's homiletical analysis.

The Politics of Respectability

The politics of respectability, a term coined by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham in her book *Righteous Discontent*, is also a problem borne by Blacks and likely other people of color. The politics of respectability concern ways of being in a society that are acceptable to white culture. Blacks who choose to go against white determined norms of respectability can be outcast by whites, Blacks, and other people of color.[41]

Mitchell's ability to bring Black preaching into the gaze of the white academy using historically and culturally established ways of racial visualization (acceptable ways for Blacks to be viewed positively by whites) highlights the "politics of respectability." Higginbotham says, the "politics of respectability" was a strategy that aided in Black uplift but also caused tension between the "Talented Tenth" and the unlettered masses.[42] The same can be said of Mitchell's

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[39] Ibid, 81.

[40] Ibid., 81.

[41] Teresa J. Guess, "The Social Construction of Whiteness: Racism by Intent, Racism by Consequence," *Critical Sociology* 32, no 4.

[42] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 14-15.

publication of *Black Preaching*, *The Recovery of Preaching*, and *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*. They uplifted Black preaching by placing it in the academic literature. However, as shown above, his books simultaneously disavowed and opposed the culture of the "folk"—the expressive culture of many poor, informally educated Black preachers and church folk.

Mitchell, honoring the "politics of respectability," argues that Black preaching should be respected. He puts forth that what whites (and some Blacks) view as negative racial markers of Black religious identity, such as emotion, a perceived lack of cognition, and embodiment, were indicative of a lack of control.[43] Mitchell's choice to reinterpret perceived racial characteristics of Blackness, instead of performing a more radical refutation of racial essentialism, signals that Mitchell employs a politics of respectability.

Educated clergy and community leaders argued for rational discourse as they sought to uplift Black folk.[44] Higginbotham writes,

> Educated religious leaders emphasized written texts and rational discourses in the struggle for the advancement of their people. These religious leaders articulated sentiments similar to W. E. B. Du Bois' viewpoint that the Black colleges brought African Americans in contact with modern civilization. Commitment to collegiate education figured prominently in their belief in an intellectual and professional vanguard—the Talented Tenth as Du Bois characterized the Black elite at the turn of the century.[45]

Higginbotham also notes, "In the nineteenth century, ABHMS [American Baptist Home Missions Society] colleges trained Blacks sought to subvert the power of illiterate Black leaders by privileging the written word."[46] Mitchell worked for ABHMS and associated organizations

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[43] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 163.

[44] Ibid., 980.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 44.

from 1945 to 1959. His writing was doubtlessly affected by being an integral part of ABHMS for so long.[47] Writing in the twentieth century, having been reared in a middle-class, educated, family of preachers, having worked for entities that sought to "subvert the power" of non-lettered Black preachers, and having obtained multiple degrees, Mitchell privileges Black preachers who not only are literate but who write for academic publication.

He mentions those who were untrained and could not write and even goes so far as to name some of them as "Black Fathers of Black preaching."[48] However, he remarks that even these men made "strenuous efforts to establish schools and train the men coming on behind them"—again, his emphasis is on education.[49] He then says of the Black Fathers of Black preaching, "It also includes the first generation of men with some formal training for the ministry, whether at academy, college or seminary level, so long as they continued the unique faith and culture delivered to the Black masses out of which their ministerial forefathers came."[50] While Mitchell emphasizes the need for Black preachers to continue their fealty to Black people and Black culture, he grants the majority of his attention to the formally trained and educational training.

Even when discussing folk preachers, Mitchell goes out of his way to stress their intellectual acumen (formal education) even more than their liberation work. The following example is insightful. In speaking about one of the "Black Fathers," Jacob Benjamin Boddie, Mitchell writes:

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[47] Martha J. Simmons, ed., *Preaching on the Brink*, 20.

[48] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 52.

[49] Ibid., 53.

[50] Ibid.

> As a boy, Dr. Boddie gained a sixth-grade education in the rural schools near Rocky Mount, North Carolina, between crop duties. He also attended Auburn institute at Franklin, North Carolina, for three years. . . From a formal point of view, Boddie had no college or seminary training whatever, and his only degrees were honorary degrees. Yet he like Dr. Fisher read constantly and soaked up information from everywhere. After his first wife died, he married the first Black woman graduate of what became East Stroudsburg Teachers College. To this and his wide reading exposure could be added his faithful attendance at conferences at Northfield, Massachusetts for thirty-three years. Here he picked up ideas from Archibald Robertson, John R. Mott, Robert Speer, George Buttrick, Harry Emerson Fosdick, and Paul Scherer. . . . Yet Dr. Boddie had great appeal as a preacher among churches accustomed to a trained clergy as well as those with less sophisticated expectations.[51]

While Mitchell does briefly address Boddie's work for Black economic uplift, he spends most of his discussion of Boddie's resume by listing his educational attainments. Mitchell also mentions that Boddie had married an educated woman. Not surprisingly, Mitchell speaks of eight white men and suggests that Boddie learned from them during his thirty-year attendance at a minister's conference. This makes the knowledge Boddie gained respectable. For Mitchell, Boddie's work on behalf of Black folk and his abilities as a preacher and pastor could not stand alone without the mention of middle-class white men. Finally, we must also note his not-so-subtle dig at the folk—their expectations of preaching were "less sophisticated." How does Mitchell know this? Why does he mention it? Here, "less sophisticated" is code for not being as theologically astute as those who are formally educated.

In chapter two of *Black Preaching*, which Mitchell titled, "A History of Black Preaching," he again lauds the learned and connects most of the preachers he mentioned to whites. Mitchell continues:

> Perhaps the best known and most widely traveled Black preacher was the Rev. Harry Hoosier, better known as Black Harry, who preached from 1784 until his death in 1810. He was the *servant and companion of Bishop Asbury* and reputed by some to be the

[51] Ibid., 61-62.

> greatest orators in America. . . It is quite evident that Richard Allen, father of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, did his preaching to early white audiences. . . The Rev. Lemuel Haynes fought in the Revolution and was licensed to preach in the Congregational Church in 1780, after which he was soon ordained. Thereafter he held only white pastorates in Connecticut, Vermont, and New York Du Bois and Woodson also list numerous other early Black preaches who preached for whites: John Stewart, who also preached among Indians in his Ohio ministry; Uncle Jack, a Baptist pastor in Nottoway County, Virginia; John Chavis, a Princeton trained Presbyterian in Virginia and North Carolina.
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> The Rev. Andrew Marshall, pastor of First African Baptist Church at Savannah from 1812 to 1856, had the distinction of being called to this church, of being the missionary for the largely white Sunbury Baptist Association of Georgia. . . Marshall's church's first pastor, George Leile, was converted at Kiokee Georgia in 1773, while still a slave. Leile began immediately to preach, both to slaves and to the whites at Matthew Moore's Baptist Church of which he was a member [emphasis mine]. [52]

Mitchell's presentation of this information about Hoosier, Haynes, Stewart, Uncle Jack, Chavis, Marshall, and Leile engages in what Victor Anderson, in his book *Beyond Ontological Blackness* refers to as "how African Americans represent themselves as the mirror of European genius: ontological Blackness signifies the Blackness that whiteness created."[53] Anderson writes,

> Ontological Blackness is a philosophy of racial consciousness. It is governed by dialectical matrices that existentially structure African Americans' self-conscious perceptions of Black life. Under ontological Blackness, the conscious lives of Blacks are experienced as bound by unresolved binary dialectics of slavery and freedom, negro and citizen, insider and outsider, Black and white, struggle and survival. However, such binary polarities admit no possibility of transcendence or mediation. . . These alienated forms of Black consciousness have been categorically defined in African American cultural studies as *The Negro Problem, The Color Line, Black Experience, Black Power, The Veil of Blackness*, Black Radicalism and most recently, The Black Sacred Cosmos.[54]

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[52] Ibid., 69-71.

[53] Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness*, 13.

[54] Ibid., 14.

Mitchell details the talents and genius of Black preachers, to use the words of Anderson, "by depicting the racial genius of Blacks as entailed in the marks of European genius."[55] This comports with the work of Du Bois as he fashioned his idea of the Talented Tenth—Blacks could show their genius by using the marks of European genius as their measuring rod. By using the "marks of European genius," Mitchell helped establish expectations and norms of practice for what would be viewed in the future as *respectable* African American preachers and preaching. He even concludes his first book on Black preaching with a sermon by a white preacher, Ernest T. Campbell, who pastored the Riverside Church of New York.

The Talented Tenth idea embeds itself within African American homiletics, via Mitchell, through emotional dissonance, triple consciousness, and the politics of respectability. African American homiletics, as placed in the literature by Mitchell, displays that he is conflicted as he attempts to salute, explain, and place Black preachers in the literature.

We must also note that, although there are several outstanding Black female preachers from the same periods as Hoosier, Haynes, Stewart, Uncle Jack, Chavis, Marshall, and Leile, but none of them are mentioned in Mitchell's first two books. They include Jarena Lee (1783-1864), Zilpha Elaw (1790-ca. 1873), Julia Foote (1823-1900), Maria Stewart 1803-1879), Harriet Cole Baker 1829-1913), and Emily Christmas Kinch (ca. 1865-1932). Mitchell was also married to a female preacher, Reverend Ella Pearson Mitchell; they wed in 1944. She died in 2008. Even so, the Talented Tenth preacher that Mitchell introduces to the world is male.

[55] Ibid.

Detecting a Talented Tenth Imagination in the Literature of African American Homiletics

The intellectual shadow of the Talented Tenth cast a historically rich and racially complex shadow upon the field of homiletics. The Talented Tenth idea emerged from the desire of northern white Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASP) to create a replica of its class consciousness in a small social class of educated African Americans. The formation of ministers was especially critical to this work, as they were respected in their community and served as role models.

Mitchell did attain racial respectability by having books on Black preaching placed on the syllabi of numerous white homileticians in white schools. Mitchell also affirmed the complex identity and gave credence to a modified version of African American folkways in the pulpit for those who identify with the model of the Talented Tenth preacher. Mitchell notes this by saying:

> One pleasure I experienced after writing the first edition of *Black Preaching* that I hope will not be subject to change is the volume of response from mature preachers who reported *healing* [emphasis mine] of their self-esteem as practitioners of the Black tradition. All these years they had followed African American patterns with a kind of *guilty conscious* [emphasis mine], or wistful wish that they could somehow measure "up" to the established standards. Now they know that their tradition is widely contributing to the standards *respected by all* [emphasis mine], and they go back home to affirm themselves and their tradition, with a new commitment to refining it on its own terms, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.[56]

Mitchell's scholarship operated as a balm to heal "mature" Black preachers. Preaching with wounded self-concepts based on a homiletic triple-consciousness, these leaders of the African America community were likely conflicted emotionally and as they preached. The self-consciousness felt by these preachers could be a function of their own personal and professional struggles, and also may have mirrored the class angst and respectability politics within their congregations and communities. Mitchell's intervention brought affirmation and validity to one manifestation of the African American preaching tradition.

[56] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 8.

What remains little explored is how the Talented Tenth concept, extending from and beyond Mitchell, continues to loom over African American homiletic thought. Mitchell, more than anyone, helped make Black preaching visible in homiletics. Mitchell's approach to presenting Black preaching in a Talented Tenth framework helped whites recognize the Black preacher as a figure of inquiry. For those who have never recognized or studied Black preaching, Mitchell's opinions and assessments would carry significant weight. Simmons is correct in her assertion that Mitchell has done more than anyone else to make Black preaching respectable.

The Talented Tenth Preacher and Contemporary African American Homiletics

After the publication of *Black Preaching*, more African American homileticians began to enrich Mitchell's insights and to articulate alternate approaches to Black preaching. Scholars offered new perspectives concerning the African American preaching tradition. Echoes of Mitchell's Talented Tenth bias, whether faint or pronounced, were detectable. African American scholars after Mitchell further explored questions within African American homiletics. Despite the theological, sociological and gender problems in his foundational books, Mitchell's publishing success and influence became aspirational and instructional.

One way to trace the influence of the Talented Tenth in the literature of African American homiletics is to note different preaching theorists and the image of the preacher they put forth. Many institutions of African American education, including those that became colleges and universities, were founded as seminaries for the development of African American religious leaders. ABHMS schools—Richmond Institute, Richmond, Virginia; Atlanta Baptist Male College, Atlanta, Georgia; Shaw University, Raleigh, North Carolina; Benedict Institute, Columbia, South Carolina; Nashville Institute, Nashville, Tennessee; Natchez Seminary,

Natchez, Mississippi; Leland University, New Orleans, Louisiana; and Wayland Seminary, Washington, D.C. and others have produced African American preachers who are cited in the pages of homiletic textbooks as images of preaching excellence.

Many persons in the literature of African American homiletics who are considered practitioners of African American preaching excellence are graduates of or affiliated with the former institutions. Gardner C. Taylor graduated from Leland College before a successful pastorate at Concord Baptist Church in Brooklyn, NY. The Richmond Institute, which after several iterations, became Virginia Union University, is the institution from which Samuel DeWitt Proctor graduated. Preachers such as Martin Luther King, Sr., Martin Luther King, Jr., Otis Moss, Jr., Otis Moss, III., and Sandy F. Ray graduated from Morehouse College, the former Atlanta Baptist Male Seminary. Morehouse is also where theologian Howard Thurman graduated and taught before becoming the Dean of Rankin Chapel at Howard University. All these preachers greatly impacted contemporary African American homiletics due to either their preaching gifts, the churches they pastored, where they taught, or movements they led. Before assuming leadership of Tuskegee Institute, Booker T. Washington, a Baptist minister, briefly attended Wayland Seminary in 1878–79.[57]

The National Baptist Inc. denomination (of which Henry Mitchell was a member) contributed to the formation of how many African American clergy would come to understand themselves and how outsiders would come to image the African American preacher due in large part to the writings of Mitchell. The possibility for misunderstanding a Talented Tenth expression of preaching as "the best of the tradition" is due in large measure to the way that the Talented Tenth preacher has been imaged by leading African American preaching theorists,

[57] Louis Harlan, ed. *The Making of a Black Leader*, 96 – 99.

beginning with Mitchell. African American preaching theorists imaged preaching excellence from the Talented Tenth perspective, in part, due to their religious imagination and educational formation. Thus, actively embedding one ministerial image of excellence in culture. The preacher preferences of these theorists also shed light on underrepresented and undervalued preachers and preaching approaches.

W. E. B. Du Bois, Alexander Crummell, and the Beginnings of a Talented Tenth Homiletic

Du Bois is not often considered a contributor to the Black preaching tradition, yet white homiletician Richard Lischer includes a chapter from *The Souls of Black Folk* in his book *Theories of Preaching: Selected Readings in the Homiletical Tradition*. For Lischer. Du Bois "captures the aura of Black folk worship, which Du Bois summarizes under three headings: the preacher, the music, and the frenzy."[58] The preacher would be central to Du Bois' understanding of religion. Du Bois' Talented Tenth preacher is embodied by Alexander Crummell (1819-1898), the Episcopal priest, Pan-Africanist, and academic. One of the most moving chapters in *Souls* is called "Of Alexander Crummell," where Du Bois' poignantly reflects upon the biography of Crummell and wistfully allegorizes the meaning of his life. Du Bois comes to understand Crummell as a prophet whose story is an allegory about the collective soul of Black people.

Crummell was indeed an exceptional person. Crummell was born to free and literate parents in 1819. Undoubtedly, the educated, anti-slavery orientation of his parents would inform how Crummell would take advantage of his providential social and educational opportunities. He became an Episcopal minister after significant trials and racial restrictions. After his ordination, Crummell is sponsored to attend the University of Cambridge in Cambridge England in 1848. He

[58] Richard Lischer, *Theories of Preaching*, 280.

then immigrates to Liberia in 1853 and remains there for two decades. He left America in 1848 and did not return until 1872. He would later organize St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Washington, D. C. where he served until his death in 1898. The consistent and pulsing core of Crummell's actions is his faith and role as a minister.

> Arthur P. Davis summarizes Crummell's contradictions in a concise manner stating:
>
> Alexander Crummell, like Du Bois, his intellectual heir, was an extremely complex and paradoxical person—at times petty, at times saintly. Also, like Dr. Du Bois, he seemed to be constantly changing his position on significant issues. One day he would emphasize the supreme importance of practical education for Negroes; on another, he would insist that high intellectual and classic training was a necessity for Black advancement. . .The reader, however, soon realizes that all of Crummell's vacillation occurred upon the unchanging bedrock of a deep and mystical faith.[59]

Crummell's perspective on these issues in the 19th century, in many ways, embodied Talented Tenth impulses. Crummell was deeply committed to the idea of racial uplift. His desire to save the race exhibited both liberal and conservative attributes, functions of his 19th century educational and cultural development as a Black man. His aspirations for the uplift of African Americans is a mark of his liberal Yankee zeal. Intermixed in the concept of uplift is the reality of race management, and the responsibility or burden of racial uplift undertaken by the Talented Tenth. Crummell believed that an educated few would be the leaders to uplift that masses. The leaders would, in effect, become race managers. Their responsibility to influence the masses and maintain social order was indeed tenuous and fraught with danger and difficulties. By managing the masses away from revolt and revolution, leaders such as Crummell knew that they also were conserving the system that oppresses them. However, they were also strategically and

[59] Gregory U. Rigsby, *Alexander Crummell: Pioneer in Nineteenth-Century Pan-African Thought* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), x-xi.

subversively living to fight another day and determine ways that future generations would live in a country under less oppression.

Du Bois compares Crummell, a complex person, to a modern-day prophet of biblical proportion, thus shaping the Talented Tenth preaching image in a prophetic tradition. In her book *W. E. B. Du Bois and the Soul of Black Folk*, Stephanie J. Shaw also makes the connection between Du Bois and his prophetic interpretation of Crummell:

> Ultimately, Du Bois' chapter on Crummell is much more than a biographical tribute, a eulogy, and a celebration of Crummell's life; more than a snipe at Booker T. Washington; and more than simple self-aggrandizement. In a rather significant way, in the chapter on Crummell Du Bois provided two distinct but equally important discussions of Soul—one allegorical, situated in theology in the literary tradition of countless religion-based stories, and the other based in the Hegelian that pays particular attention to the development of consciousness. In both cases, Du Bois illustrates an *individual's* journey toward spirit—destiny. Ultimately, whether one reads the spiritual journey represented in Du Bois' chapter as sacred or secular, Du Bois logically casts Crummell as a prophet because only a prophet is ever trusted with the destiny of a people.[60]

Shaw contextualizes Du Bois' work on Crummell in different ways displaying the diversity and impact of the relationship on Du Bois. She affirms that Du Bois, the homiletic theorist, offers this work as a eulogy, a sermonic reflection, on his hero and mentor. In this exercise, Du Bois models his preaching sensibilities. He frames Crummell as the ideal minister, an educated prophet who utilized his socio-political status to uplift the masses of Africans in America and wherever African-descended peoples are present. "Significantly, Crummell never had enemies among the poor, the downtrodden, or the oppressed. They were always willing to sign petitions, with X's if need be, in support of their pastor," notes Crummell biographer Gregory U. Grisby.[61] Du Bois' admiration of Crummell, an Episcopal preacher, shaped the way successive generations

[60] Stephanie J. Shaw, *W. E. B. Du Bois and the Souls of Black Folks* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 80.

[61] Grigsby, *Alexander Crummell,* 181.

of African American preachers would come to understand the identity of the preacher and the practices of preaching mainly due to Du Bois' larger than life impact on Black culture and his advocacy for the Talented Tenth idea. Crummell, active in the struggle for civil rights for African Americans, mainly concerned with the masses, would impress upon Du Bois how a preacher functions. Not until the popularity of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during the height of the American civil rights movement, would Du Bois' image of the Talented Tenth preacher reach the American mainstream and influence contemporary conceptions of a Talented Tenth homiletic.[62]

The "Epiphany" of Talented Tenth Preaching and the "edited" Martin Luther King, Jr.

African American homiletician Frank A. Thomas notes the national recognition of Martin Luther King, Jr. as a watershed moment in the exploration of African American preaching. Thomas states, "In the preaching of Marin Luther King, Jr. (1955-68) and several other well-known African American preachers of the civil rights movement, the folk and educated strands of African American preaching converged and majority America had a 'homiletical epiphany' and became aware of the power of Black preaching."[63]

Thomas' opinion on King's role in homiletics is debatable, but it does spark an interesting conversation concerning the importance of Martin Luther King, Jr. to the development of African American homiletics. Thomas' understanding of how King blended the folk and educated traditions of Black preaching requires some exploration. Thomas cites the homiletic work of Mervyn Warren entitled *King Came Preaching: The Pulpit Power of Martin Luther*

[62] Frank A. Thomas, *Introduction to the Practice of African American Homiletics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 29.

[63] Ibid., 29.

King, Jr. In it, Warren states, "In fact, the increased visibility and respectability of Black preaching in America falls into two distinct eras, B.K. and A.K.—Before King and After King."[64]

Thomas agrees with this assessment of King's impact on the study and scholarship of Black preaching but grounds King in a distinctly Talented Tenth tradition when he writes:

> King was squarely located in the educated strand of African American preaching, following in the footsteps of Mordecai Wyatt Johnson, Benjamin Elijah Mays, and Vernon Johns. Though not considered a folk preacher, King borrowed heavily from folk preachers, including his father, grandfather, and many African American preachers he heard growing up and with whom he worked in the civil rights movement.[65]

In King, these borrowed elements found a palatable synthesis to appeal to broader white culture. The "I Have a Dream" speech epitomized this in 1963. In the *Concise History of Preaching*, homileticians Richard Lischer and William H. Willimon note King's speech "functioned as a Black sermon to the nation. Since then, others have begun to make an impression outside the African-American community proportionate to the one they made within it."[66] In King's "I Have A Dream" message, a Talented Tenth vision of social integration, combined with his selective sampling of the folk preaching styles, would set the template for white respectability for the African American preacher image.

Homiletician L. Susan Bond identifies in *Contemporary African American Preaching: Diversity in Theory and Style* the contours of a Talented Tenth homiletic method with Martin Luther King, Jr. as the image of the preacher. She states:

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[64] Mervyn Warren, *King Came Preaching: The Pulpit Power of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 52.

[65] Thomas, *Practice of African American Preaching*, 31.

[66] William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer, eds., *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 225.

> Martin Luther King, Jr. himself admitted that he was embarrassed in his early preaching career to "preach Black." Preaching "Black" meant the usage of African American homiletic conventions such as "Black English," alliteration, emotionalism, or "whooping." King was not alone in his assumptions that preachers should "uplift" the congregation through scrupulous grammar, careful elocution, and impressive vocabulary. The other "gentleman preachers" of his generation had similar commitments to a particular leadership style that manifested itself in sermons according to what Augustine called "grand" or "inspirational" style of rhetoric. Sermon illustrations came from Western literary traditions, from Western philosophy, from Western poetry, and from the sciences, Rhetorical style was marked by dignity and the kind of "authorities" valued by white homiletics.[67]

The Talented Tenth concept active within African American preaching produced a class of "gentlemen preachers" whose content and delivery reflected, in many ways, the best of white preaching – a gentleman's homiletic steeped in Western European cultural excellence. For Bond, the early King seemingly 'Blackenized' the Western tradition at the expense of the suppression of his folkways. King's homiletic was fraught with respectability politics having to synthesize several worlds—Western European, European American, the Talented Tenth and the African American masses—who all make conflicting claims about the value and future of African Americans. The early Martin Luther King of "I Have A Dream" fame became the dominant influence for the formation of the Talented Tenth preacher image. The complexities within King's respectability politics informed his preaching and content. However, there may be a more textured reality about King that is often flattened and simplified into a single speech, no matter how significant.

Richard Lischer helps to uncover a more accurate image of Martin Luther King, one that has homiletical import. In *The Preacher King*, Lischer constructs a fresh perspective on King mining "raw materials that most biographers and critics overlook. The substance of that portrait

[67] Susan L. Bond, *Contemporary African American Preaching: Diversity in Theory and Style* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003).

relies heavily on the unedited audiotapes and transcripts of King's sermons and speeches, including a few recorded by police mobile surveillance units in Birmingham and Selma."[68] The necessity of mining King's authentic voice is a crucial task to help homiletics discover the ways the Talented Tenth imagination influenced King's actual and written voice. A more authentic understanding of King can help liberate preachers who may have sought to model a King that did not exist.

Lischer notes that King's extensive travel and speaking engagements meant that "most of his books and articles were published only with substantial editorial assistance."[69] The constant threats upon his life by extremists and the persistent surveillance by the American government limited his ability to have a more heavy-handed approach in the writing process. What was more at stake in an "edited" King is that those choices in content and style reflect deep Talented Tenth sensibilities since the editors were not Black. Lischer's discusses the "edited" King at length.

> King and his editors removed all local and personal references from these sermons and polished them up as timeless masterpieces of the pulpit. In their printed form, they are scarcely distinguishable from the liberal commonplaces of white, mainline pulpits during the Eisenhower era. Anything resembling the African-Baptist gospel of King's experience or the prophetic rage that often seized him was removed in order to lend his utterances universality and to recommend his Movement to as wide a reading audience as possible. In the process, his real preaching and, consequently, something of the real Martin Luther King, Jr. was lost to the public.[70]

The "edited" King, a preacher who did not exist except as an image, became the paradigm for generations of preachers. The "homiletical epiphany" Thomas notes in his discussion of King is, in fact, a heavily-redacted Talented Tenth vision. Other Talented Tenth preachers influenced

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[68] Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word that Moved America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 4.

[69] Ibid., 4.

[70] Ibid., 4-5.

King's homiletical conception—former Morehouse College president Benjamin E. Mays and King's father, Martin Luther King, Sr. "King discovered three mediating influences who, like Mays appreciated a good theological argument and, like King Sr., sat astride enormous urban congregations. They were William Holmes Borders, Sandy F. Ray, and Gardner C. Taylor."[71]

Of these figures, Taylor had the most impact on King. Lischer states, "Taylor was one of the few who could generate passion while retaining his composure. To King he was an example of John Chrysostom's observation: he is a rare preacher who can move the masses without losing his soul."[72] It was not only King who admired Taylor. Henry H. Mitchell also admired Taylor, in ways similar to Du Bois' admiration for Alexander Crummell, whereby Crummell became the dominant model for the Talented Tenth preacher figure in his era. Taylor's influence on the literature of African American preaching is immense, as he would become, in many ways, in the twentieth century, the prime example of how African American preaching excellence is understood—steeped in Talented Tenth sensibilities.

Henry H. Mitchell, Gardner C. Taylor, and the Image of the Talented Tenth Preacher

The late Gardner C. Taylor was offered by Mitchell as the ideal image for Black preaching, placing Taylor and his preaching approach on an ideological pedestal that currently impacts the imagination of African American preaching. Ebony Magazine honored him as one of the "Fifteen Greatest Preachers in America."[73] A 1997 *Newsweek* survey by Baylor University chose Taylor as one of the twelve most effective preachers in the English-speaking world. Timothy George says,

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[71] Ibid., 48.

[72] Ibid.

[73] "Fifteen Greatest Preachers in America," *Ebony Magazine* 39 (September 1984), 25. No author.

"Over the past century, Gardner Calvin Taylor has cut a swath unmatched by any other Protestant minister across the landscape of Christianity."[74] Richard Lischer chronicles Martin Luther King, Jr.'s affinity for the person and preaching of Gardner Taylor. Lischer describes King's affinity stating, "What King and many young preachers besides would have learned from Taylor was the genius for channeling evangelical doctrine and the great stories of the Bible into socially progressive and prophetic utterance."[75]

As a demonstration of respect for Taylor's powerful preaching and significant contributions to the teaching, theorization, and practice of preaching, in 1976, Taylor presented the 100th Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching at Yale Divinity School. Taylor taught homiletics courses at Harvard Divinity School, Colgate Rochester Divinity School, and Union Theological Seminary. He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2000 by President Bill Clinton. Taylor, in many respects, operated at the crux of Black and white ideological visibility. Harkening back to Du Bois, Taylor is the idealized version of the Negro preacher, who is only one manifestation of a broader tradition of the Du Boisian preacher. Mitchell's desire to make Blackness visible to the white discourse in homiletics became embodied in Taylor. Mitchell's homiletic method became the embodied racial negotiation of white respectability. Talented Tenth preaching and a Talented Tenth preacher would be Mitchell's aim.

Mitchell expresses the late Gardner C. Taylor's importance to the homiletic tradition, especially in terms of its academic study and the practice of preaching:

> I studied under premier preaching teachers, such as Harry Emerson Fosdick and George Buttrick, whom I recall having no earned doctorates but some honoraries. The same is true of the man I regard as the greatest preacher of my lifetime, Gardner C. Taylor, an African

[74] Timothy George, James Earl Massey, and Robert Smith, eds. *Our Sufficiency is of God: Essays in Preaching Honoring Gardner C. Taylor*, (Macon, Mercer, 2010), xiii.

[75] Richard Lischer, "Gardner C. Taylor," in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, eds. William Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 466.

> American, pastor of the Concord Baptist Church of Christ in Brooklyn. The growth and development of preaching in the African American pulpit and in the churches and classrooms of America will proceed best when it is clear that the genius of a Gardner C. Taylor is only in part owing to an education.[76]

Gesturing beyond the formal theological education process, Mitchell emphasizes that there is more for preachers to ascertain from the preaching life than just formal education. Creative and transformative preaching are not born in the intellectual sterility of a classroom. According to Mitchell, Taylor has apprehended whatever lies beyond a mere theological degree and commands it rhetorically. Gardner Taylor's pulpit excellence is only partially due to his education.

Mitchell presses Gardner Taylor to the fore as an example of African American rhetorical and linguistic mastery saying, "the impact of the lessons of the faith is greatly enhanced by the natural poetry and music of gifted preachers. Gardner C. Taylor is a case in point. Real soul preaching demands rhetorical flair. Perhaps it would be accurate to say that one of the many strengths of good Black preaching is the skillful use of poetic language."[77] Taylor's ability to negotiate Black preaching and the Black preacher in the homiletic racial imagination made him worthy of his accolades.

Cleophus J. LaRue, Kenyatta R. Gilbert, and the Cosmology of Baptist, Talented Tenth Preaching

Henry Mitchell put forth a homiletic method influenced by Talented Tenth sensibilities. For Mitchell, Gardner C. Taylor was the model. It is inevitable that Talented Tenth sensibilities and assumptions would be discernable in the works of future homileticians since they begin with

[76] Henry H. Mitchell, 55.

[77] Ibid., 96.

Mitchell as their foundational author. The homiletic texts of Cleophus J. LaRue and Kenyatta R. Gilbert represent different trajectories of African American homiletician thought. Their works continue to make aspects of the African American preaching tradition accessible for academic consideration. They also highlight laudable figures of the Talented Tenth tradition, further deepening exploration of the theory and practice of African American preaching but, also as important, they continue the heavily-Baptist, educated, civil rights understanding of the Black pulpit.

For both scholars, their origins in the Black Baptist tradition, particularly in western Texas, shape how they conceive the tradition and imagine the possibilities of the African American preaching tradition. LaRue, a native of Corpus Christi, TX, through the support of white Southern Baptists, attended Baylor University. LaRue would note of his journey "I was actively involved in pastoral ministry for fourteen years before I enrolled as an MDiv student at Princeton Theological Seminary. In my pursuit of a theological education, I moved from actual practice to theory and finally to reflection on both practice and theory in my current capacity as a professor of homiletics."[78] Those many years of pastoring within the Baptist context, before attending and eventually becoming a professor at Princeton, would profoundly influence his homiletic method. LaRue further discusses the context for his preaching method in his 2002 text *I Believe I'll Testify*. In this work of homiletical autobiography, Larue is bearing witness or testifying. This aspect is not insignificant; I will further explore in Chapter 4 the importance of the witness motif in a discussion of the work of homiletician Thomas G. Long. Interesting to note, LaRue was a doctoral student under Long at Princeton. The intersection of context and proclamation explored by Long shaped the ways LaRue resourced his pastoral and personal

[78] Cleophus James LaRue, *I Believe I'll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 6.

experiences to imagine and explain the African American preaching tradition.

Though significantly younger than Henry Mitchell, race would also shape LaRue's world. The book title *Preaching in Black and* White*: What We Can Learn From Each Other*, written by prominent preachers E. K. Bailey and Warren W. Wiersbe, could also summarize LaRue's approach to homiletic thought. He compares Black preaching and white homiletics, and he hopes to bring the two traditions together.[79] He also addresses wanting to stop white homileticians from neglecting Black religious traditions as they teach.[80] Importantly, LaRue defines Black preaching. After stating the definitions that several Black homileticians have given for Black preaching, LaRue writes,

> In an earlier work I, too, made an attempt to list the significant characteristics of this style of preaching. . . Among the distinctions in matters of content, I cited a biblical hermeneutic of a sovereign God who acts powerfully on the part of the disinherited and five realms or domains of experience into which and out of which Blacks are shaped by the gospel and lived situations…All such characteristics can only be described as touching different parts of the elephant.[81]

LaRue also says that there are four essentials of preaching the scriptures that "come together in the best of Black preaching. They are God, the Scriptures, the preacher, and Black lived experience."[82] LaRue then addresses how these components come forth in the preaching moment. He then discusses the use of artful language and crafted oratory. In *The Heart of Black Preaching*, LaRue is less interested in the linguistic and the cultural project of Mitchell and is concerned with the hermeneutics of African American preaching.

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[79] Ibid., 21.

[80] Ibid., 22.

[81] Ibid., 34.

[82] Ibid., 58.

Like Mitchell, LaRue's homiletic method remains shaped by his homiletic heroes. LaRue presents in his books, *The Heart of Black Preaching* and *Power in the Pulpit,* an array of understandings of the African American preacher. LaRue notes that he accepted his call to ministry after hearing Rev. A. Louis Patterson preach a citywide revival in his hometown.[83] LaRue says that "Patterson became the connecting link between my past and future in the church."[84] LaRue found Patterson to be "a highly educated extremely articulate person who preached the gospel with power and conviction. There were no histrionics and pyrotechnics in his preaching, yet his style was riveting and impressive. . . In A. Louis Patterson I found a model and mentor worthy of emulation."[85] LaRue says he "would come under the influence of other *significant preachers* [italics mine] of the order of P. S. Wilkerson Sr., Manuel L. Scott Sr., Caesar A. W. Clark, James A. Forbes Jr., and Gardner C. Taylor."[86] LaRue's preaching influences would also reflect how he made sense of Black preaching and how he envisioned ideal images of the Black preacher.

LaRue does not so much define what an African American preacher is but instead illustrates it by the preachers and sermons he analyzes. In *The Heart of Black Preaching*, LaRue chose to analyze the sermons of 19th-century preachers John Jasper, Alexander Crummell, Francis J. Grimkè, Daniel Alexander Payne, and Elias Camp Morris, among others. All of these men, except John Jasper (a preacher of the masses), are connected to Du Bois.[87] LaRue states

[83] LaRue, *I'll Believe I'll Testify*, 6.

[84] Ibid., 6.

[85] Ibid., 6.

[86] Ibid., 6.

[87] For the Grimkè connection, see Herbert Aptheker, ed., *The Correspondence of W. E. B. Du Bois, Volume 2* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 195. His connection to Daniel Payne concerns the fact that Du Bois briefly taught at Wilberforce, which under the leadership of Payne was purchased by the African Methodist Episcopal denomination in 1863. Payne also served as the first president of the college. Du Bois regularly attended

that "all five were leading figures in Black religious life who made significant contributions to their ministerial careers and the elevation of the race"[88] while also admitting, "four of the five individuals whose sermons I will examine were either professionally trained or self-educated, one could argue that their preaching was not really representative of the kind of preaching being done by the multitudes of Black ministers."[89] The preachers selected by LaRue are in the same vein as those chosen by Mitchell. Both mention John Jasper (1812-1901) for his use of imagination and creativity. LaRue says Jasper is his representative of the "folk tradition."[90] Although unlettered, Jasper started the Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church in Richmond, VA, which, before his death in 1887, had attracted several hundred members.[91]

The others would all be considered Talented Tenth preachers of their era. LaRue admits this when he says of their preaching, "one could argue that their preaching was not representative of the kind of preaching being done by the multitude of Black ministers."[92] These were not the preachers of the masses.

LaRue analyzes contemporary sermons in a book he edited, *Power in the Pulpit: How America's Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare Their Sermons*. LaRue again selects ministers both men and women who: a) pastor large Protestant congregations, b) are denominational leaders, work in the academy, c) are professionally trained, and d) are age 55 or

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the National Baptist Convention, for which Elias Camp Morris became the first president in 1895. His presidency continued until 1920.

[88] LaRue, 30.

[89] Ibid., 31.

[90] Ibid., 31.

[91] Martha J. Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, eds. *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons 1750 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton 2010), 281-282.

[92] Ibid.

older. The preachers are Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr., Katie G. Cannon, A. Louis Patterson, Jr., Mozella Mitchell, Fred C. Lofton, and Carolyn Ann Knight. *More Power in the Pulpit*, a follow-up text, follows the same benchmarks for the selection of preachers, with some slight variation, but all still within the Talented Tenth scope.

The preachers in this volume include Willette Alyce Bryant, William Epps, Veronica Goines, Cynthia Hale, C. E. McLean, Otis Moss Jr., Otis Moss III, Raquel St. Clair, Walter Scott Thomas, and Melvin Wade Sr.[93] The biographical sketches of the preachers inform readers that these are preachers of significant educational attainment and social influence, many of them are pastors or aiding in the leadership of some of the more prominent churches in the country. LaRue offers more variety of the same tradition, imaging preaching excellence importantly but primarily using Talented Tenth lens. LaRue would have to concede that these preachers also are *not* representative of the preachers of the masses. Enlisting the homiletical insights of African American clergy whose experiences do not necessarily reflect African American folk culture reinforces the image of the educationally and culturally exceptional Talented Tenth preacher figure. Du Bois championed this model; it was continued by Henry H. Mitchell and Larue.

More recently, Kenyatta Gilbert sought to construct what he terms a new "ethical model for Black preaching" in his book *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching*. Gilbert explicitly aims to move discussions of Black preaching beyond contrasting it with European preaching, a hallmark of LaRue's socio-political scholarship. Appreciative of LaRue's influence, Gilbert recognizes "Dr. Cleophus J. LaRue for first stimulating my scholarly interest in the African American preaching traditions."[94] Though different in age, Gilbert and LaRue

[93] Cleophus J. LaRue, *More Power in the Pulpit: How America's Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare Sermons* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009).

[94] Kenyatta R. Gilbert, *Journey and Promise*, ix.

share similar educational, socio-cultural geographic backgrounds, which may explain Gilbert's use of an approach similar to that of LaRue.

Gilbert begins *Journey and Promise* with a testimony—much like LaRue in *I'll Believe I'll Testify*—as a way to situate his approach to homiletics in the context of the Black Baptist preaching culture of Waco, Texas where, like LaRue, he would graduate from Baylor. In a different order of events, Gilbert, like LaRue, would pastor Baptist congregations, graduate from Princeton Seminary with masters and doctoral degrees, and write books that would influence the conversations concerning the many African American preaching traditions.

Gilbert's explores the ethical dimensions of preaching, mainly through a homiletical imagination steeped in civil rights sensibilities in the image of the "edited" King described by Lischer's work. As much as LaRue is trying to interpret what is distinctive about Black preaching, Gilbert is seeing to imagine a renewed ethic of preaching based on "the best of the tradition." Gilbert, contrasting from his predecessors Mitchell and LaRue, does not focus on the impact of race and linguistic understandings, or claims of racial distinction in African American preaching. In Gilbert's thrust of exploring and reclaiming the ethical import of preaching, he sources Talented Tenth models of proclamation and preachers as the ideal for current application. In Gilbert's writings, those who represent an understanding of the ethical import of preaching are mainly the same names and have similar educational pedigrees as those that populate the work of Mitchell and LaRue.

Consistent across Gilbert's books, both *Journey and Promise* and *A Justice Pursued: Black Preaching from the Great Migration to Civil Rights*, is the importance of the overarching struggle for human rights, especially framed by the civil rights movement. In *Journey and Promise*, Gilbert notes Colonial North America, the Revival Period, Reconstruction, the Great

Migration, and the modern civil rights movement as historical periods that establish the context for the development of the African American preacher. Gilbert's homiletic approach is grounded in sensibilities deeply influenced by the civil rights movement of the 1960s. It is a period of an increased emphasis on social integration and human rights. As noted by Frank Thomas and Lischer, the African American preacher figure epitomized by King came into national prominence during this period. Along with that, a Talented Tenth conception of prophetic preaching also takes a Kingian form.

The ethical disposition utilized by King to diagnose and treat what he believed was a disease of the soul, is a central thrust of Gilbert's approach. He writes, "The common thread of all prophetic preaching is the recognition of injustice, and that the preacher will name injustice for what it is, and what injustice should be. Thus, the prophetic witness is never imported; it is mediated, sent to, and worked out in community, not in isolation."[95] The prophetic nature of the tradition is grounded in its intimate connection to the local community and an essential relationship to the broader social context. Justice is a real concern and coordinated action that materializes in the bodies and imaginations of people. Gilbert offers a "trivocal approach" to preaching as a corrective to the lack of prophetic concern that he diagnoses within the current state of Black preaching. He writes, "Thus, my working definition of African American preaching—or what I call trivocal preaching—is: African American preaching is a ministry of Christian proclamation—a theo-rhetorical discourse about God's good will toward community with regard to divine intentionality, communal care, and the active practice of hope—that finds resources internal to Black life in the North American context."[96]

[95] Ibid., 57.

[96] Kenyatta R. Gilbert, *Journey and Promise*, 11

When presenting his desired image of the African American preacher, Gilbert evokes some of the same images as Mitchell and LaRue—Gardner C. Taylor, Prathia Hall, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Gilbert provides, in essence, a concept of "trivocal preaching" resonant in image and sound with a heavily-Baptist, Talented Tenth civil rights ethic.

Gilbert recasts the venerable tradition in a different light in *A Pursued Justice*. He focuses his energies on exploring "the vital role prophetic Black preaching played within African American churches and communities during a period of intense social upheaval: showing how a small cadre of Black clerics of the early twentieth century America cultivated a prophetic consciousness in their preaching that daringly challenged the dominant social forces afflicting Black life during the Great Migration period…"[97] Gilbert also makes "the bold claim that one can hardly be prophetic in a significant way if one preaches exclusively to the oppressed, though it is significant for the oppressed to know how to resist their oppression."[98] Consistent with *Journey and Promise*, Gilbert images preachers of a particular social and educational class, an extension of Talented Tenth formation, as examples of prophetic preaching, possibly skewing the ways the prophetic imagination expressed itself beyond a Talented Tenth framework.

Gilbert analyzes the sermons of Martin Luther King, Jr., Sandy Frederick Ray, Benjamin Elijah Mays, and Samuel DeWitt Proctor as examples of prophetic preaching during the civil rights era. He cites Katie Geneva Cannon, Otis Moss Jr., Marvin McMickle, and Cheryl J. Sanders as current voices finding prophetic continuity with the themes and images of the civil rights era.

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[97] Kenyatta Gilbert, *A Pursued Justice: From the Great Migration to Civil Rights* (Waco: Baylor, 2016), 7.

[98] Ibid., 8.

Talented Tenth sensibilities deeply form the ethical and homiletic dimensions of Gilbert's thought. Like Mitchell and LaRue before him, Gilbert circulates an aristocracy of preaching images. For Gilbert, Talented Tenth preachers embody the ethical dimensions of preaching. The tradition of the African America preacher and the practices of preaching are understood through this lens. His emphasis on the civil rights era as a source for modern homiletic import lifts undervalued names for needed discussion. It also stresses the ways that the ethical dimensions of preaching are contextual and community-oriented, a hallmark of African American preaching. Justice is concrete while also being an ideal and a standard.

Within the Talented Tenth idea is the reinforcement of racial respectability politics. Gilbert acknowledges the climate of respectability politics. He states:

> Acknowledged or not, all authors write from a local, culturally determined contextualized space. Regrettably, that Black scholars reflecting on historically marginalized North American communities shoulder unfair burdens as writers in a racialized society. Because the theological academy puts a premium on scholarly works modeled after centuries-old norms and dominant paradigms established by Europeans and Euro-American scholars, works that deviate from set norms are generally met with academic suspicion at best, and contempt or indifference at worst.[99]

The academic climate that Gilbert describes invariably impinges upon the topics, resources, and critical reception of the literature of African American preaching. Respectability politics, according to Gilbert, is endemic in a racialized society; therefore, it shapes the conceptualization of the preacher and the theorization of preaching.

A significant reason why Mitchell, LaRue, and Gilbert, among others, circulate the same names of excellence preachers and utilize the same criteria of congregational or educational significance to extend the influence of Talented Tenth thought is that Talented Tenth preachers

[99] Kenyatta Gilbert, *A Pursued Justice: Black Preaching from the Great Migration to Civil Rights*, (Waco: Baylor, 2016), x.

have often left a trail of literature to match their oratory. Often, the 'great preachers' are the ones who left written artifacts for later scholars to encounter in their academic research. Though preaching is an expression that combines writing and speaking, the scholarship in much of African American homiletic thought rests upon the written sermons of preachers, past and present. Those unlettered bards of the pulpit who by the processes of history, had their words absorbed with no trove of written materials left behind, disappear.

Reimagining the Identity of the Talented Tenth Preacher, A Womanist Perspective

Some scholars seek to push beyond the Talented Tenth hegemony in homiletic thought, with varying degrees of success in offering new ways to conceive of the African American preacher figure. Teresa Fry Brown discusses the figure of the preacher, specifically women preachers, in *Weary Throats and New Songs: Black Women Proclaiming God's Word*. Pauli Murray (1910-1985), who was an Episcopal priest, civil rights activist, and an attorney, once said, "Hope is a song in a weary throat."[100] Women have been singing and testifying for centuries in sexist and patriarchal spaces.

Fry Brown aims to "provide a brief review of the rich heritage of female proclaimers and an analysis of the particulars of contemporary Black women's calls, models, sermon preparation, content, delivery, and personhood."[101] By grounding her work in the voice (the throat) and the production of that voice, Fry Brown wrestles traditional understandings of power away from the grip of many who see preaching as a male endeavor rooted in theological imperatives that "establish" that fact. Fry Brown pushes the conversation to, but, ultimately past, men by

[100] Teresa Fry Brown, *Weary Throats and New Songs:* Black *Women Proclaiming God's Word* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 25.

[101] Ibid., 17.

addressing women in ministry. She not only destabilizes the male-centric rhetoric of who and what a Black preacher figure is, but she also addresses the very patriarchal exclusion of all previous conceptions of the Black preacher. In this way, she disrupts the discourse about what Black preachers actually were and who they can realistically be—*women.*

Fry Brown begins her homiletic texts with personal narratives. When women offer counternarratives that seemingly undermine the presentation of male-centered history, there is often resistance. These women see bearing witness (telling their stories/narratives) as a subversive approach. Traditional approaches to homiletic scholarship will be insufficient. Fry Brown engages conversations with other women preachers within her book to address the field of homiletics. The academic discourse within its literature privileges white masculine voices and sometimes Black male voices. Fry Brown's work challenges the assumptions of preaching as a male enterprise. These female influential Black women preachers force us to consider the counter-stories of Black preaching and teaching, which heretofore excluded the feminine voice. By focusing on song and voice itself, African American women usher in a day of reckoning in which the Black female voice will no longer be silenced, overlooked, or excluded from the annals of homiletic history.

Fry Brown's understanding of the authority to preach is grounded in the personal moral voice and God's Divine call. In many churches, ecclesiastical authority to preach remains denied to women. Female preachers in many African American denominations and even in non-denominational settings engage in an immense struggle to be officially recognized as preachers. Fry Brown addresses how systemic, interpersonal, racial, and gendered oppression is heaped upon the female proclaimer wherever and whoever she may be. Fry Brown employs womanist

ethics to illuminate the multiplicity of approaches to preaching that can be used by those who are specifically engaged in racial, gender, or social struggles.

She is instructive in the way she challenges previous understandings of what preaching is, based on the gendered and racialized experiences she details in her writings. She also enlists the term "proclamation" in conjunction with the term preaching, providing a more expansive understanding of the definition of the word preaching and a balance to the formalized connotations attached to the word preaching. Proclamation is "sacred speech differentiated from public speaking. It centers on who God is, what God requires when God acts, where God is, how God operates, and why God does what God does in the lives of all God's people."[102] Women are central to proclaiming and preaching, offering gender balance and unique experiences to enrich the image and self-understanding of those who seek to speak *for* God *to* the people, and *for* the people to God.

Seeing that her voice, along with the voices of those who are typically not considered preachers, has been ignored, silenced, or abandoned, Fry Brown seeks to expand the notion of who is a preacher. Harkening back to Higginbotham's work on respectability politics and Gilbert's comments on the state of academic discourse and respect, Fry Brown's understanding and imagining of the preacher was conceived in a similar environment—an academic context dominated by white male voices. Her work must also engage in the same respectability politics that existed before her for her to make a scholarly contribution to the field of homiletics. Du Bois' double consciousness motif continues, in unconscious ways, even manifesting in the architecture of academic discourse in preaching.

[102] Ibid.

Fry Brown also foregrounds preachers of the masses by pointing out that "for proclaimers, preaching does not occur solely in the pulpit, as traditional homiletics suggests. Because these women's voices function on the margins, where and how proclamation occurs varies widely. Women proclaim in schools, pulpits, churchyards, missionary societies, choir stands and over kitchen sinks."[103] The expansion of space for proclamation to non-pulpit settings is a breakthrough because it opens the exploration of themes beyond who is a preacher and what is preaching, *especially* in the Black community.

Fry Brown does not ignore her Blackness but makes her gender the focal point of self-understanding and theological interpretation. Her use of the concept of the gendered body demands a reappraisal of the proclamation task even in the Black Church. She represents a new vanguard of Black female preachers who defy the limits of traditional preaching molds. A religious leader can be anyone God chooses. Homiletic literature would profit greatly from the abundant supply of Black women preachers actively proclaiming. Fry Brown's contribution to the field of homiletics brings awareness to this gap. Fry Brown's understanding of preacher as proclaimer can help transform both the preacher's immediate social world *and* the field of scholarship that comprises it if those who have ears to hear are attentive.

Though Blackness is a reality for Fry Brown, she does not slavishly deal with race. Instead, she embraces gender as a place to understand oneself as a proclaimer. Her range of social transformation and poetic persuasion are not diminished but expanded because of her gendered perspective. Fry Brown can communicate relevantly to anyone due to her sensitivity concerning the mistreatment of women. This allows her to raise her voice in opposition to the mistreatment of all persons that occurs in religious systems of exploitation. She is also capable of

[103] Ibid., 16.

translating how that reality informs how we all should live. She indicates that lay preaching women and clergywomen moved their voices outside of the Church and into the culture, as should all preachers. These women inform how preachers in the pulpit proclaim and impact how homileticians write about preaching as proclamation.

Fry Brown's ideas about proclamation and the proclaimer are important concepts because they continue to emphasize the poetics and the justice motif ascribed to African American preaching. Her book takes the tradition of African American preaching seriously, and even the orality that is one of its historical signatures. Fry Brown describes how it is, through a weary throat that sings new songs, textured with experiences, intellect, and the Spirit can be housed in a gendered African American body. This combination of characteristics and personal agency extend the beauty, and not just racialized portrayal, of Blackness. What we can glean from Fry Brown is an admonishment for our neglect of Black women preachers. However, she also offers the hope that expanding our definitions of teachers, preachers, and proclaimers will draw us closer to a more authentic and inclusive understanding of the Black preacher.[104]

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[104] Teresa Fry Brown writes extensively about African American preaching in works such as "An African American Woman's Perspective: Renovating Sorrow's Kitchen," in *Preaching Justice: Ethnic and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Christine M. Smith (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1998) and *God Don't Like Ugly: African American Handing on Spiritual Values* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000). Though these works are significant, she is not the only contributor to the academic discourse concerning African American preaching. Recently, Lisa L. Thompson's recent work *Ingenuity: Preaching as the Outsider* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2018) also sources a wide array of African American women's experiences to provide a perspective on preaching that calls the masculine normativity of the preaching image into question. Thompson states, "images of the Black preacher have negative and positive characteristics based on skewed history, racist stereotypes, and the actions of preachers themselves. And, over time, the "images" have converged into one predominate "image" that is unequivocally Black and male." For a substantial overview on the contribution of African American women to the field of homiletics (all of whom are not self-disclosed Womanists), see Ella Pearson Mitchell, *Those Preaching Women*, 3 vols. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1985); Leontine T. C. Kelly, "Preaching in the Black Tradition," in *Women Ministers*, ed. Judith L. Weidman (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 67-76; Katie Geneva Cannon, *Teaching Preaching: Isaac Rufus Clark and Black Sacred Rhetoric* (New York: Continuum, 2007); Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons*, 1850-1979 (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1998); M. Elaine Collins Flake (author) and Kathryn V. Stanley (editor), *God in Her Midst: Preaching Healing to Wounded Women* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2007); and Donna E. Allen, *Towards a Womanist Homiletic: Katie Cannon, Alice Walker and Emancipatory Proclamation* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2013).

The Black Preacher and Black Preaching Beyond Talented Tenth Frameworks

Previous conceptualizations of the Black preacher, mainly defined by Du Bois and propagated by some of the most respected homileticians of our time, are limited and not imaginative enough to robustly include both women and all iterations of the Black preacher—namely, the preachers of the masses.

Some scholars are expanding the preaching imagination and the understanding of the preacher beyond Talented Tenth frameworks. In 2010, Martha J. Simmons and Frank A. Thomas edited *Preaching with Sacred Fire: African American sermons from 1750 to the Present*. This Norton-published anthology provides the history and practices of numerous African American preacher figures rooted in the African American folk preaching tradition. These include preachers such as Reverends Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, Sojourner Truth, J. M. Gates, Caesar Clark, C. L. Franklin, Minister Malcolm X, and others. Simmons and Thomas redraw the boundaries of the African American preaching tradition. Additionally, Simmons provides a robust article on the African American preaching art form known as whooping.[105] The limitation of this historical work is that it fails to present rap preaching or include the Hip-Hop MC.

Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching written by Frank Thomas begins to expand the footprint of African American preaching into the sphere of popular culture. As a mentee of Henry H. Mitchell, Thomas engages homiletics through the field of rhetoric and communication studies. Using the lens of rhetoric, Thomas engages the rhymes of JAY Z, the award-winning Hip-Hop MC, with the tools of rhetorical criticism. The emphasis on "the real" or the authentic space for conversation, dialogue and witness as offered by JAY Z becomes another way to deepen the practice of African American preaching. Thomas argues that future

[105] Martha J. Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, *Preaching with Sacred Fire*, 864-883.

"excellence in preaching will be much more heavily influenced by poetic form,"[106] meaning that Hip-Hop culture and other spaces beyond the traditional African American church tradition are fertile for the expansion of the dominant preaching imagination. Thomas falls short of offering a Hip-Hop homiletic method or naming the Hip-Hop Emcee (MC) as a preacher figure, but he does encourage further dialogue between Hip-Hop and Black preaching.

One of the most promising contributions to the field of homiletics concerning the future of preaching and the role of the preacher figure is *Blue Note Preaching in a Post-Soul World* by Otis Moss III. This work by Moss functions as a bridge, linking the past and future of African American homiletics as a direct product of Talented Tenth tradition shaped within the Baptist tradition. Moss provides a context for his preaching perspective, saying "My father and mother are children of the South and products of the rich religious heritage of the Black church. Dr. Otis Moss Jr., my father, mentor, and pastor is now pastor emeritus of the Olivet Institutional Baptist Church in Cleveland, Ohio, where he served for thirty-three years before his retirement in 2008."[107] Otis Moss Jr., as cited by Gilbert and LaRue, is a venerable name in the Baptist preaching cosmology and his approach to preaching is in the vein and substance of the King/Taylor school. Both father and son Moss attended Morehouse College where a dormitory bears Moss Jr.'s name. Moss III reflects upon the influence of his father's ministry by stating "If Gardner C. Taylor is the Dean of Black Preaching, then I proclaim my father the Provost of Prophetic Passion and Love."[108] Pointing beyond the influence of his father, Moss further states

[106] Frank A. Thomas, *Practice of African American Preaching*, 117.

[107] Otis Moss, III and Otis Moss, Jr., *Preach!: The Power and Purpose Behind Our Praise* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2012), 12.

[108] Ibid., 29.

"With all of this said, my approach to preaching is informed by Samuel DeWitt Proctor along with Paul Scott Wilson's method of finding trouble in the text."[109]

Otis Moss III expounds upon the conversation about the interface between Hip Hop culture and homiletics. Moss connects African American homiletics with Hip-Hop culture by calling attention to the contextual nature of Black preaching and grounding his contextual perspective in a socio-cultural period termed "post-soul" by cultural critic Nelson George.[110] The post-soul generation was born without a direct connection to the civil rights movement and the attitudes that defined it. The disconnect from those attitudes combined with dramatic shifts in American culture set the generations born and reared beyond the "soul" period of African American music and culture in a different imaginative course.

Moss begins to rethink the Talented Tenth preaching tradition by expanding who is a preacher and where preaching excellence is observable. Moss sees Hip-Hop culture as an extension of the Gospel, Blues, and Jazz traditions, all of which are deeply enmeshed in African American culture. Moss argues that "if you take the four pillars of Hip-Hop [DJing, graffiti, break dancing and rapping] you all of a sudden have a narrative and a framing for preaching. . . These are the pillars that give us a framework for how we are to engage liturgically and homiletically; the embodiment, the space, the appropriation, and the rhetorical proficiency of the person who is communicating. To communicate so that people understand."[111]

In connecting Hip-Hop culture to earlier African American musical and performative genres such as the Spirituals, the Blues, and Jazz, Moss emphasizes an ethic for preaching

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[109] Ibid., 27.

[110] Otis Moss, III, *Blue Note Preaching in a Post Soul World: Finding Hope in an Age of Despair* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 55–57.

[111] Ibid., 55–57.

grounded in the concept of the blue note. Blue note preaching is a proclamation that does not shy away from difficult theological and existential issues; instead, it stares into the opacity of issues and articulates hope. Moss expands the preaching tent by saying:

> I am certainly a proponent of studying homiletical scholars who come from the academy, but the greatest prophetic poets of this generation do not come from the academy. The writings of James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, Colson Whitehead, Edwidge Dandicat, Paul Beatty and Junior Diaz; the poetry of Sonia Sanchez; and the music of John Coltrane, the Dead Presidents, Mos Def, and Common speak to the contradictions of the human condition.[112]

Moss rightly notes the genius of poetic prophets beyond the Talented Tenth Baptist pulpit, his natural center of ideological gravity. However, even in his expansiveness, he reinforces a sense of respectability politics by appealing to certain poets. These are all artists of influence who gained at least moderate levels of popular culture recognition, including the Hip-Hop MCs Mos Def and the Dead Presidents (Dead Prez), to those of international acclaim like Baldwin, Morrison, and Dandicat. Moss' influences does expand the tent of who is a preacher, even including Hip-Hop MCs. Moss creates space for further discussion about preaching in what he terms a post-soul, 21st century Church. Moss, more than any other homiletician, envisions how Hip-Hop culture can inform homiletic practice through an expanded understanding of the digital and analog age, and more importantly, how to attract listeners in both groups.

Moss partially transcends the Talented Tenth influence in homiletics. He builds the Blue Note homiletic method around a jazz sensibility to attract the Hip Hop generation. In this respect, Moss is engaging, the critical trope of jazz first raised by Kirk Byron Jones in his book *The Jazz of Preaching*. Jones employs jazz both as a form of African American musical culture and as a way to reimagine the practice of preaching. For Jones, his central claim is that jazz culture is a

[112] Otis Moss, III and Otis Moss, Jr., *Preach!*, 26.

site for discovering new preaching methods and models. However, jazz, more than just a site for a homiletic refreshing, also functions as a critical signifier of racial respectability within African American culture. Widely accepted as an American art form, jazz transcends the racial designation accorded other musical styles created by Blacks. The international acceptance of jazz, marked by its commemoration and reinterpretation by white culture, like the Spirituals before it, is deemed respectable by white culture.[113]

Moss seems to access Hip-Hop culture and the Post-Soul socio-cultural context through a jazz sensibility. He appreciates its importance and realizes how even a cursory knowledge of Hip-Hop culture can help reimagine the entire enterprise of preaching. Moss' emphasis on a "Jazz Methodology" and "the Jazz motif" remains steeped in a Talented Tenth social and educational formation. However, this may be so in its most aspirational way. At its best, the Talented Tenth tradition operates as a bridge between the 'finer' aspects of white culture and the folk experiences of the Black masses. Moss creates a bridge by connecting the various cultural manifestations within the African American experience, including Hip-Hop culture. He challenges the folk/professional boundaries where preaching excellence is active while not abandoning his distinct lineage in the Talented Tenth preacher tradition of the Baptist church. Moss III brought Hip-Hop culture to the highest point in the academic preaching world, the Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale Divinity School, citing Hip-Hop culture as a necessary conversation partner for theological reflection. Where he provides room for more exploration is the possibility of not a "Jazz methodology" that engages the post-soul context but, the possibilities of a Hip-Hop methodology comprised of the images, significations, and narratives

[113] Kirk B. Jones, *The Jazz of Preaching: How to Preach with Great Freedom and Joy* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004).

more resonant to the culture itself. Such work could shape the contours of a Hip-Hop homiletic method, which would include a more expansive discussion of the MC as a preacher.

Henry H. Mitchell successfully built a homiletic method steeped in the Talented Tenth idea that was supported in African American colleges and universities after the Civil War, picking up intensity at the turn of the 20th century. Talented Tenth religious formation often eschewed aspects of African American folk culture. Expressions such as emotionalism, hand clapping, folk language, drums, African Traditional Religions, and other cultural and ethnic manifestations were discouraged. These expressions were believed by some to be a hindrance to the group assimilation of African Americans into the European American social imagination and were discouraged.

W. E. B. Du Bois was concerned about assimilation and social striving as well, thus influencing him to support the Talented Tenth idea for African Americans to utilize as a means of group uplift. The preaching of African American preachers would be important to his plan of uplift. The proclamation of the Word would be a site where respectability politics would manifest as the preacher embodied the tension between Black and white worlds.

The scholarship of Henry H. Mitchell suggests that he understood this tension well as he put forth a homiletic method that continues to influence the scholarship of preaching in a predominantly Baptist, male, and Talented Tenth direction. What happened to the other identities and manifestations of the Black preacher that the Talented Tenth preacher image left behind?

The preachers of the masses, though not part of the Talented Tenth, knew the religious culture of the poor was deserving of serious attention and nurture. They related to the poor, and often the preachers of the masses shared the socio-economic status of their parishioners. These preachers often worked secular jobs while pastoring churches. They offered life-sustaining

pastoral nurturing for folk still suffering from the impact of a Jane and Jim Crow world. The folk orality offered by the preachers of the masses helped "the Black poor [as they] waged a struggle over cultural authority that ultimately subverted the hegemonic values and aesthetic standards of the traditional Protestantism of the Black middle class."[114]

Then, in the late 1970s, the Hip-Hop MC, not birthed during the civil rights movement, nor by the Black church, arrived. This figure could produce poetic lines that startled some and delighted others. Now a fixture in culture, the Hip-Hop MC has come of age and as shall be shown in the next chapter, is ready to take its rightful place as a preacher of the masses.

Though white preacher images abound, African American scholarship in homiletics has promulgated only a few images of the African American preacher.[115] Du Bois employs a "Great Man" history to motivate racial uplift for African Americans. Mitchell, influenced by Du Bois, employs this approach for African American homiletics and makes the image of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gardner C. Taylor central. This limiting of the African American preaching tradition to types that are socially, morally, and culturally acceptable to the middle-class sensibilities of whites *and* Blacks creates space for the stories of some, but not all, preaching identities.

There is no doubt that Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gardner C. Taylor are great preachers worthy of rigorous study. However, with these men and similar men as exemplars, too many of the seminal works in African American homiletics have offered helpful, yet narrow images of

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[114] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "Rethinking Vernacular Culture: Black Religion and Race Records in the 1920s and 1930s," Wahneema Lubiano, ed. *The House that Race Built: Black Americans. U.S. Terrain*. New York: Random House, 1997, 159.

[115] *The Preacher's Portrait* by John R. W. Stott discusses the image of the preacher through theological language, obscuring or assuming the racial aspects of the identity. Likewise, *Slow of Speech and Unclean Lips: Contemporary Images of Preaching Identity* edited by Robert S. Reid also delves deep into the theological but does not address more significant differences that are implicit in a racialized society.

who is a preacher—primarily a straight, male or female, middle-class, formally educated, pastor of large a church or the leader of a movement.

Even as African American homiletics expands its images of who is a preacher, it will remain indebted to Du Bois, who more than one hundred years ago (1903) gave a robust description of the Negro preacher. As well, a deep expression of gratitude is owed to Dr. Henry H. Mitchell, who placed the Black preacher firmly in the homiletics literature. However, it is past time for an expansion of how the Black preacher is defined. Homiletics should open its ears to hear all the voices of this generation, male and female, including the preachers of the masses and the Hip-Hop MC. In Chapter 3, we next turn our attention to the preachers of the masses who, as will be shown, are precursors to the Hip-Hop MC preacher.

Chapter 3

Beyond the Talented Tenth: Ministers, Minstrels, and Preachers of the Masses as Homiletic Precursors to the Hip-Hop MC

The future of the African American folk preacher and the traditions that this figure represents were at stake in the broader aims of social uplift espoused by Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois. Influential African American educational institutions of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, such as Morehouse College, committed to a Talented Tenth ideology producing a class of professional ministers who would be considered the image of preaching excellence embodied in the person of Martin Luther King, Jr. Henry Mitchell's position as a pioneering African American homiletician would establish the trajectory of conversations about the nature and practice of preaching within the tradition and also influence the theorization of the African American preacher.

The heavily Baptist Talented Tenth cosmology of preachers that often populate books within African American homiletics and who are cited by white homileticians as examples of diversity would eventually lose sway to the Hip-Hop MC as the dominant image of the preacher figure in African American culture during the rise of the Post-Soul generation. I will fill in the gap, so to speak, in order to trace the folk preacher tradition of the masses of the Black Church after Reconstruction up to the civil rights era. These preachers of the masses exist on the periphery of Talented Tenth sensibilities. They all influence the modern preacher of the masses, the Hip Hop MC. This chapter explores the multifaceted manifestations of the African American preacher figure beyond Talented Tenth configurations.

Folk Preachers as Preachers of the Masses

W. E. B. Du Bois, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, said, "The Preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil."[1] This preacher became the preacher of the masses operating at the center of the lives of the folk, especially the poor and the unlettered, engaging in material and spiritual care and uplift. The preachers of the masses knew that the religious culture of the poor was deserving of serious attention and nurture. The folk orality offered by the early preachers of the masses in the United States helped "the Black poor waged a struggle over cultural authority that ultimately subverted the hegemonic values and aesthetic standards of the traditional Protestantism of the Black middle class"[2] as they sought to uplift Black folk.[3] The complicated and often contentious relationship between Talented Tenth sensibilities and indigenous cultural lifestyles became embodied in the preachers of the masses.

Evelyn Higginbotham notes in her article "Rethinking Vernacular Culture," that the "phenomenal rise in literacy among African Americans in the decades after the Civil war occurred with unsettling consequences for traditions of Black worship."[4] However, just as groups worked to silence the orality of the Black Church in favor of the written page, "it is no small irony, then, that the newly urbanized southern folk ushered in the 'age of the voice' at the height of the renaissance of the Black literati. . . .During the 1920s and 1930s, the Black working class

[1] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk (A Norton Critical Edition)*, 120.

[2] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "Rethinking Vernacular Culture: Black Religion and Race Records in the 1920s and 1930s," in *African American Religious Thought, An Anthology*, eds. Cornel West and Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 979.

[3] Ibid., 980.

[4] Ibid., 982.

affected the shift to an emotional folk orality that challenged the cultural authority of the Black middle class."[5]

Unlettered men and women continued to serve as priests, judges, healers, and bards. They lived in all areas of the country, but before 1930, mainly in the south. On this point, Higginbotham writes,

> At the most prosaic levels, the ascendant voice of southern folk culture challenged the bourgeois ideology of racial uplift as pronounced by educated religious leaders of the late nineteenth century. The latter group had defined racial progress not merely in the context of Black-white relations but also the context of a class-based contestation over group practices and beliefs.[6]

There was a clash between the "group practices and beliefs" of Black churches. The folk did not allow the push by the Talented Tenth of Black society to overtake their voices. By the 1930s, the issue of the lettered and unlettered Black preacher had already gained the attention of scholars. Paul Oliver, author of *Songsters and Saints: Vocal Traditions on Race Records* writes,

> In the late 1930s, when Savannah, Georgia had a Black population of 43,000, there were ninety Black churches, a hundred regular preachers, and as many more jack-legs. Jack-leg preachers were not popular with "high-status" Blacks, according to a poll made in Chicago by Drake and Clayton, (authors of *Black Metropolis*) who found that only three percent of their sample liked them, whereas nearly half of the store-front church members polled voted in their favor.[7]

E. Franklin Frazier also opined on the rift between middle-class and less financially able Black church people in his book, *The Negro Church in America/The Black Church Since Frazier*,

> Their [the Black middle class] ambiguous position in American society together with their recent rise to middle-class status is reflected in the religious behavior and attitudes of middle-class Negroes. There is first a tendency for middle-class Negroes to sever their

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[5] Ibid., 983.

[6] Ibid., 980.

[7] Paul Oliver. *Songsters and Saints, Vocal Traditions on Race Records* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 200-201.

> affiliation with the Baptist and Methodist churches and join the Presbyterian, Congregational and Episcopal churches. The middle-class Negroes who continue their affiliation with the Baptist and Methodist churches choose their churches with intelligent ministers and a relatively large middle-class membership.[8]

The rift between lettered and non-lettered Blacks has strong roots in the Black Church manifesting in who the preacher is and how the preacher preaches.

Good Folk Preaching

Good Black Preaching of the masses is rooted in the fact that proclamation is an embodied performance, an expression of fine art.[9] Preaching well generally entails: a) identifying with the audience and the context, which often generates popularity for the preacher, b) using vivid images and bold metaphors, c) being able to tell a story well, d) using humor, rhyme, alliteration, and e) sometimes whooping/tonality. These are all defining criteria for how to characterize good Black preaching of the masses and view skilled Black folk preachers. Many people, of all ilk (that is, not just Black folk), have appreciated and gained inspiration from folk preachers and folk preaching.

Folklorist Zora Neale Hurston describes African American folk preachers and preaching by saying:

> Our preachers are talented men even though many of them are barely literate. The masses do not read literature; do not visit theaters, nor museums of the fine arts. The preacher must satisfy their beauty-hunger himself. He must be a poet and an actor and possess a body and voice. . . . It is not admitted as such by our "classes." Only James Weldon Johnson and I give it praise. It is utterly scorned by the "Niggerati." But the truth is, the greatest poets

[8] See E. Franklin Frazier's "The Negro Church and Assimilation" in *African American Religious Thought*: *An Anthology*, eds. Cornel West and Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 71.

[9] Scottie Aaron, *The Power of the Preacher's Voice: The Potency of Black Preaching and Leadership in America* (Scotts Valley, CreateSpace, 2015).

> among us are in our pulpits, and the greatest poetry has come from them. It is merely not set down. It passes from mouth to mouth as in the days of Homer.[10]

Hurston knew there was a division between the folk and the Talented Tenth class, whom Hurston here eschews as snubs by using the term "Niggerati." Hurston's pejorative is a portmanteau of the words Nigger and literati and was used by Hurston and other Black artists and intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance. By using "Niggerati," they were showing contempt for those with Talented Tenth sensibilities who demeaned the folkways of the Black masses.[11]

Indeed, Larry Neale states in his profile on Hurston that she considered the folk preacher as Afro-America's "only true poet," an authoritative and forceful wielder of words.[12] Hurston included in one of her texts, *The Sanctified Church,* a sermon titled *The Wounds of Jesus* by Rev. C.C. Lovelace. Hurston's purpose for publishing Lovelace's sermon may be that she wanted to exemplify the genius of the folk tradition, in its idiom, in its folk vernacular. The preachers of the Talented Tenth would have shunned Lovelace's approach to preaching. His sermon was not a written manuscript; therefore, it was recorded and transcribed by Hurston. The following is a section of the homily she published:

> I'll put him in de garden
> And Jesus said, ha!
> And if he sin,
> I'll go his bond before yo' mighty throne
> Ah, He was yo' friend
> He made us all, ha!
> Delegates to de judgment convention
> Ah!

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[10] William Jelani Cobb, *To the Break of Dawn: A Freestyle on the Hip-Hop Aesthetic* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 15.

[11] Kathleen Pfeffer, "Niggerati" in *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance*, eds. Cary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman (Oxfordshire, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2004), 906–907. *Also see* Tina Barr, "'Queen of the Niggerati' and the Nile: The Isis-Osiris Myth in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 25, no. 3–4 (2012): 101–113.

[12] Larry Neale, "A Profile: Zora Neale Hurston," *Southern Exposure* 1 (1974): 160-168.

Faith hasn't got no eyes, but she's long-legged
But take de spy-glass of Faith
And look into dat upper room
When you are alone to yourself
When yo' heart is burnt with fire, ha!
When de blood is lopin thru yo' veins
Make man, ha!
If he sin, I will redeem him
I'll break the chasm of hell
Where de fire's never quenched
I'll go into de grave
Where de worm never dies, Ah!

So, God A'mighty, ha!
Got his stuff together
He dipped some water out of de mighty deep
He got Him a handful of dirt, ha!
From de foundation sills of de earth.
He seized a thimble full of breath, ha!
From de drums of de wind, ha!
God my master!

Now I'm ready to make man
Aa-aah!
Who shall I make him after? Ha!
World within worlds begin to wheel and roll.[13]

Hurston's selection of Lovelace as an example of folk preaching excellence privileges a different type of theological formation and articulation than Talented Tenth approaches. This is, in part, evidenced in the emotion and embodied rhythm of the preacher. The concise and theologically dense images and phrases Lovelace employs facilitated a kinetic faith, theology that moves the body—the individual and congregational body, respectively. The folk needed an accessible faith that was vivid, clear, and palpable to the imagination—one that moves people and changes situations. Lovelace's sermon is a distinctly different expression of faith than the type of sermons Carter G. Woodson cited coming from educated clergy in *The Miseducation of the Negro*.

[13] C.C. Lovelace, "The Wounds of Jesus" in *The Sanctified Church: The Folklore Writings Zora Neale Hurston* (Berkley: Turtle Island Publishing, 1981), 95-102.

Lovelace embodied preaching in such manner that Talented Tenth comportment was, at best, a minor concern. He was preaching to a particular congregation at a unique point in time, realities that were to never occur in just such configuration ever again. Hurston's recording of Lovelace's words saved them from permanent erasure. Lovelace was not necessarily preaching for the acceptance of whites but to the concrete and immediate stuff of the non-Talented Tenth of Black life.

Hurston, whose work was embroiled in a politics of racial respectability, as alluded to by Gilbert, helps to establish Lovelace and the cadre of unlettered bards among the heights of European artistry and intellectual virtuosity. She places African American folk preaching in conversation with the poetic accomplishments of the Greek bard and poet Homer, whose legend purports his authorship of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These works are foundational for European and European American literary education; therefore, Hurston, in a bold assertion, equates the best of African American folk preaching as part of the best of poetry and music, period. Homer is revisited and valued as part of a larger poetic tradition, and Hurston argues through implication that the folk preacher, the same figure that Du Bois and Washington both reviled, is worthy of study and is essential for understanding African American culture.

African American author and social critic James Baldwin also finds value in the folk preacher. Baldwin recognized that the genius of the folk preacher was rooted in the preacher's relationship to the immediate context, the preacher's embodiment of a shared militant social imagination, and the preacher's deep connection to the folk. The relative autonomy of the institution the Black Church formed a context for increased freedom in practice and embodiment combined with an opportunity for spiritual and social truth, which later writers would rightly

note in a civil rights, Talented Tenth homiletic. Baldwin notes lively qualities in the African American folk preacher when he says:

> The Black preacher, since the church was the only civilized institution we were permitted – separately – to enter, was our first warrior, terrorist or guerrilla. He said that freedom was real – that we were real. He told us that trouble don't last always. He told us that our children and elders were sacred when the Civilized were spitting on them and hacking them to pieces, in the name of God and in order to keep making money.[14]

Before the formation of the Talented Tenth class, African American folk preaching expressed oral genius with a message of uplift within the confines of its heavily-oppressed socio-cultural context. The preaching of the folk preacher, as described by Baldwin, threatened the project of integration and moderate social protest established by the Talented Tenth and instead became a space where the more militant characteristics of the community could manifest. The Black preacher as "warrior, terrorist or guerrilla" would certainly draw the ire of a more Talented Tenth-minded congregation, focused on integration, assimilation, and the theological cultivation of middle-class values. The process of professionalization and education of a Talented Tenth class of clergy was to certainly refine those "terrorist or guerilla" impulses into a more moderate identity of the preacher figure. If education were not a sufficient mechanism of assimilation, the Talented Tenth would combat ideals it deemed rooted in ethnic or racial tribalism and leaders who preached0 a sectarian gospel that would put Blacks at odds with whites.

[14] William Jelani Cobb, *To the Break of Dawn*, 14.

The Politics of Respectability in Emotion and Celebration: Ministers, Minstrels, and the Art of Whooping

A result of a racial respectability politics embodied within the preacher figure is identity fragmentation held especially around concepts of emotion manifesting in different conceptions of celebration, by African American homileticians. The bard domain "crudely" expresses views, images, and ideas alternate to the social and political conventions of the Talented Tenth and excluded from the definition of "fine art" promoted by Talented Tenth communities and congregations. The politics of racial respectability inherent in Talented Tenth thought influences the compartmentalization and fragmentation of the vast domains of the priest, the judge, the physician and the bard within the Du Boisian figure. The gaze of white society would operate in defining the bard domain as crude when compared to the Talented Tenth preacher.

The Talented Tenth preacher operating in the role of social manager, has the responsibility to maintain, monitor, and control emotion within himself or herself, congregation, and community. Emotion and emotionalism became intensely negative signifiers within the Talented Tenth mindset reflecting in theory and practice inclinations towards white middle-class social sensibilities. The contrary signification around the idea of emotion and stereotypes of emotionalism meant that Talented Tenth preachers were to avoid or restrain emotion in sermons that would diminish its social standing as they are to model uplift in every sense: educational, theological, social, and political, which implied, at least, a conflicted relationship with emotion and the stereotype of emotionalism or innate religiosity.

Historian Curtis J. Evans, in his work *The Burden of Black Religion*, helps explore the ways emotion impacts the Talented Tenth mind regarding the crudeness of the bard domain proposed by Du Bois. The intellectual underpinning of Evans's work is rooted in questioning

why "Black sociologists of the 1940s were so eager to prove that Blacks were not 'innately religious.'"[15] As noted in chapter 1, Willie Jennings names the belief of innate religiosity is an outworking of the diseased racial imagination. The white racial imagination distorted the identity of Blacks by arguing that Blacks are inherently religious. Evans states, "Claims of innate religiosity were also a reminder of race-based assessment of Black prospects in the nation, and they lingered as barriers to Black assimilation because they signified permanent racial differences."[16] Hinderances to Black assimilation, like claims of being inherently predisposition to emotion, would influence Talented Tenth thought to form preachers in ways that would mostly curb the embodied emotion found in the more bard-like preachers of the masses.

Highlighting the way that emotion and racial respectability politics intertwine, Evans discusses the 1893 graduation address titled "A New Ethnic Contribution to Christianity" by Henry Hugh Proctor, one of twelve Black students at Yale Divinity School at the time. Yale Divinity School played a prominent role in the shaping of African American thought in the realm of religion. Yale was an intellectually fertile, though socially hostile, environment for Talented Tenth thought like Proctor's. His argument, highlighted by Evans, is that:

> [E]ach race brought to Christianity its particular contribution. Drawing on racial theory dominant in his da . . .. The Saxons brought energy, vigor, enterprise, and thrift. Yet with all of these elements of native genius offered to the faith, Christianity was still not complete. The Africans would bring humility, fidelity, patience, love and a large-heartedness to Christianity. These qualities would signal the distinct contribution of Africans. The Saxons and the Africans, as "complementary opposites," could carry Christianity to its fullness.[17]

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[15] Curtis J. Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion*, viii.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., 3.

The underlying assumption of race in Proctor's thought is that different races of people provided various racial gifts for the fulfillment of society. Seeking to provide a positive and mutually edifying identity with whites, Proctor describes Blacks as embodying primarily feminine characteristics to the more masculine framing of whiteness, and he defines Blackness in a manner consistent with Talented Tenth aims of societal integration. Theorizing that Africans offer a distinct and necessary racial gift to help the fulfillment of Christianity's purpose was not an abstract concept. His thesis would prove useful, as he would graduate from Yale and pastor First Congregational Church of Atlanta from 1894 to 1920.[18] Proctor led "one of the first "institutional churches of the South, which were churches that took on a variety of functions in the urban center."[19] It would be in Atlanta where Proctor would lead one of the most prominent churches, the same city and during the time of the rise of Washington in 1895 and subsequently Du Bois in 1915. Proctor became one of the first embodiments of the Talented Tenth preacher in Atlanta.

Consistent with Du Bois, Proctor's educational and cultural formation would expose him to a world of thought shared with often educated, liberal whites from the Northeast, who would be considered romantic racialists. Evans states:

> Romantic racialists were those of the belief that the conception of Black religion involved claims about the innate religious nature of Blacks, what Proctor and others called the Negro's genius for religion. Assertions that Blacks were naturally or innately religious changed in relation to Black's social, political, and economic situation. Being naturally religious was not a static concept, but the social and cultural meaning was profoundly affected by broader changes in discussions about Black capacities and their place in the nation. Innate religiosity, for example, could mean "feeling" or emotion that was said to be unique to Blacks and a compliment to "rational" faith for whites, as in the case of [Harriet Beecher] Stowe and her white racialist contemporaries.[20]

[18] Ibid., 4.

[19] Ibid.

Romantic racialists sought to affirm the humanity of African Americans without conceding that African Americans are the intellectual equal of European Americans. African American religion became the freight car that carried the hopes of acceptability and progress for the culture. It is important to note that African American religion is not defined on its terms but interpreted through a Eurocentric gaze. Hence, the concept of religion, in the words of Evans' title, bears the burden of racial respectability

Evans is helpful in highlighting how the professionalization of the academic study of Negro religion would bring increased scrutiny concerning its relevance and function. Though not stated, Evans points towards the burden of Black religion ultimately resting upon the Black preacher figure. Religion would become the preeminent whites interpreted Black folklife and the Talented Tenth Blacks in the social sciences in the early 20th century. The preacher figure, as identified by Du Bois, is central to the institution and social domain considered the Black Church. The image of the Black preacher would ultimately bear any burden that Black religion would bear. Hence, the Talented Tenth sought to influence academic conversations with white scholars and critically assess Black religion. Black religion or the Black Church tradition for many of the early Black sociologists was a concept primarily based upon mainline African American denominations and not a more expansive conception of urban folk traditions, including what Arthur Faucet calls in the title of his book, *Black Gods of the Metropolis*.[21]

The Black religion resembled in custom Eurocentric forms of religious practice. The more conventional and valuable it becomes as a model of integration. "Religion, then, as a natural gift

[20] Ibid.

[21] Arthur Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1971).

or a characteristic of Blacks, was celebrated, in part, because its promoters firmly believed that Blacks did not equally possess the intellectual capabilities of Anglo-Saxons."[22] This artificial bifurcation of the emotional and the rational, the innate and the intellectual, would haunt future understandings of African American religiosity, including the folk preacher.

From a Talented Tenth perspective, barriers to Black assimilation would be antagonistic to their aims. This line of reasoning would manifest itself theologically, influencing how the Talented Tenth minister would be formed, thus defining who is not in the Talented Tenth, the remaining ninety percent, the majority outsider. The chanted or whooped sermon was the embodiment of the ignorance that many educated African American ministers feared and emotion that European Americans, to varying degrees, recognized in African American religiosity. The Talented Tenth did not always embrace the whooped sermon and the preachers who employed this practice. This practice or this minister is either this or that, minister or minstrel. The burden of Black religion, the sociological weight of double consciousness, was placed upon the folk preacher and the practice of displaying 'excessive' emotion in the sermon. The musicality in the chanted sermon became a stereotype hallmark of unlettered folk preachers and their descendants.

At the core of a vibrant, resilient, and even militant faith is folk preaching connected to the bard domain. The domains of the priest, the physician, and the judge have received more emphasis, due in part to the fact that these domains have become professionalized, conforming to European and European Amerian standards for proficiency and respectability. It is the bard, the molder and shaper of rhythm and language, who often utilized the idioms and images more resonant with the masses with whom they communicate. The freedom of emotional, rhythmic

[22] Ibid., 6.

vocality rooted in experience among the masses of African Americans is a profound source for cultural expression, social reflection, and theological hope.

Indeed, this would be manifest in the sermons of the preachers. The sermons were to be militant to the dominant logic of Black inferiority or even outright reject other interpretations of faith that make peace with such dehumanization. Baldwin's interpretation of the folk preaching is that it takes seriously the broken edge of society articulated impingement from the embodied realities of oppressed African Americans. African American folk preaching sought to address personal and communal pains and attended to those feelings and traumas in real time. Preaching by the preachers of the masses reoriented enslaved folk and those who lived through the deconstruction that followed Reconstruction (1865-1877) and endured the Jim Crow era.

William Jelani Cobb in *To the Break of Dawn* writes, "Recognize that the African, stolen and shackled, scorned and rejected, was dropped into a textual culture from an oral tradition where articulation was paramount. . .. Not only were their indigenous languages derided and outlawed, but the very nature of *creole* English they spoke operated as a mark of inferiority. And it is unspeakably difficult to be a poet in a language that is hostile to one's existence."[23] For Cobb, language operates as a contested space where African Americans were non-natives. The English language in America was a weapon utilized by whites to perpetuate and systematize African American political oppression, social segregation, and religious malformation. This healing from the fracturing of their language was made manifest in a linguistic re-appropriation and amalgamation by folk preachers. Cobb further opines:

> The African, enslaved in a land of strange deeds and customs and shackled into a new language, made speech into a metaphor for identity. If English vocabulary was mandatory, its grammatical roots were to remain West African, and the lexicon spiced up with unforgotten words from home. The evolution of that *creole* may chart the evolving new

[23] Jelani Cobb, *To the Break of Dawn*, Ibid., 15.

> world identity, but the issue at hand is how that Ebonic fusion operated. The well-spoken word, in ways both subtle and vast, undermined the decree that the African was to possess nothing and thus preceded physical freedom.[24]

Enslaved individuals were faced with a muting of their African languages but combated this dehumanizing reality by using pieces of their African tongue merged with the American language in ways that were liberating. The African American preacher of the masses, during and after slavery, utilized the white Christian biblical language intended for his oppression and replaced it with life-affirming theology to help enslaved people remember. Also, more importantly, to come together and heal. African American folk preachers gave the creolization of language by enslaved people public articulation. These hybrid language practices informed and reshaped the public and personal narratives of the enslaved, and later, of Blacks continuing the fight for social freedom in America. The burden of Black religion cited by Evans rests upon the African American preacher. The legacy of romantic racialist thought evident in the Talented Tenth idea more acutely placed the burden of Black religion on the emotional-style of preaching embodied by certain folk preachers. It is called whooping. Homileticians often describe it as part of, or part and parcel of, the act of celebration.

Ministers or Minstrels? The Respectability Politics of Whooping and Celebration

In 2010, Columnist John Blake wrote a provocative article for CNN.com titled "Black Preachers who 'Whoop' – Ministers or Minstrels?" The article sought to be a cursory explanation of the religious practice of "whooping."[25] The article highlighted the oft-discussed issue within

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[24] Ibid., 16.

[25] John Blake, "Black Preachers who 'Whoop' – Ministers or Minstrels?" Cable News Network, http://www.cnn.com/2010/LIVING/10/20/whooping/index.html.

African American preaching concerning the legitimacy of whooping. Is it needed? Is it antiquated? Blake's questions harken back to the observations made by Black sociologists of Du Bois' time, and, in years immediately after who noted that the emotional sermon and the folk preacher were fading away as more African Americans became integrated into American society. Du Bois surmised that the more educated African Americans would adopt assimilationist ways resulting in a more subdued, emotionally constrained form of worship. The hope, for Du Bois and others of his camp, was that religion would make African Americans more fit for assimilation and social uplift. There will be more on this later.

Blake visited The Greater Travelers Rest Baptist Church in Decatur, Georgia also, known as the House of Hope Atlanta. It is an African American, a multigenerational congregation that, at the time of the article, claimed over 8,000 members. At the time of the article in 2010, The Greater Travelers Rest (GTR) was one of the fastest growing churches in the country, averaging one thousand new members joining every year for the previous five years. The pastor, Rev. Dr. E. Dewey Smith, Jr., was in his mid-forties. His youthful energy attracted the under-40 demographic, while his sermonic approach – displaying hybridity of elements such as "old-time" hymnology, seminary training, and whooping—attracted the over-40 crowd. These characteristics may have intrigued Blake. The minstrel who is the bard of the pulpit and the minister whose identity is more professional and respectable. Maybe Blake wanted to interview Smith because he saw him as someone who bridged these stereotypes and could provide articulation for the religious practice of whooping in ways that the CNN audience could understand.

Blake offers a binary understanding for the preacher who whoops in the title of the article "Black Preachers who 'Whoop' – Ministers or Minstrels?" The preacher is either a minister or a minstrel. A minstrel is akin to a bard, a singer of songs, a person skilled in rhyme and rhythm. The

title suggests that the bard tradition is in opposition to the identity of the preacher, namely the Talented Tenth image, seemingly reifying traditional Eurocentric models of preaching as normative and anything outside of that as aberrant and in need of reformation.

In an interview about the practice of whooping, Pastor Smith said, "I hope that people understand the beauty and culture in whooping and don't see it as coonery."[26] His last statement is important to note. By evoking the term "coon," Smith realized that this practice remains loaded with respectability politics. Many of whooping's detractors see it as a racial pejorative, one that hinders the practice of preaching. It is possible that his education at Morehouse College, combined with his roots in the folk preaching traditions of middle Georgia,[27] made Smith conscientious about the racial respectability politics of whooping.

What is Whooping?

Martha Simmons states that "African Americans have produced a unique form of preaching whose signature is tonality. Referred to as whooping (sometimes misspelled as hooping, which is a sports term), it has other names including squalling, pulling it, intoning, humming, and zooming."[28] Simmons provides specificity to the broader assumptions about whooping. First, not all African American preachers pre-1970 were folk preachers. Preachers such as Bishop Daniel Payne vehemently opposed whooping and other "folk" practices as they were not becoming of what African Americans should be doing. Simmons states, "Unfortunately, when those who are spectators of whooping discuss it, whether they are African American or not, they sometimes

[26] E. Dewey Smith (Pastor of the Greater Travelers Rest Baptist Church), interviewed by author, Decatur, GA, April 8, 2012.

[27] House of Hope Atlanta, "Our Pastor," https://www.houseofhopeatl.org/our-pastor.

[28] Martha J. Simmons, "Whooping and Musicality," in Martha Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, *Preaching with Sacred Fire*, 865.

reduce it to just a debased art form or a style of preaching done by ignorant folk. Not all folk preachers are whoopers, and certainly not all African American preachers are whoopers…"[29] Whooping is a tonal property typically ascribed to African American preachers, but what is whooping?

In order to define what it is, it is crucial to assess the components of it. Melody is an essential component of whooping. Musicologist Jon Michael Spencer states "[t]hat which is variously referred to as whooping, intoning, chanting, moaning, and tuning, is essentially melody. This particular style of melody is a definable as a series of cohesive pitches which have continuity, tonality, quasi-metrical phraseology, and formulary cadence. The use of melody in sermons and prayers is a tradition of long standing among Black preachers in this country."[30] The melodic nature of chanted sermons is grounded in the fertile soul of melody.

Spencer reflects upon the essential role of rhythm in preaching stating "rhythm is the element that gives Black preaching locomotion and momentum. Without it, preaching would not only be static, but it would also hardly have an audience. Those who have studied Black homiletics concur that rhythm is its fundamental component."[31] Rhythm is essential to the whooped or chanted sermon. It provides a lively canvas in order for the preacher to articulate his/her sermon. Rhythm paces the sermon and provides a sense of expectancy because it intimates that the rhythm will climax at a high point. A noted aspect of rhythm is how a sermon concludes. Rhythm is essential to a whoop/chanted sermon's conclusion. Spencer further states, "Just as a composer climactically concludes a symphony with a fast, rhythmical movement, so do Black preachers

[29] Ibid., 864.

[30] Jon M. Spencer, *Sacred Symphony: The Chanted Sermon of the Black Preacher* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 1.

[31] Ibid., 3.

apply this technique in order to evoke the most enthusiastic involvement of their audience in the preaching event."[32] Melody is essential to whooping because it drives and helps to conclude the sermon.

Pastor Smith said, "Whooping is like jazz. It is an improvisation moment between the preacher and the audience. The preacher knows what he/she desires to say but is not restricted to the manuscript of the sermon but is willing and able to improvise in between the written sermon and the spontaneity of the congregation."[33] Smith's quote highlights another function of whooping, the necessity of call and response. During call and response, "worshipers engage in more than simply acknowledging the preached word with 'amen' or like responses, they preach back. Hence there is reciprocal instruction, through which preacher and congregation commune in the spontaneous creation of spirituals."[34] The worshiping body is intimately engaged in the chanted sermon because the preacher solicits and encourages feedback. Though non-whooping preachers may engage in call and response, for whooping preachers, call and response is not a luxury but a necessity in order to be effective.

Pastor Smith cites jazz as a cultural influence in terms of understanding the importance of improvisation. For Smith, jazz provides a metaphor that allows him to capture the structure of a sermon and also to negotiate the audience's desire to engage that sermon at times or in ways that are not planned by the preacher. Spenser suggests four ways in which preaching is similar to the jazz tradition.

> Initially, the musical theme in jazz is like the textual theme in a sermon: both are merely motifs requiring further improvisatory development. Second, both jazz and homiletical compositions tend to have a skeletal form inside which intermediary form exists by

[32] Ibid., 4.

[33] E. Dewey Smith, Interview

[34] Spencer, *Sacred Symphony*, 15.

> improvisational means. Third, just as enthusiastic applause from an audience can impel a jazz artist to return to the stage for an encore, so can exuberant "shouting" amid a congregation inspire a minister to stand back up and whoop a little while longer…Last, the art of preaching, like the art of jazz soloing, is characterized by improvisatory inflection. Vocal inflection typically used by Black preachers and jazz soloists include the bending and lowering (blue notes) of pitches, sliding from tone to tone (glissando), grace notes, fall-offs, and tremolo.[35]

Spenser's coupling of whooping with a newer African American cultural medium, jazz, allows the vivacity of whooping to be appreciated by those who may not have a direct connection to the practice. Jazz musicians and whooping preachers improvise with the gathered body in order to create new experiences with constructed verse.

As stated before, not all African Americans whoop, and some non-whites do whoop. Albert Raboteau, a noted historian, situates the chanted sermon as a central expression of African American religion and culture. He states, "Nevertheless, the chanted sermon is as much a staple of African American culture as spirituals, gospel, blues, and tales. Like these other forms of oral literature, the sermon has served as source information, advice, wisdom, and, not least, sheer enjoyment for generations of Black Americans."[36] Whooping functions as a cultural marker because it is inextricably bound to the folk roots of African Americans. Whooping also offers a reshaping of American protestant preaching. In the preacher and the preaching, African American show cultural hybridity and mutual influence. Martha Simmons states, "Whooping provides perhaps one of the clearest examples of the convergence of West African and Euro-American cultural streams.[37]

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[35] Ibid., 16.

[36] Albert J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 142.

[37] Martha J. Simmons, "Whooping and Musicality," in Martha J. Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, *Preaching with Sacred Fire*, 869.

Protestantism spread to a large number of African Americans during the Great Awakening. Before this movement, most African Americans were not Christian, and Christian missionaries struggled to gain significant traction in slave conversion. The Great Awakening was an explosive Protestant movement that manifested in revivals that encouraged more expressive and demonstrative forms of worship and preaching as it was also a precursor to the abolitionist movement during the Second Great Awakening. "When the full tide of the Great Awakening swept over the colonies, beginning in 1740, Blacks were among those lifted to new heights of religious excitement."[38] Africans, who reimagined and retained native religious practices as a way of reconciling their broken relationship with their homeland and their native religions, found space in this new movement to experience faith in new ways.

> Stressing the conversion experience instead of the process of religious instruction made Christianity more accessible to illiterate slaves and slaveholders alike. Evangelicals grew concerned as Anglicans about observing the rules of Christian conduct after conversion, but it was the experience of conviction, repentance, and regeneration which occupied the attention of the former….The enthusiasm of the camp meeting, as excessive as it seemed to some churchmen, was triggered by the personal emotional appeal of the preacher and supported by the standard response of members of his congregation….The plain doctrine and heavy emotion of revivalist sermons appealed as much to the Black slave as the white farmer.[39]

The experiential focus of the Great Awakening provided an opportunity for many African Americans to engage Christian worship as a space for communal catharsis. The emotional vigor that was experienced by Blacks and whites in the same worship space began to agitate the creative genius of African Americans evident in the emerging of African American preaching. Raboteau says,

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[38] Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 128.

[39] Ibid., 132-133.

> The Baptists and Methodists did not insist on a well-educated clergy. A converted heart and a gifted tongue were more important than the amount of theological training received. If a converted slave showed a talent for exhorting, he exhorted, and not only to Black audiences. The tendency of evangelical religion to level the souls of all men before God became manifest when awakened Blacks preached to unconverted whites.[40]

The egalitarian ethos of this religious movement was essential to carving out space for reshaping the practices of the Christian faith for the healing of African Americans. The broadening of Christianity to more original styles of African expression was a significant factor in Christianity's burgeoning appeal.

Beyond the Great Awakening as a movement, one of its major figures helped to further the whooping, or intoned, preaching style, George Whitfield. Whitfield was a highly sought preacher. During a forty-five-day period in 1740, Whitfield delivered more than 175 sermons to thousands of people, in addition to frequently exhorting in private.[41] Many suggest that a large part of Whitfield's success was his extemporaneous speaking style, which afforded him the freedom to dramatize his sermons. African Americans resonated with Whitfield's delivery and content. Simmons explains:

> Whitfield's vivid portrayals correspond to the African heritage of delivering vivid imagery (storytelling), but his sonorous delivery, perhaps adopted to reach thousands without technical help, also appealed irresistibly to those with tonal language roots. Black preachers heard that Whitfield preached without notes. They realized they had the cultural tools to preach as rousingly as Whitfield. Whitfield's success created space for Blacks to use their unique form of tonality now that whites had a form of preaching akin to it. Whitfield's preaching without notes also appealed to the enslaved because it was typically against the law for them to read and write. Since writing was not necessary, enslaved preachers were free to speak from memory and through metaphor and story in cinematic color with fiery tones that were so unforgettable to their audience.[42]

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[40] Ibid., 133-134.

[41] Henry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 190 - 92

Whitfield's success and influence spread a pneumatology that suggested that written sermons were deficient and evidence of spiritual decline. Further Whitfield's tonality and dramatization inspired African and European American preaching, but there is lasting residue among African American protestant congregations and ministers. Whitfield was unafraid to sensationalize and dramatize his sermons to evoke a decision, action, or feeling. African American preachers sought to utilize the fullness of their gifts to convey their faith in order for the congregation to worship God and, if for a moment, to escape their existential oppression. Although Whitfield was not a whooping preacher, he embodied some of the elements of the practice, which gave cultural and religious validity to a more demonstrative form of preaching, emphasizing tonality and dramatization.

Whooping has a complex, hybrid history that incorporates distinct cultural aspects of African American culture but, also, points back to Euro-American influences that aided in its legitimization and diffusion from isolated pockets of the population to a national cultural phenomenon. The next section of this paper will briefly discuss some of the benefits and offerings of whooping and focus on addressing its criticisms that have endured.

The notion of empowerment is essential in the African American preaching tradition. The whooped or chanted sermon is a device that provided the avenue for emancipation, even if existing external factors bracket that emancipation. Dwight Andrews suggests, "African American music is a means of self-empowerment."[43] This self-empowerment manifested in the confluent notions of African tradition that believe that,

> By maintaining that the roots of Black music lie not only in the adaption and synthesis of various African musical practices but also in the African conceptualization of music as power. Music served as a means of communication with the gods; it could not only alter

[42] Martha J. Simmons, "Whooping and Musicality," in Martha J. Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, *Preaching with Sacred Fire*, 871.

[43] Dwight D. Andrews, "From Blacks to Blues," *Black Sacred Music Journal* 6, no. 1 (1992), 51.

> the understanding of an existential experience but also to dramatically change the quality of the experience itself. Thus, to participate in the creation of music is to have both divine access and power.[44]

The musicality of African American culture is not merely for a soothing aesthetic, but it is a means of communing with a power beyond the temporal constraints and also affirms the enslaved person's agency to create, despite the circumstances.

The chanting or whooping preacher also participates in a self-empowerment narrative by embodying musicality in the sermon. Andrews notes that the often-overlooked dimension of self-empowerment is one of the most, if not the most significant of all the probable African retentions such as African-American music. The Black preacher does not merely speak when he preaches; he often "sings" his sermon as well. Within this tradition, the sung word is radically more powerful than the spoken word. Fela Sowande notes: "By far the most important single factor in African music is the full recognition, practical, endorsement, and use of the metaphysical powers of sound."[45] The African-American has retained, albeit with some adaption, the notion of the spiritual powers of sound (music). This idea of self-empowerment is all the more profound when we consider that it evolved during an American slave system designed to render the slave powerless, disenfranchised, and without hope.[46] Highlighting the power of the sung word, Andrews places particular emphasis on how empowerment is a product of divine connection which is mediated by the whooping or chanting preacher. When discussions concerning the validity of the practice of whooping occur, the concept of empowerment suffers neglect. A more obvious benefit is the

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[44] Ibid., 51.

[45] Fela Sowande, *The Role of Music in African Society* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1969), 27.

[46] Dwight D. Andrews, "From Blacks to Blues," 52.

whooped or chanted sermon provides a cultural compass through which many African Americans connect to their roots.

When asked about whooping, Pastor Smith said, "It's in the DNA of our people. When people were beaten and bruised, the slave preacher, with the intonation of the voice, was able to lift the spirits of the people."[47] Smith mentions the effect of the preacher, but his primary association with the practice is cultural and racial. Musicality, as understood by Smith, is inherent to the African American cultural enterprise. The tonality in the whoop was an audible reminder of life and culture beyond enslavement. The intonation of words became a connection to God, but, just as important, it was a connection to the place where they originated. Simmons says,

> This tonal affirmation of their identity same to be interpreted as a distinct moment of encounter with the Spirit of God during the preaching moment, which gave whooping not only the appeal of nostalgia but also the soul-stirring role of being a bridge to communing with the all-powerful God in a familiar way. To the powerless person in chains, this was an invaluable affirmation of group and individual identity. How nourishing to the soul and psyche of slaves to have a tie to Africa binding them that slavery could not destroy.[48]

Whooping is a place of cultural memory and self–empowerment. The title of John Blake's article points to a pejorative perspective on whooping by making a sharp dichotomy between the act and function of ministry or entertainment. The burden that Evans argues is upon Black religion naturally found itself also upon the folk preacher and subsequently upon the chanted sermon. The expression of emotion, music, and rhythm that expresses the idiom and imagination of the masses exist within a layered racial stigma. The racial burden would compound as it fell upon the person of the preacher, the practice of whooping, and the emotion that it evokes in the people. The sung

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[47] John Blake, "Black Preachers Who Whoop – Ministers or Minstrels," http://www.cnn.com/2010/LIVING/10/20/whooping/index.html

[48] Martha J. Simmons, "Whooping and Musicality," in Martha J. Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, *Preaching with Sacred Fire*, 880.

word was exciting, powerful, and socially disturbing. The preacher who bore witness with the rhythm, melody, and images is a socio-cultural retention — a persona in the African American community that remains in tension with Talented Tenth ideals.

As previously stated, whooping is not merely an African American phenomenon but has mixed cultural lineage. It is assigned particular cultural significance for African Americans as a way psychologically to self-regulate certain impulses and imaginations, which manifest in behavior. Whooping, the rhythm and the word working in unison, often, but not always accompanied by an organ, is a precursor of rap music. The folk preacher and this folk practice were targets of Talented Tenth criticisms because of their potential for hindering racial assimilation by essentially proving the hyper-emotional or naturally emotional religious stereotypes of African Americans as true.

The practice of whooping has obvious and subtle benefits, appreciated in those communities where this practice continues to flourish still. Some of the criticisms of whooping have merit, but the framing of the critiques stems from a romantic racialist concept of the subordination of emotion to intellect and the idea that African Americans were intellectually inferior to European Americans. The emotive, tonal, and lyrical qualities of the whoop are not markers of inferiority. These markers may be possible signs that the sermon arises from a different epistemological source. The whoop is not an emotional addendum to the rational and intellectual argument of the sermon but is part of the entire sermon. This work is only a step toward mining the richness of this practice towards the preservation of the whoop as a viable religious practice empowering those who engage it.

Higginbotham says, "The twentieth century witnessed the ascendancy of the Black working class as the oral narrator of modernity."[49] That said, following is a discussion of some of the "oral narrators," termed the preachers of the masses. These preachers utilized whooping, celebration, rhythm and other forms of emotion through folk preaching for the uplift of Black folks.

Leora Ross (CA. 1890 – CA. 1953)

Reverend Leora Ross was one of the most prominent Black female preachers of the interwar period (1918-1939)[50] preaching in the non-structured, Sanctified-style Church. The Sanctified church is an expression of the Pentecostal movement that saw explosive growth during her lifetime. The Sanctified church stressed a lifestyle of holiness whereby one's clothes, actions, and attitudes reflected exacting religious devotion. She was born around 1890 in Missouri. She married Reverend Marcellus Ross. Leora had a high school education. According to Lerone Martin, the Rosses were the only homeowners on the block where they lived in Cincinnati.[51] "Ross and her group of unidentified female singers made their media ministry an all-female affair."[52]

As did all of the preachers who recorded during the prewar era, Ross recirculated sermonic images of "immoral, spiritually unsophisticated men and women,"[53] and her sermons confirmed gender stereotypes as she simultaneously upended them by being a female preacher

[49] Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. "Rethinking Vernacular Culture," 985.

[50] Lerone A. Martin, *Preaching on Wax: The Phonograph and the Shaping of Modern African American Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 118.

[51] Ibid., 119.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid., 224.

who recorded her sermons. For instance, her sermon "Dry Bones in the Valley" was "marketed as an antidote to the culture of blues women and flappers."[54]

In her sermon titled "God's Mercy to Colonel Lindbergh," Ross as a new twist among recording preachers devised her sermon around a current cultural event—the flight of Charles Lindbergh. She encouraged the people to remember that they prayed to the same God that "carried him across the ocean."[55]

Ross also recorded "A Gambler Broke in a Strange Land," "Keep on the Firing Line," "Love Lifted Me," "Get Ready," "From Six troubles He will Deliver," and "Shine on Me." Ross's media career, though historically significant, was short-lived. Lerone Martin writes, "To some, Black women preachers were the consummate representative of the skewed womanhood of the decade…. Such women migrated to the city and shed old notions of femininity, including the need to "choose between a career and marriage…. Singing was acceptable, perhaps even expected of women. Preaching, however, was largely seen as a man's role."[56] Regarding the content of Ross's sermons, Jonathan Walton writes,

> Rev. Ross's recordings show little difference in cadence or content from those of her male contemporaries. Her language is creative, and her tone is essentially pietistic. . .. The vast majority of preachers appear to elaborate on a biblical story such as Daniel in the lions' den or Ezekiel in the valley of the dry bones so that they may speak to what they consider the sinful sins of the times. The denunciation of drinkers, gamblers, "midnight ramblers" (masculine), and "midnight walkers" (feminine) are all common tropes in the genre. The inordinate emphasis on "fast living" and fire and brimstone was a sure-fire yet simplistic response to the structural realities affecting urban African Americans.[57]

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[54] Ibid., 120.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid., 120-21.

[57] Jonathan L. Walton, *Watch This! The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 37.

Similar to other Black preachers of her day, Ross preached to uplift Blacks during a historical period when the morality, the intellect, and the civil rights of Blacks remained in question. Her content was typical of the times—pietistic, light on addressing structural social issues, and keen on addressing right living. However, her very presence behind a pulpit and a recording microphone made her different. In the 1920s and 30s long before most denominations would license and ordain women for ministry, she modeled another homiletic path for preaching women: that of the phonographic recording female preacher who unashamedly prepared sermons for public listening.

Regarding her style, in his article "The Preacher's Blues: Religious Race Records and Claims of Authority on Wax," Jonathan Walton writes,

> A chorus of female vocalists joined Ross in the studio, and her homiletic delivery was comparable to, if not better than, her male recording mates. On her sermon "Dry Bones in the Valley" the recording begins with the opening song "We Shall Run" as the accompanying female singers antiphonally intersperse with Ross's rhythmic call. From the outset as song leader, Ross's voice riffs with a distinguishable charisma above her background singers. Then she seamlessly reads her text from Ezekiel chapter 37 and moves immediately into the message. Ross's rhythmic cadence and verbal dexterity are more distinctive on the recording than her clarity of enunciation. The intelligibility of the latter may have to do with the static-filled reproduction currently available. However, static fails to obscure her vocal ability.
>
> She claims for herself the identity of the prophet and acts out his character on the record. Prophesying to the bones, she intones, "Ohhhhhh, dry bones . . . Ohhhhhh, dry bones. . . . hear the Word of the Lawwd!" She then repeats the prophecy to the wind, "Ohhhhhh, east wind. Ohhhhhh, east wind, blow upon these bones!" And with this same repetitive cadence demonstrated throughout the sermon, Ross concludes by singing, "Ohhhhhh, Will You Come? Ohhhhhh, Will You Come?[58]

[58] Jonathan L. Walton, "Preacher's Blues: Religious Race Records and the Reclamation of Authority on Wax," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 20, no. 2 (2010): 205-232.

Ross preached with great musical awareness. Her voice boomed and was as melodious as the male whoopers of her day. Her voice displayed a rhythmic pattern as she preached. She did not begin in a conversational tone and move to a whoop; she whooped throughout her messages. Her rhythm and cadence made displayed a different female voice and one that connected to many people through recordings.

Though her recording career was brief, the fact that she produced eight recorded sermons suggests that she was a favorite of the people. One can only imagine what heights to which she could have soared if women in her day received more opportunities to be vehicles through which God could present the preached word.

Ida B. Robinson (1891-1946)

Ida Bell was born the seventh of twelve children to Robert and Annie Bell in 1891 in Hazelnut, Georgia.[59] In 1908, she became a member of the Church of God. In 1910, she married Oliver Robinson. In 1917, they moved to Philadelphia, and she joined the United Holy Church of America.[60] She was a street evangelist, and her denomination made her an elder and then a pastor of Mount Olive Church, a small mission church.[61]According to Bettye Collier-Thomas, author of *Daughters of Thunder*,

> Ida Robinson's forcefulness as a holiness preacher and her concern that women receive full clergy rights led her to the 1924 founding of a denomination, the Mount Sinai Holy Church of America, Inc. Beginning with the mother church in Philadelphia, Mount Sinai rapidly

[59] Harold Dean Trulear, "Reshaping Black Pastoral Theology: The Vision of Bishop Ida B. Robinson," *Journal of Religious Thought* 46 (2005): 17-31.

[60] Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons 1850-1979* (Hoboken: Josey Bass Publishers, 1997), 194.

[61] Ibid.

> expanded as churches in other states affiliated. Robinson was elected bishop, and in 1925, Mount Sinai held its first national convocation.[62]

The denomination spread to Cuba, Guyana, and South America and the predominance of the church's elders, ministers, and administrators were women. Harold Dean Trulear notes that over two decades of work yielded her a denomination of eighty-four churches from New England to Florida, with one hundred and sixty-three ordained ministers (one hundred and twenty-five of them women), Robinson began an accredited elementary and high school…purchased a farm which housed and employed people in South Jersey and continued the work of a pastor at Mount Olive in Philadelphia and Bethel Holy Church in New York.[63] Robinson then formed the Mount Sinai denomination. Her preaching emphasized conversion and holiness. "One charter member of Mount Sinai recalled life under Bishop Robinson: 'We knew nothing but holiness . . . she used frightening words, words of action.'"[64] Keeping with her Pentecostal theological roots concerning holiness, Robinson aimed to point believers to the God who formed Mount Sinai, which is where believers could find "new life" and purpose.[65] A song on holiness, written by Elder K.E. Agard, was often sung in Mount Sinai meetings.[66] The song mentioned the typical subject matter that Black churches addressed as they sought societal respectability, which included being against smoking, drinking, adultery, and the like.[67]

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[62] Ibid.

[63] Harold Dean Trulear, "Reshaping Black Pastoral Theology," 23-24.

[64] Ibid., 26.

[65] Ibid., 25.

[66] Ibid., 27.

[67] Ibid.

Robinson, as an agent of uplift, preached sermons that promoted "new life" in Christ and new life (a better life) in a racist society for Blacks. Robinson, though not highly formally educated, opened an accredited elementary and high school and purchased a farm which housed and employed people. Hence, in both her words and deeds, education and employment were also signs of new life. For Robinson, holiness, education, and employment were a trinity of sorts in keeping with the pietistic dimension of the Black church's historical understanding of itself and its liberationist identity.[68] Harold Trulear wrote in the *Journal of Religious Thought*,

> But Bishop Robinson in her preaching and witnessing was the channel, or better put, vessel, bringing new life to Blacks in the rural South, Philadelphia, and New York. . . .This image of the pastor as a channel of new life presents an alternative to, or at least a modification of, the idea of the pastor as building, placing emphasis not merely on the institutional dimensions of the growth of the church, but also the quality of life that is central to such growth.[69]

Trulear considers "the development of her feminist hermeneutic and biblical rationale for ministry" and maintains that she did "not draw her sense of authority from structures of vertical dominance," but through her ability to birth and nurture her flock."[70]

A further look at some of Robinson's published sermons offers insight into their content. As a living text, Robinson was entirely different from many preachers of her day. She advocated for women preachers and women in leadership. Robinson was a womanist long before the term gained currency through Alice Walker in her book *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*[71] truly

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[68] Raphael G. Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety and Public Witness* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 153.

[69] Harold Dean Trulear, "Reshaping Black Pastoral Theology," 25-26.

[70] Ibid., 19.

[71] Alice Walker defines a womanist as "A Black feminist or feminist of color. From the Black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. . . Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people,

separating Robinson from the masses of Black and white male preachers who led congregations and denominations in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s.

Regarding the content of Robinson's sermons, Trulear writes of her focus on the equality of the sexes:

> It is in the distinction between the creation of humankind and formation of humankind that Bishop Robinson sees God's creative intention of equality between the sexes. Reading Genesis one and two as chronological history, she taught that in Genesis 1:26 and 27 God created male and female in his image. God subsequently formed Adam in Genesis 2:7. But Adam, as created being in the image of God, already had existence. It is this formed man, with created male and female essence, that is given dominion over the earth. Therefore, that dominion, that quality of *leadership* belongs to both male and female, for they were both already created.[72]

Providing further insight into the content of Robinson's preaching, Bettye Collier-Thomas, who was the first scholar to publish several of Robinson's sermons, writes,

> Robinson delivered "Who Shall Be Able to Stand?" and "Can These Bones Live"? on May 6, 1934. . . Robinson elaborates most extensively on her holiness theology and stresses the importance of purifying God's Church through the sanctification of all Christians. She delivered "The Economic Persecution" in 1935. This sermon speaks about pressing social issues and raises questions of morality. . . The Costigan-Wagner [Anti-Lynching] Bill of 1935 sparked debates that inspired Robinson's sermon.[73]

In summing up the content of Robinson's preaching, it is pietistic, womanist, relational (through her lived ministry), and centered on uplifting Black folk. It also shows that Robinson was unafraid to address the critical issues of her time, such as lynching.

Following are lines from three of Robinson's sermons that are indicative of her style. In "Who Shall Be Able to Stand? Based on Malachi 3:2 and Psalms 107-117, Robinson says,

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male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health." Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York: Mariner Books, 1983. Reprint, 2013), 10.

[72] Harold Dean Trulear, "Reshaping Black Pastoral Theology," 17-31.

[73] Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder*, 196.

> Jesus is coming back for a church without spot or blemish. This church is not a building or structure, nor a holy edifice, but the souls of those who have been walking uprightly. . . Beware of anti-Christs, false prophets, and seductive, lustful doctrines. Who shall be able to stand? Those who are swift witnesses against sin. All unrighteousness is sin. Who Shall be able to stand? Who shall pass through the pearly gates of that beautiful city whose ruler and builder is God?[74]

In the sermon titled "Can these Bones Live?" Robinson preached,

> If we the preachers and leaders, and supposed shepherds of his people, were firmer in our undertakings, there would be fewer on the downward road of destruction. We are the lights of the gospel, yet thousands of souls are racing into hell daily as thoughtless horses into battle because those preaching the word have become very careless. Oh, ye dry bones, hear ye the word of the Lord. These things you call no harm have many innocent souls blindfolded.[75]

In her sermon titled "The Economic Persecution" texts 1 John 4:20 and Acts 2:4, Robinson said,

> Our people in certain southern states are killed, their bodies dismembered and thrown to vultures. This, of course, is a common occurrence, and, unfortunately, [occurs] where "Christianity" is more prevalent than any other part of our Union….So let us saints pray that the Constantine of our day (if there be one) sends a letter to the modern pagans in the polluted southland in the form of "anti-lynch" legislation that is now pending in Congress. We can overcome, and we will overcome, right here in this present world, the persecutions we [are] are made to suffer, by our unjust brethren.[76]

In each of these sermon snippets, the same tropes appear—holy living, the role of the preacher/prophet, and social uplift for Black folks. Stylistically, Trulear notes, Bishop Robinson was also known as a "gifted preacher, teacher, and singer, often moving back and forth between the three modes for periods of two or three hours at a time. … She moved up and down the aisles

[74] Ibid., 200.

[75] Ibid., 201.

[76] Ibid., 204.

of the churches as she preached and sang, often pausing to speak directly to members and worshippers."[77]

The homiletical structure of the preaching of Robinson remains relatively unknown. From her printed sermons we see that she a) was not prone to use alliteration, b) used both plain-spoken language and very formal language, c) was descriptive, d) used repetition, e) regularly used illustrations, and f) used equality (between races, sexes, and society) as a consistent hermeneutical lens. When we take all of the sermon traits together, we can surmise the Robinson was both a woman before her time. She made a name in the male-dominated ranks of folk preachers, and even her womanism and style were revolutionary at the time. Robinson was indeed an early preacher of the masses, and her recording success—albeit short-lived—certainly paved the way for other women in preaching and religious leadership.

J.M. Gates (1884-1945)

As is true of so many unlettered folk preachers, J.M. Gates had all but disappeared from the annals of preaching until he was resurrected in the 2010 anthology *Preaching with Sacred Fire: African American Sermons from 1750 to the Present*, edited by Martha Simmons and Frank A. Thomas. Simmons notes "J.M. Gates is likely the most prolific Black sermonizer of the early 1900s who has had very little written about him. He was born on July 14, 1884, in [Hogansville] Georgia to George Gates and Minnie Gates (Harris). … J.M. Gates was married to his first wife, Nellie, in 1924, and to his second wife, Lydia in 1937. He began preaching in his early twenties."[78] Martin indicates that he "joined Mount Calvary Baptist Church, and when the

[77] Harold Dean Trulear, "Reshaping Black Pastoral Theology," 22.

[78] Martha J. Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, *Preaching with Sacred Fire*, 386.

preacher resigned to pastor another church in Detroit, Gates became the ordained minister of the congregation in 1916. During his 26-year tenure, the Reverend Gates preaching style rooted in Black folk evangelicalism was celebrated, effectively appealing to the church's migrant congregation."[79]

Simmons and Thomas write, "The sheer number of Gates' recordings is still unparalleled (two hundred recordings between 1926 and 1941)."[80] His popularity was unquestionable. When "Death's Black Train is Coming" was released in 1926, it sold more than fifty thousand copies."[81] Lerone Martin writes in *Preaching on Wax*, "America's Black rural diaspora heard the familiar in the preaching of Reverend Gates. For willing listeners, hearing and experiencing the 'downhome' folk sermon was priceless. Reverend Gates was the first to record a hit sermon. He blazed the way toward a fruitful and popular mass media ministry in Black Protestantism."[82] Gates recorded for a variety of labels and was responsible for a quarter of the total amount of all recorded sermons released before 1943.[83] Gates was a preacher figure of the masses.

Adding to Gates's popularity was the fact that he produced recordings that had the titles of blues songs or were very provocative: "Kinky Hair Is No Disgrace," "Will the Coffin Be Your Santa Claus?," "Hitler and Hell," "To All You Negro Haters," "The Woman and the Snake," and "Mannish Women."[84] In addition to his record sales, Gates receives credit for introducing the gospel music of former blues artist Thomas A. Dorsey into the Black gospel market via crusades

[79] Lerone A. Martin, *Preaching on Wax*, 94-96.

[80] Martha J. Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, *Preaching with Sacred Fire*, 386.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Lerone A. Martin, *Preaching on Wax*, 92.

[83] Paul Oliver, *Songsters, and Saints*, 160.

[84] Martha J. Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, *Preaching with Sacred Fire*, 387.

that Gates held.[85] Thomas Dorsey wrote the hugely popular "Precious Lord Take My Hand" and went on to achieve the moniker, "father of gospel music."[86]

When it comes to African American preachers with mass appeal, the period 1915-1950 can rightly be called the Gates Era. During this period Gates was a national revivalist, and his recording of more than 200 sermons made him a household name among the masses of Black church folk. It was Gates whom the king of the melodious whoop, C.L. Franklin, said he listened to while growing up.[87] According to music critic Tony Scherman, Gates regularly outsold the bestselling blues 78s.[88]

Gates' sermons contained practical information. They addressed current issues facing his listeners; and they were typical of the sermons of his day—pietistic, uplifting, practical; and they showed an awareness of the lives of his folk. As was the case with Bishop Ida Robinson, Gates was not afraid to address the issues of his day, as exampled by his April 1930 two-part sermon, "Say Goodbye to Chain Stores." Martin writes of the Chain Stores sermons, "American retail was rapidly shifting from the hands of individual proprietors of small local businesses to the hands of chain corporations. Like countless other Americans, Gates viewed the meteoric rise of retail chains … as profoundly detrimental to local economies as well as to Protestant faith communities."[89] In the "Goodbye to Chain Stores" sermons, Gates warns his listeners that "chain

[85] Bill Carpenter, *Uncloudy Days: The Gospel Music Encyclopedia* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2005), 149.

[86] Jonathan L. Walton, "Preacher's Blues," 207-208.

[87] Nick Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C.L. Franklin, The Black Church, and the Transformation of America* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 31.

[88] Tony Scherman, "The Man with the Million Dollar Voice," *Believer Magazine*, July 1. 2013. Online at https://believermag.com/the-man-with-the-million-dollar-voice/ (Accessed May 9, 2017).

[89] Lerone A. Martin, *Preaching on Wax*, 150.

stores mean that they will not have jobs and will not be extended credit."[90] Gates said, "You spend a hundred dollars a week; you gets [sic] no credit. When you become sick [and] out of a job, you gets no credit."[91] Gates made clear that whites begrudgingly extended credit to Blacks, and when they did, they did not honor them as customers.

In the sermon "Pay Your Policy Man," also dated 1930, Gates admonishes listeners to purchase burial insurance policies. "You know I'm tired of begging the church to bury your dead. You should pay your policy man."[92] Again, Gates encourages personal responsibility. Lerone Martin writes,

> Like their blues counterparts, phonograph preachers addressed race, class, romance, gender, and consumption from various sometimes contradictory perspectives. Reverend Gates addressed the "race problem" in several sermons. In "Straining at a Gnat and Swallowing a Camel," for example, Gates confronted "a mixed congregation" for their racist practices. Based on the words of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 23:24 ("You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!"), he chastised whites for professing to be Christians but adhering to Jim Crow laws in their personal and public relationships, calling them Negro Haters.[93]

Gate's sermons covered the gamut of Black life with specificity, which no doubt endeared him to listeners. He spoke their language, addressed their issues, uplifted their Jesus, and understood their suffering and sorrow.

Regarding his style, Martin writes that preachers like Gates used a formula. Mostly, these phonograph preachers delivered an extended folk sermon introduction, followed by a climatic and demonstrative chanted [whooped] close. They preached Black "vernacular homilies to the

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[90] Ibid.

[91] Martha J. Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, *Preaching with Sacred Fire*, 388.

[92] Ibid., 389.

[93] Lerone A. Martin, *Preaching on Wax*, 155.

tune and pace of the jazz and blues era. This formula catered to a religious need."[94] Although there is not one formula that constitutes Black folk Protestant preaching and worship, the formula listed by Martin remains in many Black churches today. The folks are consistent in the styles of preaching they find appealing.

Martin, writing about Gates and similar "phonograph preachers," says, "Moreover, these antiphonal sermons avoided scholarly theological discourse. Instead, they employed Black dialect, idioms, and memes to preach on topics such as Christian piety, racism, and popular cultural events—the totality of which constituted everyday Black life."[95]

One cannot be sure what Martin means by "Black dialect" or why preaching about subjects such as "Christian piety and racism" is not theological and scholarly discourse. However, given the number of his record sales, masses of Blacks found sermons by Gates and similar preachers useful and enjoyable.

In all likelihood, Gates also had high record sales because people who migrated to the north and elsewhere craved a southern taste of home. Martin writes, "Many urban churches refused to adjust their worship practices to the colorful folkways of the rural diaspora. Some faith communities even prohibited "shouters" from attending or joining the church."[96] Congregational aesthetics has been the subject of a long-running debate in Black churches. Some saw it acceptable to have "shouters," and some saw those who engage in shouting as uncouth and inappropriate for worship. The racial and social conventions became issues of practical theology.

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[94] Ibid., 93.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid.

Grounded in the call-and-response oral tradition of the Black Church, “shouting” is a mechanism of responding to the sermon through an emotional, vocalized expression of the soul. Shouting or "the shout" is a vestige of enslaved people's need to express themselves in a white world that continually suppressed any action that seemed emotional or emancipatory. If someone shakes a soda bottle vigorously, its pressurized content threatens to burst the container. Just so, shouting depressurizes the soul like slowly untwisting the top. Shouting leads to eruptions that express the soul and depressurizes the oppressed Black bodies gathered for worship.

Gates had a folk preaching style. He spoke the idiom of the folk, and the folk rewarded him by buying his recordings. Martin also writes of Gates’ style and the early phonograph preachers,

> These popular phonograph preachers—all born in the rural south a generation or so after slavery—eschewed the urbane, didactic, and stoic sermons of Reverends Sunday [nickname used by Calvin Dixon in honor of famed white evangelist Billy Sunday] and White [William Arthur White, the second Black recording preacher]. Instead, they preached their homilies in Black vernacular expression, that is, in the form of the folk sermon. Hallmarks of folk preaching include metaphor, simile double descriptors (high-tall, low-down, kill-dead, more-better), and the use of verbal nouns such as “funeralize.” The sermons were also chanted, beginning with conversational prose and then transitioning to a “metrical, tonal, and rhythmic chant.” A staged and primed studio congregation joined these folk sermons with singing, clapping, shouts of affirmation, and popular music. For many Black listeners, this homiletic formula constituted authentic Black Protestant preaching.[97]

Writing in 2014, Martin said, “Black (mostly male) evangelicals today, as in the 1920s, firmly believe that mass media and entertainment, commercial viability, and the life of celebrity—not the elite and/or professional channels of education, elected office, or leadership in Black civic

[97] Ibid., 92-93.

organizations—are the best means to bring about the revival of the church and to establish ministerial authority."[98]

Martin makes clear that the preachers of the masses have always found ways to bring their messages to the people. Martin does not define what he means by ministerial authority. However, at a minimum, it must mean that the preacher can establish new ways of continuing to communicate effectively.

Caesar Arthur Walter Clark, Sr. (1914-2008)

Reverend Caesar (CAW) Clark Sr. was born in 1914 in Shreveport, Louisiana. Clark could not continue school past the seventh grade because his help was too valuable to the family farm. He educated himself during his teenage years and earned admission to Bishop College, from which he graduated in 1946 at age thirty-two.[99]

> A self-described "loner and introvert" in his youth, Clark began preaching at age thirteen. He was ordained in Louisiana in 1933 and served his first pastorate at the Israelite Baptist Church in Longstreet, Louisiana. After graduating from Bishop College in 1946, he became pastor of the Good Street Baptist Church in Dallas on September 10, 1950. Before this, Clark married Carolyn Bunch-Richard, the widow of Rev. J. L. Richards, in a private ceremony at the Oakland Hilton in Louisiana. They had one child together, C. A. W. Clark, Jr.; and Caesar became stepfather to Carolyn's children from her previous marriage. Clark was affectionately known as "Little Caesar" due to his small stature of just over five feet, but he was "bigger than life" in terms of his lifetime accomplishments.[100]

In 1950, Clark became the senior pastor of Good Street Baptist Church (the original name of Macedonia Baptist Church changed in 1934) where he remained for fifty-eight years until his death in 2008. During his tenure, Good Street Church built apartments, a childcare center, a Day

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[98] Ibid., 173.

[99] Martha J. Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, *Preaching with Sacred Fire,* 626.

[100] Jennifer Bridges, "Clark, Caesar Arthur Walter," Handbook of Texas. Texas Historical Association, Online at https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fcl63 (Accessed January 12, 2017).

Care Center, a Credit Union, a nursery, and a kindergarten school. Clark served as the Vice President at Large of the National Baptist Convention U.S.A. Inc., Secretary of the Board of Trustees of the now-closed Bishop College, and Executive Editor of the National Baptist Voice.[101]

On the fiftieth anniversary of Good Street Church, many persons sent felicitations such as the President of the United States, Dwight Eisenhower; the Governor of Texas, Price Daniel; The Baptist World Alliance; the National Council of Churches; the President of the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc.; Bishop College; Gardner C. Taylor and Concord Baptist Church; W. A. Criswell, the pastor of what was then the largest Southern Baptist Church, First Baptist of Dallas; and Black and white pastors throughout Texas.[102] Good Street was such a noted church before and during Clark's pastorate that the church developed postcards for persons visiting the church to send to others as an indication that they had attended.[103]

"For more than forty years, Clark was one of the top five American revivalists averaging thirty week-long revivals a year."[104] Clark is still widely viewed on YouTube, and his CDs remain available for purchase. Despite being such a famous preacher of the masses, Clark is only briefly mentioned in *Preaching with Sacred Fire: African American Sermons from 1750 to the Present*. However, like C.L. Franklin, the masses lauded him. *Ebony* magazine listed him among fifteen of the country's greatest Black preachers in 1993. A *USA Today* article cited one minister

[101] Information is taken from the Good Street Baptist Church Quarterly Newsletter Jan-Mar/April 1990, page one. This material is in the author's possession.

[102] This information was obtained from the Diamond Jubilee Anniversary Program of Good Street. This material is in the author's possession.

[103] Copies of the postcards are in possession of the author.

[104] Ibid., 627.

describing Clark, then age seventy-eight, as "the most sought-after revival preacher there is."[105] Although he never featured him in any of his books, homiletician Cleophus LaRue, in a 2006 interview with a Dallas newspaper, said of Clark, "Everybody who knows anything about Black Baptist life is familiar with C.A.W. Clark. He was regarded as one of the great Black preachers in the 20th century."[106]

Clark's sermons show a high Christology, a love of history (biblical and social), and an evangelism thrust. High Christology means that Clark, who was baptized in the Jim Crow South (Louisiana) and came to awareness during the movement for civil rights preached of a Christ that engaged the Black experience. James Cone, the father of Black Liberation Theology, expressed a high Christology when he says that the "essence of the church is Jesus Christ, and all Christian doctrines must be interpreted in light of Jesus Christ."[107] Clark's sermons show a similar conviction. Evangelism mattered to Clark; he was one of the busiest revivalists in America for more than thirty years, and the saving of souls was essential to him.

In one of his more famous sermons, *The Worms Got Him* based on Acts 12, his high Christology, interest in history, and his concern for souls are laid bare:

> Come with me to view the burial place of the family of Herod and the sound of it suggests the law which in modern time is known as heredity but which was declared ages ago when God gave the commandment to Moses. In the second commandment, God says that he is a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. …

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[105] Adelle M. Banks, "Influential Black Baptist Rev. Clark Dies." USA Today Newspaper, Online at https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/religion/2008-07-28-clark-baptist_N.htm (Accessed January 9, 2017).

[106] Ibid.

[107] James Cone, *The Doctrine of Man in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 1965), 51-52.

> These Idumean descendants of Esau came to power in the century before Christ. All of the Herods show evil and dangerous traits. In the burial ground of the Herod family, the most famous of them is Herod the Great, who slew the innocents when Christ was born. This Herod also murdered his three sons. He drowned his brother-in-law, Aristobulus, and had his beautiful queen, Marianne, whom he sincerely loved, strangled to death. When Herod the great lay dying in his ivory palace at Jericho knowing that people would rejoice rather than sorrow when they heard that he was dead, he had the representatives of the chief families shut up in the Hippodrome, where they were to be put to death the moment the breath left his body. Thus, he made sure that there would be mourning in the lead when he was dead. . . .
>
> The first things that this text shows us is that there is a law of justice and retribution at work in the world…The second thing that this text tells us is that right will finally prevail over wrong, and the kingdom of Christ will finally prevail over the kingdom of Satan. . . .
>
> Ahhhhhh, Lawwwwwd, if you rebel against Gawd, the worms will get yah'. If you go around trying to destroy other people, the worms will get yah'. . ..
>
> I'mmmmmmm glllllaad I responded to the gospel a looooooong time ago; the angel of the gospel touched this soul of mine. A looooooong time ago, it snatched me from the branch of the burning. A looooooong time ago, a new name was written down. A looooooong time ago, my soooool was set on fire. A looooooong time ago, I heard the voice of Jesus saying, "Come unto me and rest. Lay down; thou weary one lay down thy head upon my breast…. I knnnnnnnnow that my soul has got a hidin' place, beyond the grave."[108]

In an undated sermon published by the Baptist Theological Union Congress of the Baptist Missionary and Education Convention of Tennessee, titled "The Danger of Being Unoccupied" based on (Luke 11:24-26), we again see Clark's s use of history, a high Christology, and an evangelistic thrust:

> This parable is cast in the thought-pattern of the day in which Jesus lived. It tells of a man who had successfully ousted a devil from his life. He is overjoyed to be free! He sweeps and polishes the house of his life but leaves it empty. The evicted devil roams and rambles around for a while, gets tired of being without a home and returns. He finds his former home not only unoccupied but even more fit for occupancy that it had ever been before—so in he steps. In fact, he more than steps in! He gets seven other devils even worse than

[108] Caesar Arthur Walter Clark, Sr., "The Worms Got Him," in Martha J. Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, *Preaching with Sacred Fire*, 627-634.

he to move in with him and Jesus says, "The last state of that man was worse than the first." This parable comes with four affirmations that suggest a positive way out of our troubles, provided we have the courage to take it. In effect, these affirmations constitute the Christian alternative to chaos.

Life abhors a vacuum…When life finds a heart and soul unoccupied, it proceeds to fill that heart and soul with whatever is at hand. Life is restless and must be constructively occupied, or it will occupy itself.

The second affirmation of the parable grows out of the fact that the man was content when he had evicted the devil; he put nothing else in his place—he soon learned that negatives are not enough. That strikes at the heart of our problem today…Most of us can take things apart, but the real test of one's spiritual capacity is not the ability to take things apart. It is the ability to put things together. . . .

During the early part of this century, we emptied or dispossessed ourselves of the rugged convictions and faith of our fathers. Theological liberalism took over. It had a philosophy, a theology, and a psychology that were all sugar and no salt. It had a sugary philosophy of history: History was a march of inevitable progress. It had a sugary theology about God. God was a being of such melting tenderness there could be no hell in his universe. It had a sugary psychology of man. Man was, after all, not a really sinful being who needed to be changed in a spiritual rebirth, but a being essentially good who needed only to have that good brought out by education and by improvement in the environment. But easy money, liquor, easy morals, and divorce courts working overtime, a sharp switch from a depression economy in which we had bread lines and W.P.A.'s to a war—created prosperity in which we had factory girls in fur coats and bellhops getting manicures—a national debt of three billion dollars, ghastly devastation, puppet governments, quislings and dictators and two world wars in one generation have shaken the very daylights out of our easy going and un-biblical liberalism.

A third insight into this parable rests on the fact that the evicted devil took advantage of the unoccupied life and moved back in—but he moved in with the terrifying support of seven other devils worse than he! . . .

Evil always replaces itself with evil. Lying never replaces itself with truth; fear never replaces itself with faith; misery never replaces itself with comfort; doubt never replaces itself with trust; hate never replaces itself with love; despair never replaces itself with hope, and corruption never replaces itself with purity. . .

> We need Christ here and hereafter. As for me regardless of what I may possess of this world's goods, I want to be in that number when the saints go marching in. When God's blood washed millions shall step out of the narrow circumscriptions of time into the illimitable expanses of eternity—I want to be in that number.[109]

Clark's style of preaching, as gathered from his written sermons and those that appear online, the following can be said of Clark's preaching: it was poetic, contained a generous number of metaphors, was relevant, and uplifting.[110] Clark was also a whooper and concluded most of his sermons by whooping. He was a continuation of the Du Boisian bard— "the one who would rudely, but picturesquely speak (sic) of the sorrows heaped upon the folk."[111]

Martha Simmons, who listened to Clark's sermons for twenty-five years, attended his funeral, and personally placed his sermons in *The African American Pulpit Journal* and in *Preaching with Sacred Fire: African American Sermons from 1750 to the Present*, which she co-edited, commented on the preaching style of Clark:

> You could tell that Reverend Clark spent a great deal of time preparing each sermon; the labor was always evident. He made other preachers want to study more, including me. He loved history. When I saw his office and home library, both were filled with history books of all types. As for his style, he loved metaphors and was one of the best storytellers our pulpits have ever heard. C.L. Franklin had a sweet, melodious whoop. Caesar Clark almost growled, and you had a sense of a voice rumbling; it was the working man and the working woman's whoop. It was the Du Boisian bard standing in the modern pulpit. And, although you knew what was coming when he prepared to whoop, it still engendered so much excitement and joy; if he went on too long, you could barely stand it, it was so riveting.[112]

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[109] Caesar Arthur Walter Clark, Sr., "The Danger of Being Unoccupied," is in the possession of the author of this dissertation.

[110] Please see sermons by Clark on YouTube including, "Weep Not for Me," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EbRS3Ypqh40 (accessed March 11, 2019) "The King Wants to See You," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTbA_PVwmO0 (accessed March 11, 2019) "The Importance of being on Fire for God," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWH-Q3ZALqU (accessed March 11, 2019).
"Mine Eyes Have Seen My Ears Have Heard", and "We Shall See Him as He is" (accessed May 5-6, 2017).

[111] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: A Norton Critical Edition*, 123.

[112] Telephone conversation between the writer and Dr. Martha Simmons, November 9, 2017.

Clarence LaVaughn (C.L.) Franklin (1915-1984)

Clarence LaVaughn (C.L.) Franklin was born in 1915 in the "hamlet of Sunflower, just outside Indianola,"[113] Mississippi only fifty years after slavery legally ended in the United States. Mississippi led the nation in lynchings of Blacks for the period 1882-1968.[114] Rachel Pittman was Franklin's mother. When Franklin was about age five, his mother married Henry Franklin whose surname C.L. took.[115] Franklin had three siblings[116] and grew up in poverty. In the book *Reverend C.L. Franklin Give Me This Mountain,* edited by Jeff Todd Tilton, the author recorded Franklin saying, "I remember Christmas morning. My mother would cry because the only things that she could purchase for the children were raisins and oranges and apples and striped candy. No toys, I never had toys."[117] Franklin received limited formal education as a child due to having to work as a cotton picker and performing farming chores during most of the school year.[118]

Franklin's grandfather, Elijah Pittman, was a preacher who pastored several small churches in Mississippi simultaneously.[119] Franklin did the same thing as a young adult.[120] At

[113] Martha J. Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, *Preaching with Sacred Fire*, 509.

[114] Taylor Gordon, "10 American States with the Most Lynchings of Black People from 1882-1968," The Atlanta Black Star. February 14, 2015. Online at http://atlantaBlackstar.com/2015/02/24/10-american-states-with-the-most-lynchings-of-Black-people-from-1882-1968/ (Accessed January 12, 2017).

[115] Nick Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land*, 12.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Jeff Todd Titon, ed., *Reverend C.L Franklin: Give me this Mountain, Life History and Selected Sermons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 3.

[118] Nick Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land*, 18.

[119] Ibid., 4.

[120] Ibid., 37.

about age sixteen, after having a vision, C.L. announced that he had been called to preach.[121] As a young preacher, he pastored four churches between Cleveland, MS, and Clarksdale, MS.[122]

Just shy of age twenty in 1934, he married for the first time—Alene Gaines. They divorced in two years.[123] In 1936, he married Barbara Siggers[124] and adopted her son, Vaughn. C.L. and Barbara were the parents of five children, Vaughn, Erma, Cecil, Aretha, and Carolyn. C.L. also had another daughter, Carl Ellan, by a teenage girl while he was married to Barbara.[125] In 1948, when C.L. was thirty-three, he and Barbara separated.[126] She died in 1952, and he never remarried.[127]

In addition to taking classes for three years at the Howe Institute and at Lemoyne-Owens College, both in Memphis,[128] Franklin also brought in Reuben Gayden, the former Dean of the School of Religion at Natchez College, to tutor him in religion for a decade even *after* C.L. began pastoring in Detroit.[129]

In 1946, Franklin became the pastor of New Bethel Baptist Church in Detroit and remained its pastor until his death in 1984. When Franklin was thirty-five years of age, the church voted to give him a lifetime contract to serve as pastor.[130] By 1953, under Franklin's

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[121] Ibid., 27-28

[122] Ibid., 36.

[123] Ibid., 37.

[124] Ibid., 42.

[125] Ibid., 61.

[126] Ibid., 122-123.

[127] Ibid., 25.

[128] Ibid., 57-58.

[129] Ibid., 164-165.

[130] Ibid., 133.

leadership, the church claimed a membership of more than 7,500.[131] Most members were "working people, day laborers, maids, janitors and the like. There were as well numerous small business people, a slice of Paradise Valley's (Detroit's Black commercial and entertainment district during Franklin's tenure) prostitutes, gamblers, and pimps, and a self-selected layer of the professionals."[132]

The context for Franklin's preaching, theologically speaking, was thoroughly evangelical, in that he believed that everyone could be saved or redeemed, and it was his role to be the preacher who reached out to everyone. Nick Salvatore writes,

> Bill Lane, the *Chronicle's* entertainment reporter, wrote in 1953, that during the construction "nightclub owners, beauty and barber shop operators, numbers banks, professional and business people, and plain citizens were all donating new money to start a new building for the young minister they heavily admired." C.L. was unique among his fellow ministers in that he welcomed all the residents of Hastings Street—prostitutes, drug dealers, and pimps as well as the businessmen, professionals and the devout working classes. Since 1946, he had greeted on the street those usually shunned by church people, talked to them with respect, remembered their names, and invited them to Sunday services. C.L. believed, Charlie Thompson explained, "that if anybody needed redemption, it was the unsaved," and that could not be achieved by "running from these people."[133]

As were the sermons of most of the Black preachers of his day, his early sermons are theologically conservative.[134] For example, in his "Hannah Sermon" preached in the 1950s, he addresses child rearing. He said his mother whipped him after he failed to say a speech loudly enough to be heard and that although psychologists would not recommend this childrearing course, it helped him.[135] The remainder of the sermon directed women on how to be good

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[131] Ibid., 147.

[132] Ibid.

[133] Ibid., 132-133.

[134] Ibid., 38.

mothers and homemakers. Salvatore said that in the sermon Franklin was "reflecting a nineteenth-century code of domesticity."[136]

In one version of perhaps his most famous sermon, "The Eagle Stirs Its Nest," Franklin stated that God stirred the nest during slavery. The roots of American slavery began no later than 1619 in what is now Hampton, Virginia, and it persisted for more than two hundred years. Franklin said that this timeframe was only a minute for God. Franklin does indeed present a true statement about one of the most horrific eras in American history while in the same sermon he says, "suffering can be redemptive; to know yourself you must suffer."[137] While it is true that people can learn about themselves amidst suffering, since he was addressing slavery, the conflation of eternal suffering with the suffering of chattel slavery would be challenging to hear for some people. Natural questions of theodicy would arise in ways that the sermon did not address. This type of preaching, though meant to provide an explanation and uplift to Blacks who were suffering, is sorely lacking a thicker scholarly and theological description of the context for enslavement as such it does not provide an adequate account of the context of the congregation, historically and theologically, relative to American slavery.

In a sermon Franklin preached in the 1950s titled "Moses at the Red Sea" (aka "Facing a Crisis with God"), Franklin compared Abraham Lincoln to Moses. By the 1950s, even a cursory reading of history showed that Lincoln's main intention was not to end slavery but to keep the Union from being torn asunder.[138] Throughout his life, Franklin's socio-cultural theological understanding evolved toward a more radical and engaged position regarding race.

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[135] C.L. Franklin, *Give Me this Mountain*, 148-149.

[136] Nick Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land*, 219.

[137] Ibid., 84.

His evolution allowed him to partner with Black Nationalists[139] and he participated in the modern civil rights movement.[140] Accordingly, by the mid-60s when America was fighting a war in Viet Nam, and the country was revolting for myriad reasons, Franklin preached "What of the Night?" (the Watchman sermon). As the sermon concludes he says, "A few more days, a little while to wait and a little while to pray. A little while to labor and a little while to sing. We're blundering in the dark; we're toiling in the dark. We're toiling in the light. Oh, tell us, Watchman, Oh, we're waiting for an answer, how long, how long?"[141] His preaching had evolved. There was not a simple solution; the truth was that Black folk were tired of waiting for freedom from American oppression, and so was Franklin. No one else could answer "how long?" so Franklin questioned God. Unlike his usual celebratory ending, this sermon ended with righteous indignation and deep questioning. By 1969, he was preaching sermons on Black Power, which he said meant "Black folk controlling their own destinies, believing in one another, being on school boards and police forces."[142]

Franklin also spoke against the preachers of his day whose messages revolved around health, wealth, and material gain, what is popularly called Prosperity preaching. In the sermon titled "This is My Beloved Son," he speaks against people building shrines to Daddy Grace

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[138] See President Abraham Lincoln's 1862 letter to Horace Greeley printed in the *New York Times* in which he stated, "If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that." Online www.nytimes.com/1862/08/24/archives/a-letter-from-president-lincoln-reply-to-horace-greeley-slavery-and.html (Accessed November 3, 2017).

[139] Nick Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land*, 169.

[140] Ibid., 176-181.

[141] C.L. Franklin, *Give Me this Mountain*, 173-174.

[142] Nick Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land*, 180.

(1881-1960), Father M.J. Divine (1877-1965), and Prophet James Jones of Detroit (1907-1971), who sat on a throne in the pulpit and was known as the Messiah in Mink.[143]

Theologically, the content of Franklin's sermons demonstrates his belief that all are capable of receiving God's salvation. His broad soteriology was one of the reasons he was beloved by the masses, many people from differing walks of life. From blues singers, who were not smiled upon by preachers of his time, to everyone else he met, Franklin accepted people representing many types of social conditions. Perhaps this is why Blues singer B.B. King considered Franklin as his pastor whenever King visited Detroit.[144]

Second, the content of Franklin's sermons was hopeful and relevant, hewn from the experiences of daily life. Nick Salvatore, the author of *Singing in a Strange Land*, noted that, as a young boy, Franklin found hope in just watching cars go by on Highway 61. Simply seeing different license plates was enough for him to believe that he, too, would one day rise above his circumstances and visit cities everywhere. Franklin had a hopeful outlook.[145] Franklin's sermons were relevant, in part, because he embraced those who were generally shunned by Talented Tenth churches. As early as 1957, Franklin allowed a woman, Theodisha Hooks, to participate in the anniversary of the church where he served, an act of hospitality rare and generally disapproved in a male-dominated leadership class of the Baptist church in 1957.[146]

Franklin's style of preaching was noted for its adept storytelling and painting of colorful pictures.[147] He was a master of metaphors. His sermons were typically about thirty minutes in

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[143] Ibid., 160.

[144] Ibid., 201.

[145] Ibid., 16-17.

[146] Ibid., 200.

[147] Ibid., 151.

length. As shown above, they displayed a mix of pietism and liberation preaching.[148] They offered "pointed socioreligious analysis of contemporary events."[149] They were well-prepared, as indicated by the comment from J. Pious Barbour given below.

Franklin, as did few others of his day, well-used technology. He used the radio and phonograph to make multiple recordings, at least seventy-five albums,[150] and occasionally televised sermons. In addition to being a top revivalist of his generation, beginning in 1956 Franklin was heard on WLAC Radio of Nashville each Sunday night by millions over the course of those years, as Nick Salvatore noted.[151]

Franklin took whooping from what was called the "Chitlin' Circuit"—a geographical preaching network that consists of numerous small churches pastored by folk preachers and attended by the folk—and placed it in the National Baptist Convention, as well as in many homes in America through his radio broadcast. Jesse Jackson said, "Did not our ears perk up for years before we had a television or an elected official in America if we could just hear WLAC, Nashville, Tennessee, Randy's on a Sunday night? Sunday night, New Bethel, Hastings Street was the common frame of reference for the Black church prototype."[152]

Franklin's style, the content of preaching, and the power of his whoop were summed up well by J. Pious Barber, who was a mentor to Martin Luther King, Jr., Samuel Proctor, and other Talented Tenth preachers.[153] Barber also was part of the Executive Board of the National Baptist

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[148] Ibid., 150-151.

[149] Ibid., 131.

[150] Ibid., 186.

[151] Ibid., 192.

[152] Ibid.

[153] Ibid., 102.

Convention in the 40s and 50s; served as the editor of the National Baptist Voice, and graduated from Crozer Theological Seminary.[154] At age 30, when Franklin preached at the National Baptist Convention on the subject of immortality, Barbour wrote that when he discovered that C.L. was to preach on the topic of immortality, "My heart sank" as he considered Franklin's relative inexperience. Undoubtedly, he also knew that Franklin had not obtained a college degree. Barbour said of Franklin's whoop, "The biggest surprise of all was the sermon of C.L. Franklin of Buffalo, NY. He has one of those whoops that comes every fifty years."[155]

A month later, in the National Baptist Voice, he gave a public report of Franklin's preaching for those who did not attend the convention. Barbour wrote,

> He almost paralyzed the convention with logic and history and thought. For twenty minutes he preached as if he were in Harvard Chapel and just as the people were gasping at this profound treatment of the subject, he switched gears and threw on that Mississippi whoop and broke up the convention. There is no doubt about it. He comes nearer to L.K. Williams [Past president of the National Baptist Convention] than any man I have heard. He is a perfect mixture of profound thought and emotional power.[156]

Barbour and the masses of Blacks who heard and heard *about*, Franklin appreciated his intellect and his artistry as a preacher.

The final point regarding the style of Franklin is that he took sermons from the Black preaching corpus crafted by other preachers and made them forever his. Franklin was not the first Black preacher to preach "The Eagle Stirs Its Nest." It was a staple theme in the preaching tradition with versions spanning back almost a century before Franklin preached it,[157] and J.M.

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[154] Ibid.

[155] Ibid., 103.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Ibid., 82.

Gates and others had already recorded it.[158] However, it is Franklin's version that is now in the national recording registry of the Library of Congress. The Dry Bones sermon (based on Ezekiel 37:1-14) is a staple of the Black preaching corpus. Reverend Calvin Dixon recorded it for Columbia Records. There were thirty-one (obvious by their title and or text) versions of the "Dry Bones" sermon listed in the catalogs of Blues and Gospel Records from 1800-1943.[159] But no version has been as celebrated as the version preached by C.L. Franklin, a master preacher of the masses.

To date, Franklin is the most famous African American whooper. Despite his popularity among the Black masses and his influence, the two books about Franklin were not written by Black homileticians, but by two white professors: Nick Salvatore, a professor of American Studies at Cornell University and Jeff Todd Titon, Professor Emeritus of Music at Brown University. For all of his accomplishments, Franklin was never able to enter the homiletical texts written by Black clergy or the society of the educated in Detroit. Black class lines were impermeable.[160] However, Franklin was so beloved by the masses that, until the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a funeral cortege had never been so large as for the funeral of Clarence LaVaughn Franklin. Despite his homiletic and his lack of acceptance into traditional (Talented Tenth) annals of homiletical tradition, the people of the masses adored him.[161]

Beyond the boundaries of the Talented Tenth preacher, as epitomized by Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gardner C. Taylor, there existed preachers within the broader tradition who, in their

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[158] Paul Oliver, *Songsters and Saints*. 158-159.

[159] See the Online Archives of California. Online at https://oac.cdlib.org/titles/k.html (Accessed November 5, 2017).

[160] Nick Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land*, 115-116, 120.

[161] Ibid., 314.

ways, embraced the cruder aspects of the bard domain within Du Boisian theorization of the preacher. If preaching well generally entails: a) identifying with the audience and context and developing subsequent popularity, b) using vivid images and bold metaphors, c) being able to tell a story well, d) using humor, rhyme, alliteration, and e) sometimes whooping/tonality, then these selected preachers, within and beyond the Baptist church, modeled expressions of good folk preaching.

However, these figures, as previously stated, were not discussed in books concerning the homiletic method but instead in biographical works, often, but not always by non-homileticians. To this point, the dynamism that marked each of their styles of preaching, which often included whooping or modes of celebration, may, along with other questions of personal image (like C. L. Franklin and his deep connections to the secular life) be places where the burden of Black religion is observable. Evans argues that Black religion became a signifier for the overarching progress of African Americans. The preacher bore the burden of Black religion and the sermon, notably the chanted or whooped sermon, because of its connection to innate religiosity, became the ultimate signifier for delineating whether Black preachers were "ministers or minstrels." Being deemed more of the minstrel association, manifesting the bard impulse often dislocated from a Talented Tenth identity, the celebrated preachers of the masses selected in this chapter not only advanced the African American preaching tradition but, just as importantly, made room for the new bard of the twenty-first century—the Hip-Hop MC preacher.

Chapter 4

Connecting C. L. Franklin to C. L. Smooth: The Hip-Hop MC as the New Preacher of the Masses

...A host of verbal intermediaries exist between the preacher and the MC. But when you cut through all the begats, the preacher and the MC retain their family resemblance… The MC replicates and remixes the craft of preaching, jacking one set of oratory tactics for application in the world of sin and concrete. To cut to the quick, there is more than a set of initials connecting C.L. Franklin to CL Smooth.[1]

The dominance of Talented Tenth thought as propagated by Du Bois privileged the formation of an educated class of African American clergy. The intervention of Henry Mitchell systematized a homiletic method for Black preaching that was deeply influenced by Du Bois and the needs of Talented Tenth clergy. At stake in the dominance of Talented Tenth thought in the field of homiletics is perpetuating a model of the preacher that may risk the bard domain of an expansive Du Boisian conception. By displaying preachers who embraced whooping or other modes of celebration or emotional, intoned preaching, it is possible to detect the current preachers of the masses. C. L. Franklin is a part of this tradition.

Hip-Hop culture, with its direct connections with faith traditions and religious systems grounded mainly in Northern urban cities and ghettoes like the 5 Percent Nation and its longer cultural-linguistic connection to conjure, produced the preacher figure, the MC. The Hip-Hop MC C. L. Smooth, though not the subject of this chapter, is a rhetorical symbol to embody Hip-Hop. The connection between C. L. Franklin and C. L. Smooth spans the breadth and depth of the Du Boisian preacher tradition. It is the Hip-Hop MC, as mentioned by Thomas and Moss, not the Talented Tenth preacher figure, who is the preacher of the masses, the preacher of popular

[1] William Jelani Cobb, *To the Break of Dawn*, 16-17 and 20.

culture. Considering the MC figure in homiletic conversations can reimagine the practice of preaching.

The Plantation, the Conjurer, and the Power of Rhetorical Conjuring

Although the Hip-Hop MC preacher figure emerges from a specific era (the 1970s), long before Hip-Hop arrived in the New York Bronx the historical antecedents for its birth were conjured through the Black experience in Africa and then America. Christianity provided a large theological canopy under which religious technologies could develop, but it was not the only source of spiritual assistance in the quest for liberation.

The transatlantic slave trade cemented the possibility that America could become permanently polyreligious, a perpetually shifting, always hybridizing state of accommodating the various religious traditions of the voluntary and *involuntary* immigrants so crucial to its founding. Hybridity is the process of mutual sharing between two or more entities. Enslaved Africans found themselves in a two-fold hybridity process: one with non-slave and slaveholding whites and one with Africans from various tribes with different customs and cosmologies. This period of forced acculturation changed the trajectory of African American religion. Albert Raboteau, in his book *Slave Religion*, suggests that a shared or "common religious heritage" is part of the experience of enslavement in a new environment. Raboteau calls it a "discrete blending" of religions and cultures.[2] Raboteau is helpful here as one begins to think about the vibrant and dynamic African American religious climate, especially when one considers the variety of African-infused religions throughout the diaspora. Examples of this infusion witnessed

[2] Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 8.

in *Candomblé* in Brazil, *Santeria* in Cuba, and *Voodoo* in Haiti. These all attest to the vitality and enduring influence of African traditions and realities in diasporic environments.

There was an array of religious vitality throughout the diaspora as well as in America. Christianity was the colonizing tool of choice for whites in the new world. However, not everyone was converting from his or her indigenous African beliefs. For example, Sterling Stuckey states in his work *Slave Culture* that Christianity became somewhat of a "protective exterior" for more subversive and unsanctioned religious expression. The Christianity of the dominant culture is encountering the enslaved Africans religious sensibilities, and Africanized Christianity develops.[3] Notably, this bidirectionality of influence reveals the profound significance of indigenous African spiritual beliefs and practices, as well as the potential for the conscientious cooptation of Christianity in order to maintain some semblance of their original faith.

Yvonne Chireau, author of *Black Magic,* troubles traditional Christian and non-Christian labels of religious practices by stating that neat and clean distinctions of "Christian and non-Christian" and the "religion and magic dichotomy" are often overdrawn and not reflective of life on the ground.[4] Chireau is asking the reader to use fresh perspectives in analyzing the religious agency of enslaved peoples. Her primary conclusion is essential. Chireau states that "African American 'religion' is not always distinct from what others call 'magic.'" She attests that they are in fact "complementary categories" that are both historical and actual in the present.[5]

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[3] Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford Publishing, 2013), 38.

[4] Yvonne R. Chireau, *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 4.

[5] Ibid., 7.

Chireau's work shows how enslaved persons, especially religious leaders, drew from an array of cultural and religious sources to bring about liberation—whether in the personal or communal sense. The hybridity of cultures and religious perspectives provided African American religious leaders with a formidable palette of technologies to combat slavery and its derivative pursuits.

She discusses how Voodoo and other forms of "Black magic" were used by the enslaved and oppressed to mediate their tangible and intangible troubles. She writes,

> Conjure is a religious tradition where persons evoke spiritual power through rituals and ceremonies for various purposes such as healing, protection, and self-defense. The relationship between Conjure and African American religion—in particular, Christianity is somewhat ambiguous. Conjure is usually associated with magical practices and not considered a respectable religion like Christianity producing a dichotomy. From slavery to the present, many African Americans have readily moved between Christianity, Conjure, and other forms of supernaturalism with little concern for their purported incompatibility.[6]

Conjure has long been used as a "spiritual power" by Blacks. Its supposed conflict with Christianity did not restrict Black Christians from engaging in its practices, especially those who lovingly remembered that which brought them and their foremothers through awkward moments. Conjure functioned as cultural retention used to find a way to survive the brutality of slavery, Jim Crow, and even the current maladies, which consistently arise to stunt Black social and cultural flourishing.

Chireau lifts Denmark Vesey as emblematic of a religious leader who employed varying theological approaches for the ultimate goal of liberation. Though he was a Christian and gathered members of the Methodist Church to help him,[7] he also enlisted the help of a known and famous conjurer, Gullah Jack Pritchard, who was an "acknowledged priest figure of the

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[6] Ibid, 12.

[7] Ibid., 65.

African tradition" and a Christian to lead in the Vesey revolt.[8] Vesey was a pragmatic leader who understood and respected the power of conjure to impact material powers. Vesey, unafraid of demonstrating religious, creative genius, willfully borrowed from the Bible and from folk religion sources to lead a slave revolt in 1822.[9] Before his revolution could begin, the plot was detected and thwarted. Conjure, because of its inability to be coopted by whites, was feared, banned, and ultimately survived the coordinated and uncoordinated squelching of this folk religion.

In 1831, Nat Turner also sought liberation through revolt. His campaign left fifty-five whites dead. Turner, according to Chireau, is "a self-styled prophet,"[10] who used biblical and mystical sources for inspiration and guidance. Turner, often categorized as a slave preacher, actually functioned more like an "African-based spiritual practitioner."[11] Turner, in some scholarly works, is identified with conjure, primarily when people chronicle his ability to lead people and tap into divine sources for insight, strength, and revolt.[12] Turner and Vesey are both figures who sought liberation through the cultural and religious tools available—particularly, conjure. They were unconcerned with Eurocentric Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy because their goal was liberation.

Chireau's assessment also aligns with Gayraud Wilmore's understanding of Black religion, which he offers in his book *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*. Gayraud explains that

[8] Ibid., 66-67.

[9] Ibid., 65-66.

[10] Ibid., 64.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

African traditions, even upon American soil, are "survivalistic and militant."[13] Religious rituals are engaged in seeking defense, protection, or even to change the fate of an outcome.

The formerly named figures and others, including Bishop C. H. Mason of the Church of God in Christ, engaged in "magic" or conjure in the hybrid ways of Nat Turner and Gullah Jack. Rather than a physical revolt, Mason started the largest African American Pentecostal body in the world.[14] Early African American religious leaders, as seen in Turner, Vesey, and Mason, employed an adroit theological imagination, unrestricted by Christian doctrine, to develop theology and action in order to provide liberation to their fellow enslaved people.

The conjurer, due to his or her religious practice, is located outside of spaces of power but engages those places of exclusion through manipulation of the cosmic powers—spiritual and structural—to change the immediate climate for many through amulets, technologies, and healing/harming powers.[15] Theophus Smith states in his book *Conjuring Culture*,

> The term "conjure" or "conjuration" is versatile as a root metaphor, a metaphor that circumscribes Black people's ritual, figural, and therapeutic transformation of culture. . . Conjure is fundamentally magic. It is first in consideration the magical folk tradition of Black North Americans. Conjure is fundamentally magic. . . More concisely and comprehensively stated: conjure is a magical means of transforming reality.[16]

Smith suggests, from a more abstract perspective, that magic or conjure is a manner of expression. Theoretically, we could consider that it functions as a language. Conjure is a mode of coping, empowerment, or malevolence. Conjure, because of its power, could be utilized to help, heal, or harm. Conjure was fluid enough to be placed alongside Christianity as a means to

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[13] Ibid., 67.

[14] Ibid., 90, 109.

[15] Ibid., 47-50, 114-115.

[16] Theophus Smith, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America (Religion in America)* (New York, Oxford Press, 1995), 4.

empower enslaved persons. Smith grounds his approach in a different methodological space than Chireau in that Smith is not interested in a purely historical project. Preferably, he is more interested in discussing conjure as a way to understand how African Americans have used the King James Bible to conjure.[17]Conjure, for Smith, as a metaphor of how African Americans have engaged the biblical text for outcomes beyond theological enrichment. Smith's work is more theoretical, focusing on hermeneutics, phenomenology and other philosophical topics.

Smith's contribution is a helpful framework to understand the vestiges of conjure seen in the culture of the historic Black preacher figure and the Hip-Hop MC preacher figure. Conjure, according to Smith, includes "ritually patterned behaviors and performative uses of language and symbols, conveying a pharmacopeic or healing/harming intent, and employing biblical figures and issuing in biblical configurations of cultural experience."[18] These criteria also all apply to Hip-Hop culture. Hip-Hop music displays "ritually patterned behaviors" (such as the use of call-and-response) and uses of language and symbols. Its language spans the gamut, ranging from the divine to the inane, to the liberating, to the profane. The symbols of Hip-Hop culture include the ghetto, sex, the thug/thug life, and subversiveness. Tricia Rose writes in *Black Noise* about the ghetto as a symbol in Hip-Hop culture.

> Most important, the ghetto exists for millions of young Blacks and other people of color—it is a profoundly significant location. Using the ghetto as a source of identity—as rapper Trech would say, if you're not from the ghetto, don't ever come to the ghetto—undermines the stigma of poverty and social marginality. At the same time, the ghetto badman posture-performance is a protective shell against real unyielding and harsh social policies and physical environments…Even though rappers are aware of the diversity of their audiences and the context for reception, their use of the ghetto and its symbolic significances is primarily directed at other Black Hip-Hop fans. [M]ost white popular culture depictions of ghetto life are drained of relevant detail, texture, and complexity. Quite to the contrary,

[17] Ibid., 6.

[18] Ibid.

> rap's ghetto imagery is too often intensely specific and locally significant, making its preferred viewers someone who can read ghettocentricity with ghetto sensitivity.[19]

Along with the ghetto as a pervasive symbol of Hip-Hop, sex is an even more potent symbol. Tricia Rose says, "I am thoroughly frustrated but not surprised by the apparent need for some rappers to craft elaborate and creative stories about the abuse and domination of young Black women. However, some responses to sexism in rap music adopt a tone that suggests that rappers have infected an otherwise sexism-free society."[20] Another symbol of Hip-Hop culture and Hip-Hop preaching concerns the thug life as lived by the thug. William Cobb says in *To the Break of Dawn*, "Whereas the Baaad Nigger and the trickster exist as parallel types in the blues, the thug alone has become the patron deity of Hip-Hop."[21] Since white corporate executives of the music industry control most of the images that come forth in rap videos, it is to be expected that in keeping with the menacing persona that whites have historically painted of Black men, that they would picture them on screen as thugs and deplorable men. Tricia Rose writes,

> The public-school system, the police, and the popular media perceive and construct young African Americans as a dangerous internal element in urban America; an element that, if allowed to roam freely, will threaten the social order; an element that must be policed. Since rap music is an authoritative symbolic voice of Black urban males, it heightens this sense of threat and reinforces dominant white middle-class objections to urban Black youths who do not aspire to (but are haunted by) white middle-class standards.[22]

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[19] Tricia Rose, *Black Noise, Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 12.

[20] Ibid., 15.

[21] William Jelani Cobb, *To the Break of Dawn*, 30.

[22] Tricia Rose, *Black Noise*, 126.

Hip-Hop culture provides subversive methods by which Black youth can reclaim their imagination from the media that caricatures Blacks. Subversiveness also is a definitive symbol of Hip-Hop. Rose writes,

> Rap is in many ways a hidden transcript. Among other things, it uses cloaked speech and disguised cultural codes to comment on and challenge aspects of current power inequalities. Not all rap transcripts critique all forms of domination; nonetheless, a large and significant element in rap's discursive territory is engaged in symbolic and ideological warfare with institutions and groups that symbolically, ideologically, and materially oppress.[23]

Hip-Hop music subverts cultural tropes that demonize Black folk and provides its artists with the stage to keep the focus on the needs of the folk. Hip-Hop also sends the message of justice around the world to all who will listen and can understand the "hidden transcript." Famous now are songs about police oppression: NWA's "Fuck the Police," Tupac Shakur's "Trapped," KRS-One's "Sound of Da Police," and Public Enemy's "911 is a Joke," and songs about the structural oppression that lingers in the hood such as Killer Mike's "Burn," "Public Enemy's "Fight The Power," and Lupe Fiasco's "Words I Never Said."

Hip-Hop culture, and especially its music, conveys a pharmacopic intent meaning that conjuring words have the potential power to harm and it is a perceivable aspect in Hip-Hop culture. The hurt occurs when the construction of masculinity is active in such ways that women are rhetorically and culturallydemeaned as hoes and bitches, and hyper-masculinity gets to run amuck. It also harms when it permits homophobic tropes to be scattered about with impunity in Hip-Hop songs. These are two of Hip-Hops greatest failings. The third is the use of Hip-Hop culture by those whose nihilistic tendencies reap death for themselves and their people.

[23] Ibid., 100-101.

Finally, in keeping with Thee Smith and his conjuring trio, Hip-Hop culture, as does conjure, sometimes uses "figures from the bible issuing in biblical configurations of cultural experiences." In Hip-Hop the main religious figure used is Jesus. Robert Tinajero in his article "Hip-Hop and Religion: Gangsta raps Christian Rhetoric" writes,

> The religious rhetorical output of many gangsta rappers, both textual and visual, points to the religious ethos embraced by many marginalized inner-city individuals who see the discourse of gangsta rap as containing a form of religious *phronesis* (practical wisdom). This output focuses on some telling characteristics: solidarity with Jesus formed through the common theme of suffering; a belief that the social order is to blame for much/most of the suffering; a strong hope that one day the suffering and marginalized will experience redemption; a mistrust of organized religion; and a psycho-social battle between good and evil. These characteristics are on display in the rhetoric of rappers Tupac, South Park Mexican, Notorious B.I.G., Jay-Z, Nas, 50 Cent, and numerous others.
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> Importantly, this ethos is not only characteristic of a few rappers but symbolic of the religious ideology of the multitude of individuals that connect to the message. As Derrick Darby writes about rappers, "these poor righteous teachers and lyrically gifted MCs [give] their congregations a street-side perspective on biding philosophical questions concerning the nature and existence of God [and] the problem of evil."[24]

The folk in the hood, Hip-Hop rappers and MCs alike can look to and uplift Jesus as they seek liberation from the grime and daily oppression they encounter. However, they may not look to organized religion. Instead, they choose to accept the "street-side perspective" of the Hip-Hop MC preacher concerning their spiritual quest to understand and survive evil. Many lovers of Jesus who are also listeners of Hip-Hop music want the Jesus of the hood. Yes, this Jesus emerges from the mouths of the same MCs who are misogynists, profane, and sometimes antithetical to whom the biblical understanding of Christians—a loving liberator (John 3:16 NRSV). However, people can wrestle with the truth they honestly receive because it is their daily

[24] Robert Tinajero, "Hip-Hop and Religion: Gangsta Rap's Christian Rhetoric," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 25, no. 3 (Fall 2013).

existence. They also can accept the Hip-Hop MC preacher figure as their "ethos of religious phronesis" guides them and the MC toward redemption, liberation, and truth ushered in by way of a suffering Jesus acquainted with grief and carried to his death by an empire.

Thee Smith's tri-fold understanding of conjure, specifically the use of language and its harming ability, coincides with what homiletician Valerie Bridgeman calls "material preaching," which she relates to Hip-Hop preaching.[25] In her aim to "connect the head and heart," Bridgeman notes, "the proclaimer must seek to say what she or he says about things that matter. Preaching ought to concern itself with grand visions that recreate mundane lives."[26] Preaching that matters is material and preaching that creates visions that change mundane and suffering lives also is material. Bridgeman also maintains,

> Material preaching portends grittier language and metaphors mined from the mother lode of the mundane and profane. Here I mean the root meaning of "profane," that is "outside the church," though never outside of where God works. Such metaphoric use still draws on biblical language, but also deliberately reaches beyond religious jargon into popular culture. A premier example of this kind of use is what is called Hip-Hop preaching.[27]

Bridgeman's call for "grittier" language mined from the "mundane and the profane" makes room for the Hip-Hop MC whose vocabulary derives from Hip Hop culture rather than church culture. Bridgeman's approach to the mundane also is helpful to those who worry that the profanity in Hip-Hop music is outside of where God works just because it is outside of church acceptance. Bridgeman, as does Tinajero, makes room for the Hip-Hop MC and the wrestling of the folk with the profane and mundane.

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[25] Valerie Bridgeman and O. Wesley Allen Jr., eds., *The Renewed Homiletic* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 74.

[26] Ibid., 75.

[27] Ibid.

Unlike orthodox Christianity and scholars of religion who obsess over near impossibilities of purity—from conjure to the Five Percenters—Africans, African Americans, and their preachers/proclaimers have always fused creative and powerful religious interpretive strategies, leadership skills, and the willingness to place oneself between the gears of power, as necessary, to bring change for those whom they represent.

The Ghetto as Urban Plantation: Hip-Hop Culture as Present-Day Slave Religion

Pastor and theologian William A. Jones, Jr. recontextualizes the plight of the Black masses in his book *God in the Ghetto*. Jones, being part of a Brooklyn preaching triumvirate with Gardner Taylor and Sandy Ray pastored Bethany Baptist Church for forty-three years. Being a past president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, holding an earned doctorate, and teaching homiletics at several seminaries, Jones found himself in the Talented Tenth class of preachers. However, Jones diverges from his contemporaries by providing in a book form a cogent explanation of the mechanisms of systemic oppression that produce what is understood to be *the ghetto*. *God in the Ghett*o is an underappreciated resource providing a quick but textured explanation for the state of millions who comprise the folk.

Jones states his claim clearly, "The ghetto is the most visible and the most profound symbol of the American System, that systematic, sociocultural design which created and perpetuated the existence of two cultures, one white and one Black under one flag."[28] For Jones, "the System" that creates the conditions for the urban ghetto ascribed to the Black masses is trifold: capitalism, racism, and militarism. "Capitalism is the economic system. Erected on the damnable foundation of slave labor, it pyramided on cheap labor after the emancipation and now

[28] William Augustus Jones, Jr., *God in the Ghetto,* 14.

thrives on social stratification, which is racism made manifest."[29] Jones connects the international system of economics utilized by Europeans and their descendants to gain, maintain, and expand control of the earth's resources both natural and human.

The chattel enslavement of Africans and their descendants occurred under this system. Capitalism, altered only in blunt effect but not at its operative core, continues to perpetuate a modified form of enslavement on brown bodies in America and beyond. Racism provides the internal logic that "serves to preserve and perpetuate the system."[30] Militarism supports the economic aims of a racist imagination. The ability to sanction legitimate violence to maintain the status quo of white supremacy and economic advantage is a totalizing weapon on the object perpetuating the violence and the object of the violence. Jones states, "Militarism saps the mental and physical energies of the nation's youth, those most capable of creatively confronting the evils of racism and capitalism."[31] Jones comments shed additional light on Willie Jennings' observation about the diseased racial imagination active in white ideology by linking the actions of a society with a malformation of imagination. Jones states, "A simple, surface diagnosis of 'The System' reveals a sick sociology based on a faulty anthropology, which emanates from a false theology. A man's attitude toward other men reflects the nature of his ultimate values."[32] It is precisely this system of economic and social relationships centered around the thriving of WASPs and Talented Tenth African Americans that can be directly at odds with the folk.

Jones theorizes that the original meaning of the *ghetto* is now a racial semantic operating as shorthand for the Black masses. Jones, citing the Kerner Commission, initially defines the

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[29] Ibid., 12.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., 13.

ghetto "as an area within a city characterized by poverty and acute social disorganization, inhabited by members of a racial or ethnic group under conditions of involuntary segregation."[33] Though the term first was used to describe where the Jewish colony lived in Venice during the sixteenth century, and the Latin root of the word means to discard or cast, Jones rightly assesses that "In America, the designation is almost synonymous with the Black community."[34] Jones critiques the overly geographic nature of the Kerner Commission definition by citing the study *Dark Ghetto* by Kenneth Clark as a more flexible definition. Clark's analysis is below.

> The dark ghetto's invisible walls have been erected by the white society, by those who have power, both to confine those who have no power and to perpetuate their powerlessness. The dark ghettos are social, political, educational, and—above all—economic colonies. Their inhabitants are subject peoples, victims of the greed and cruelty, insensitivity, guilt, and fear of their masters.[35]

Clark's definition provides a snapshot of how the diseased racial imagination is responsible for what the Kerner Commission overly narrowed as a geographic phenomenon.

Maybe the government's tendency to make the ghetto a geographic phenomenon is informed by the migrations of African Americans from the Deep South to the North. "In 1910, 75 percent of all Blacks lived in the rural South, shackled and bruised by the iron chains of segregation," Jones asserts.[36] Those persons would be the "dark, dumb masses" described in Charles S. Johnson's *Opportunity* publication. As stated before, the mass migration of these type

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[33] The United States, National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *The Kerner Report: The 1968 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 1st Pantheon ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 12.

[34] William Augustus Jones, *God in the Ghetto*, 19.

[35] Kenneth B. Clark, *Dark Ghetto*, 11.

[36] William Augustus Jones, *God in the Ghetto*, 22.

of folk was a contentious topic among Blacks, particularly those already settled and established communities of Talented Tenth persons in the North.

Usually, darker-skinned African Americans migrating from the South were viewed with double stigma. They were people of the soil who came from rural places and brought rural sensibilities with them. They were identified as "country" as they left the plantation-styled economic arrangement of the South to be renamed "ghetto" in the northern cities because of their landless peasantry status in the North. They were not immigrants from a far country but Americans, and as Jones states, "Racism made them 'gerim,' resident aliens, strangers, and pilgrims in the land of their birth."[37]

Jones further accounts for the condition of those mainly coming from southern agrarian life patterns to urbanized and industrialized cities and towns in the North who began and remained the outside of the Talented Tenth by stating:

> Blacks are a colonized people. The period of chattel slavery was marked by capitalistic ownership, with each slave master the complete ownership of his slaves. Blacks are now victims of socialistic ownership; the "The System owns them." For what is a ghetto other than a plantation without physical fences? Each workday morning the natives leave the island, the colony, or the reservation and travel to the mainland, where they expend their best energies in the continuing enhancement of dominant society. Then at eventide, they return to the island, tired and worn and devoid of the energies needed to deal creatively with their destitution.[38]

The social or governmental ownership of Blacks changed only the form and style of possession, not the system itself. By rethinking the relationship of Black folk with the country and constituting it as a colony, Jones makes understandable the moral illogic, yet capitalistic precision, of white racism and race management. Jones' question then presses harder, equating

[37] Ibid., 23.

[38] Ibid., 25.

the urban ghetto owned and maintained by the government with the private property model of chattel slavery.

The government, elite WASPs, cultivation and maintenance of strategic relationships through the influencing of the formation of the Talented Tenth class, in part, by the. The fenceless plantation Jones envision as the current reality is global in its scope and totalizing in its implications. "[R]egardless of locale and whether or not the people are Black American, Caribbean, Latin American, Asian, or African, they are all drawn together by a common affliction into the larger ghetto."[39]

The rise and spread of American economic and militaristic hegemony around the world consequently disseminated and indoctrinated its values, attitudes, prejudices, and techniques. Blacks, the distorted object of the white social imagination, would likely find themselves in ghettos in countries, cities, and towns where whites exercised social power. Jones cites Colin Morris when saying that "the larger ghetto is dominated and controlled by a ruling triumvirate of the 'Unyoung, Uncolored, and Unpoor.'"[40] The world, as ordered by white supremacy, is a large ghetto whereby European economic interests and taste are satisfied by the land, labor, and lives of the masses of poor people in non-white nations. Writer Bakari Kitwana writes in *The Hip-Hop Generation* about the negative impact of the "global economy" and its corresponding relationship to the creation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in the 1940s. Kitwana states, "Under the guidance of these two institutions, free-market policies have been established around the globe, disrupting the local economies of weaker countries and opening them up to dependency on imports from mostly Western-based foreign multinationals.

[39] Ibid., 30.

[40] Ibid.

The results, more often than not, have been disastrous for workers."[41] The increased precision of automation, the increase in corporate mergers, and workforce downsizing prove Jones to be correct.

There are serious implications when taking Jones seriously. The ghetto is not merely a geographic location or economic condition; it is a function and creation of a diseased social imagination. First, the creation of a ghetto mentality is active in the collective will of a diseased racial imagination as it seeks to answer the question of the Negro Problem. The distortions of African Americans already active in the American social imagination lead to the answer of ghettoizing African Americans. The diseased social imagination projects the ghetto ideology upon African Americans. The power held by whites turns the ghetto idea into a social relationship with African Americans where laws systematize their complete ghettoization. The total social apparatus not only projects the ghetto upon Blacks but then materializes the ghettoization of African Americans through legal, social, and economic disenfranchisement. The ghettoization of African Americans serves as a political necessity for the maintenance of white socio-economic control. The ghettoization active in the white racial imagination evident in the African American experience also manifests around the world due to the rise of globalism.

The stigmatizing of Black as synonymous with the ghetto also explains how the Talented Tenth imagination would distance itself from the social rhythms, attitudes, and practices of poor rural southern persons, who would then often become the poor and uneducated lower to middle class, northern urban dwellers. Such an image would run afoul of Talented Tenth gentile sensibilities. Therefore, those of the Talented Tenth would self-select away from such stigma. If the ghetto is, in fact, a government-maintained reservation or plantation in the urban context,

[41] Bakari Kitwana, *The Hip-Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African-American Culture* (BasicCivitas: New York, 2002), 32-33.

then the forms of religion that spring from concrete contexts may be the manifestation of slave or plantation religion.

A shared imagination is geographically boundless and sets the stage for other manifestations of slave religion. An aspect of slave religion on the plantation of American urban cores is the Five Percent Nation, alternately called The Nation of Gods and Earth, played an essential role in the development of Hip-Hop; they provided some of its religious "street knowledge." The Five Percent Nation is a "Black sect" that emerged from the decay of urbanized Northern contexts that spoke concretely to Hip-Hop culture that would arise from its theological and contextual understandings. Their leader, Clarence 13x, was a manifestation of Du Bois' preacher found in his definition of the religion of slave.

Five Percenter ideology espouses that the population consists of three types of people: eighty-five percent, the ten percent, and the five percent. The belief is that eighty-five percent (85%) of the population is ignorant about the truth of God and believe in a mystery or "spook" god as they wander through life, ravaged by the powers. The ten percent (10%) of the population is the ruling elite who deceive the majority by promoting lies of a mysterious spirit god and benefiting off the hoodwinked population's ignorance; thus, growing rich from their labor (a prime example is African American preachers and their followers). Alas, the remaining five percent (5%) of the population is composed of the poor righteous teachers who know the truth and seek to liberate the rest of the population from their prison of lies into "Freedom, Justice, and Equality."[42] It is interesting to observe that the Five Percenter anthropology identifies a Talented Tenth group of persons though it is not positive. From the street theological perspective, the ten percent are gatekeepers of Black liberation. The way to combat the oppression of the socio-

[42] Michael Muhammad Knight, *The Five Percenters: Islam, Hip-Hop, and the Gods of New York (*London, OneWorld, 2008).

economic system, one of the Five Percenter's most essential responsibilities was their duty to teach the truth about God—that God was and is "the Black Man of Asia" whose proper name is Allah. A.L.L.A.H.—which stands for Arm, Leg, Leg, Arm, and Head. Hence, the Asiatic Black man is understood to be God in the flesh.

This movement gained significant traction among the marginalized Black males that occupied the ghettos and underserved neighborhoods of New York.[43] Clarence 13x's message of the divinity of the neglected Black man resonated existentially and spiritually with droves of young Black males, many remaining disaffected by the civil rights movement. The Five Percenter movement grew so quickly and substantially that it was the largest youth organization in New York City.[44]

Within five years of Father Allah's death, Hip-Hop culture was forming in New York City's African American, and Latino neighborhoods and Five Percenters quickly became part of the new cultural movement of Hip-Hop. The pairing of rap and the Five Percent Nation was perhaps inevitable. The Five Percent Nation was a youth movement that found resonance in Hip-Hop, which was another, parallel, youth-oriented culture. Since the earliest days of Hip-Hop, Five Percenters were regarded as an integral part of Hip-Hop, recognized for their collective ability to keep gatherings peaceful. The Five Percent Nation grew with the culture and the artists that nourished it, and the movement grew with and alongside Hip-Hop.[45]

The religious traditions of the Five Percenters and conjuring, function outside of, but borrow from the economy of Christian images and understandings. These traditions often re-

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Tricia Rose, *Black Noise*, 148-150.

appropriate them for their practical use to ameliorate the current existential condition of its adherents. Those theologically and existentially castigated found solace and creative power in alternative theological frameworks that posited the Black preacher figure as central, although that individual figure diffused into many more iterations. One such integral iteration was the Five Percenters, which were an indubitable modern accompaniment of Hip-Hop and the Hip-Hop MC.

Conjuring the Hip-Hop MC Preacher in Today's Context

Hip-Hop is a sophisticated American folk culture that originated in the 1970s in the New York City borough of the Bronx, predominantly among African Americans, but it is part of a more massive cultural creolization of African diasporic and Latin influences.[46] The context from which Hip-Hop grew may not have foretold that this local, urban culture born of the dusty record crates of the African American musical tradition and the rich and varied theological terrain of the African American religious experience in "the hood," would, within forty years, become global in influence, growing from a largely ignored and unpopular genre to a mainstay in global popular culture. Alton Pollard writes in the foreword to the book, *The Hip-Hop Church*, "Hip-Hop had to be born because, among other reasons, the Black church was no longer being faithful to its calling."[47] Hip-Hop culture has been born, and there are now Holy Hip-Hop MCs, socially conscious MCs, and showman MCs.[48] The question to be answered in this chapter is whether

[46] William Jelani Cobb, *To the Break of Dawn*, 18.

[47] Alton Pollard, "Forward," in Efrem Smith and Phil Jackson, *The Hip-Hop Church: Connecting with the Movement Shaping Our Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005).

[48] Ibid., 156-157.

there is room in the Black church and other venues of religion, for the Hip-Hop MC preacher figure.

To determine if there is room for the Hip-Hop MC preacher figure in the Black church and other venues of religion, we need to know who the Hip-Hop MC is as a part of the broader American culture. Jelani Cobb in *To the Break of Dawn* says, "Every MC raps, but not every rapper is an MC."[49] Cobb's distinction lies in the fact that although both the MC and the rapper need to communicate proficiently and artistically through the vehicle of rap music and the skill of rapping, the rapper is a "general reference to Hip-Hop vocalists."[50] The rapper, by Cobb's understanding, is a function of the Hip-Hop music industry, not necessarily a cultural representative of Hip-Hop. Cobbs suggests that "rappers created in accord with the reigning flavor of the nanosecond," but the MC is "judged by his ability to move units; the measure of the MC is the ability to move crowds."[51]

Although the difference between the rapper and MC may not be as stark as Cobbs believes, speaking in ecclesial terms, one can compare the MC and rapper with the preacher and the pastor. The preacher and a pastor use the art form of the sermon as their vehicle of communication. However, the preacher can offer a message and go home. The pastor resides with the people and is responsible for offering them uplift on more of an on-call basis. The pastor resides with the people as does the Hip-Hop MC. Those who doubt the resonance of the MC need only ask Hip-Hop music adherents to spit out lines from their favorite MCs. These messages remain in the recesses of the minds and lives of Hip-Hop aficionados.

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[49] William Jelani Cobb, *To the Break of Dawn*, 8.

[50] Ibid., 9.

[51] Ibid.

In the book *Prophets of the Hood*, Imani Perry makes an explicit claim about the identity of the MC persona and the Black preacher. The title itself functions as a double entendre (prophet/profit) for "how textuality and orality bear a strained relationship."[52] It could be possible that the inherent tension is racial. The MC is constructing an identity and art form that exists in the constant discursive tension between the fluidity of oral language and the racialized structure of language in the racial imagination of dominant white discourse. This type of impingement is not only inherent to the task of the MC but of the prophet as well. "Hip-Hop artists are often self-proclaimed contemporary prophets, their work constructed of truth-revealing parables and pictures. That truth may be spiritual, cultural, personal, beautiful, and it may resonate with inspiration or tragedy."[53]

The MC persona is an extension of the crude bard aspect of the Du Boisian preacher tradition, telling and embodying harsh and inconvenient truths while also employing aspects of the other dimensions of the priest, doctor, and judge. The MC persona is a manifestation of the preachers of the masses, the proclaimers to the non-Talented Tenth, who live and proclaim amid the diseased social imagination that produces inequity and disenfranchisement. Perry pushes her claim further by extending the reach of the MC persona by stating, "Moreover, the Black Americanism of the music forms part of its international appeal, given the resonant power of Black music and culture globally. Recall the biblical quotation, 'A prophet is without honor in its own country.'"[54] Perry invokes the biblical reference of a prophet receiving no honor in its place

[52] Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood*, 2.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid., 2–3.

of origin to summarize the plight of the MC in the diseased American racial imagination and in the double and triple consciousness-laden minds of the Talented Tenth.

The Hip-Hop MC persona exists as distorted within the social imagination, which motivates Perry's premise that rap music is undervalued. To make it visible, Perry—much like Cobb—pursues rethinking the MCs place in culture through tools of analysis beyond just historical and sociological projects which often reflect Talented Tenth historical narrative framings of respectability.

Perry correlates the MC and the Black preacher by stating, "The MC sees himself as a kind of preacher, a traditional space of authority for Black men, and assumes the kind of intellectualism, exposition, and arrogance accorded that role."[55]

To be an MC preacher figure, moving beyond Talented Tenth sensibilities, is to be a Master of Ceremonies, breaking down the barriers between the sacred and secular and speaking about love and liberation in public and in private. Today's MC (from the urban, concrete sprawling, decaying, death-dealing cities of America), was given "limited vocal carte blanche" when Hip-Hop began. Now, the MC has fully emerged and joined the lineage of her/his ancestors about whom more will be said later.

Homiletician Valerie Bridgeman writes in the book *The Renewed Imagination* that the "next natural step beyond Mitchell's groundbreaking work in preaching is the 'poetic sermonic form.'"[56] Bridgeman believes that the Hip-Hop MC embodies this form best.[57] She knows that the line between the sacred and the secular is blurred in Black proclamation/preaching. This

[55] Ibid., 153.

[56] Valerie Bridgeman and O. Wesley Allen, eds., *The Renewed Homiletic*, 64.

[57] Ibid., 75.

understanding breaks up the societal fallow ground that creates a limiting secular versus religious line of demarcation as a means of blocking the church door for the Hip-Hop preacher figure, the newest preacher of the masses.

Cobb, like Du Bois, traces the preacher figure and its diasporic cultural influences to African American folk preaching, the trickster tradition in the cosmology of the African American preacher ethos, the blues, and other ideological and cultural shifts. He explains how Blacks reshaped the folk preacher figure according to the particular social conditions and political realities in which it exists.[58] It is helpful to reiterate a previous quote from Cobb when he states,

> So straight up: the preacher's central task was to open his mouth and rip it the best way he saw fit as a confirmation of the collective existence. The verbal strategy, the specific catalog trade trickery employed by the preacher, laid down the parameters for his vocal heirs four-hundred years down the line…A host of verbal intermediaries exist between the preacher and the MC. But when you cut through all the *begats*, the preacher and the MC retain their family resemblance… The MC replicates and remixes the craft of preaching, jacking one set of oratory tactics for application in the world of sin and concrete. To cut to the quick, there is more than a set of initials connecting C.L. Franklin to CL Smooth.[59]

The connection between the Hip-Hop Mc and his and her predecessors of four hundred years ago is obvious; the legacy noteworthy and the resemblance challenging to miss. The differences are only highlighted in the remixing of the preaching craft by the Hip-Hop MC "for application in the world of sin and concrete." Frank Thomas in *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching* discuss the remixing through the prism of "realness or the real" and recommends this method for preachers. Thomas defines the real using the words of rapper Tupac Shakur: "[T]he real is to close the gap between representation in words and songs and the actual day-to-day reality that one is living. To be real is to rap about a reality and live the reality that

[58] William Jelani Cobb, *To the Break of Dawn*, 30-31.

[59] Ibid., 16-17, 20.

one is rapping about."[60] Thomas also points out that keeping it real and not putting style before substance is necessary unless one's style wants to go out of style as did disco and the blues.[61]

Thomas then states how appropriating certain features from Hip-Hop can help with preaching. This includes structuring a sermon for maximum impact as MCs do in rap songs,[62] and being honest about the details of life when preaching, even if the details are difficult to discuss and are profane. Even a touch of profanity is preferred to not addressing or missing the people.[63] Preaching should address the emotional truth that supports its beliefs. Thomas writes, "After the logic of the lyrics, the second criterion of the realness of an existentially authentic performance is the emotional truth that supports the lyrics."[64] Thomas likens emotional truth to core beliefs which everyone has. Core beliefs are "the way in which one trusts or fails to trust. It is these beliefs that form the foundation for all our behavior and relationships."[65] Thomas then discusses the "human motivation" that the MC provides. He notes,

> When the MC shapes a rhyme and develops a character in the rhyme, the MC supplies motivation to the characters, and if the motivations are large and broad enough, then they become human and understandable to a broad base of listeners. . . Realness has to do with motivations and the ability of the MC to see and describe motivations that are fundamentally human and therefore common to us all. . . I tell my students that when we push our human experience deep enough, it goes universal. If we are insightful and descriptive enough, often it goes deep enough to become universal, that is, applicable to a broad range of the human family.[66]

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[60] Frank A. Thomas, *Introduction to the Practice*, 113.

[61] Ibid., 114.

[62] Ibid., 117.

[63] Ibid., 119.

[64] Ibid., 121.

[65] Ibid., 122.

[66] Ibid., 125-126.

Finally, Thomas discusses "keeping it real" through the concept of "identification" which "sums up the entire process and effect of using the right details and the right amount of details. For Thomas, in preaching, the "details that the preacher selects to place in the sermon directly affects the amount of identification the preacher creates. . .Too few details and the audience does not have enough to identify with and get on board with the story. . ."[67] Thomas also points out that too many details bog down a sermon. Sermons need the "right details" and a "commitment to getting even the smallest details right."[68]

Having stated how the Hip-Hop MC "keeps it real," next is the nature of his or her culture in which "the real" operates. Legendary Hip-Hop MC and scholar of Hip-Hop culture, KRS-ONE, list the components of Hip-Hop culture as,

> The independent collective consciousness of a specific group of inner-city people. Ever growing and expressed through such elements as Breakin' (dance), Emceein' (rap), Graffiti (aerosol art), Deejayin', Beatboxin', Street Fashion, Street Knowledge, and Street Entrepreneurialism. Discovered by Kool DJ Herc in the Bronx, New York around 1972, and established as a community of peace, love, unity, and having fun by Afrika Bambaataa through the Zulu nation in 1974, Hip-Hop is an independent and unique community, an empowering behavior, and an international culture.[69]

We begin with it being the "independent collective consciousness of a specific group of inner-city people." The culture commonly expresses itself through "Breakin', MCin', Graffiti, Deejayin', Beatboxin', Street fashion, Street Knowledge and Street Entrepreneurialism." These are the cultural pockets in which the Hip-Hop MC lives—dance, poetics/rap, drawing/art, beat-boxin', fashion, street education, and entrepreneurialism. Hip-Hop culture has a communal behavioral ethic that includes peace, love, unity, and fun. Its communal aesthetic is independent

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[67] Ibid., 129-130.

[68] Ibid., 130.

[69] Kris Parker, *Ruminations* (New York: Welcome Rain Publishers, 2003), 179-80.

and unique. It has an attitudinal and impact ethic—it is empowering. And the extensiveness of its reach is international. This is the culture of the Hip-Hop MC preacher figure.

Others Plowing the Ground for the Hip-Hop MC Preacher

The Hip-Hop MC preacher figure has had the ground for her or his acceptance plowed by African griots, conjurers, the plantation preacher figure, the blues, and as of late, the Gospel Rappers. One such example is Chance the Rapper (Chancellor Bennett), who with his third mixtape in 2016, "Coloring Book," garnered three Grammy awards, including Best Rap Album. Along with Chance the Rapper, there are other million-record sellers such as LeCrae (Devaughn Moore), NF (Nathan Feuerstein), Jackie Hill Perry, Jamie Grace, Angie Rose, Trip Lee (William Lee Barefield III), Andy Mineo, and 116 Clique (a southern Hip-Hop group that takes its name from Romans 1:16).

Additionally, the release of Snoop Dogg's (aka Calvin Broadus Jr., aka Snoop Doggy Dog, aka Snoop Lion) 2018, 32-track album "The Bible of Love," gained adherents for the Christian Hip-Hop genre. Snoop Dogg had a long history in Hip-Hop before this release. His first album debuted in 1993. Much of his early music was often profane and misogynistic, and he infamously brought two women on dog leashes to the MTV Video Awards in 2003.

In discussing the gospel album in the New Yorker, Amanda Petrusich reminds us of Snoop's faith background. "He was a member of the Nation of Islam and converted to Rastafarianism."[70] In Snoop's life, we see the shadow of groups such as the Five Percenters.

On the album, Snoop does not attempt to rap on most of the tracks. Instead, he serves as curator for some of the most well-known voices in gospel music. On the song "Words are Few,"

[70] Amanda Petrusich, "The Genuine Vulnerability of Snoop Dogg's Gospel Album," *The New Yorker*, March 2, 2018.

which is the quintessential example of the Hip-Hop world attempting to enter the Church world, Snoop is involved but leaves the gospel singing to B. Slade. This artist, also known as Anthony Williams, came out as a gay male after he rebranded himself; formerly known as the R&B singer Tonex. By including Slade, a gay male, Snoop Dogg sends a message of inclusion in a genre known for its homophobia. Perhaps he also sends a message to the Black Church, which is likewise known for its homophobia.

Interestingly, the video contains older female praise dancers dressed in robes, as opposed to the scantily-clad young women notoriously included in his historically typical Hip-Hop videos. Also seen in the video is a pulpit draped with the familiar red church parament. There is kneeling, hand waving, and when B. Slade hits a high note, Snoop responds, "You took me to church then." There are praise dancers caressing rosaries (a touch of Catholicism), stained glass windows with white saints, the ubiquitous Baptist church fans, burgundy church carpet, burgundy bench seats, and there is wood throughout the church. Conspicuously absent is a new-age plexiglass pulpit surrounded by chairs on a platform or stage where the pulpit used to be.

The singers, true to Hip-Hop cultural attire, are dressed in jeans and wear attention-getting non-collared t-shirts. B. Slade has processed hair and wears weave extensions that are curled. Snoop wears a gold chain around his neck and dons his trademark shades, though his is inside a church. Following are some of the lyrics from the song "Words are Few."

> When my words are few
> Things ain't what they seem
> Feeling like I'm fooling me
> I know God is calling me
> I'm not where I'm s'pposed to be
> Sitting here smoking trees
> When I should be on my knees
> When my words are few

> Why you hounding me (why you hounding me) in the house of the Lord?
> Conscience, guilty
> Ain't in no mood for no parking lot prophecies
> That's why act an addiction, you can't find me
> Oh ain't no smiles, ain't no joke
> No bitches, please
> Ain't no rest for my soul
> til' I come clean (come clean)
> Gon' hear from the Lord if I speak
> So back off and let me eat, let me feast (let me feast).[71]

With all of the typical and recognizable church trappings, Snoop Dogg is still unable to avoid the use of the derogatory word "bitches." Let us hope that he meant it when he said, "I did my share of bringing dark moments, now it's time to bring the light."[72]

Given the popularity of this album, it reached #1 on the Billboard Top Gospel Albums Chart. There will likely be additional offerings from well-known Hip-Hop MCs. Perhaps Gospel Hip-Hop MCs can bring Hip-Hop culture further into the Church. The Black Church, in particular, is a mainstay in the lives of many Hip-Hop fans and provides more openings for Hip-Hop preacher figures seeking to provide redemptive messages for the marginalized.

Historian Albert Raboteau highlights a historical disjuncture within the Du Boisian extensive theorization of the preacher. "The preacher was not the only figure of religious influence in the [slave] quarters. The conjurer was the preacher's chief rival for authority of the supernatural kind."[73] From their African ancestors to Denmark Vesey and other freedom-fighting conjurers, to the Negro preacher of the plantations and hush arbors, to Mitchell's Black preacher

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[71] Snoop Dogg, *Snoop Dogg Presents the Bible of Love* (New York: RCA Inspiration, 2018).

[72] Kelcie Willis, "Snoop Dogg's First Gospel Album goes to No. 1 on Billboard," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* March 29, 2018. Online at https://www.ajc.com/entertainment/snoop-dogg-first-gospel-album-goes-billboard/c9Flw0WJZ3ua5SSWeOn7AK/?icmp=np_inform_variation-test (Accessed May 12, 2018).

[73] Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 237.

of the ghetto, the Hip-Hop MC preacher figure has a robust lineage. In *To the Break of Dawn*, Jelani Cobbs says,

> The MC, despite the grumblings of various antique-aged gripers, is a modern incarnation of the Black verbal artist, whose lineage runs way back to the Black preacher, the bluesman, and the boulevard griot…The pedigree runs deep. It connects that dreadlocked, mic-gripping orator to the tradition of Black verbal gamesmanship that starts with the Black preacher, whom Du Bois reckoned with in *Souls of Black folk* as "the most unique personality created by the Negro on American soil."[74]

Cobb unites the African American preaching tradition to today's MC. Just as the Black slave preacher "emerged as the ancestral Black artist" although he had "limited vocal carte blanche,"[75] it stands to reason that the Hip-Hop MC, continuing the voicing of his preacher ancestors, would fill the void created by the unvoiced needs of the poor in urban America. Otis Moss III writes that Hip-Hop culture was "standing outside the church window looking in because no one raised questions about poverty and deindustrialized urban landscapes. Then, young people became the griot to be able to speak prophetically when preachers said, 'We will not speak.'"[76]

Continuing the list of connections between the preacher figure and the MC, Imani Perry writes in *Prophets of the Hood*,

> The Christian church courses through most African American cultural spaces. References to Christian imagery, to salvation, resurrection, transfiguration, and apocalypse all appear within Hip-Hop. This is art as politics because it locates the status of savior in the minds and bodies of young Black people. Like Five Percenter theology, this stance celebrates the divinity of the individual and revitalizes the notion of people as part of the body of Christ, while at the same time using the power of the image for self-aggrandizement and mysticism.[77]

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[74] William Jelani Cobb, *To the Break of Dawn*, 14.

[75] Ibid., 15.

[76] Otis Moss, III, *Blue Note Preaching*, 55.

[77] Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood*, 150.

Homiletician Teresa Fry Brown, in her book *Weary Throats and New Songs,* posits the person of the "proclaimer" instead of the preacher.[78] Though some would ignore this shift or subsume it under scholarly sleight of hand, there are positive implications for the use of this approach for the Hip-Hop MC preacher figure. First, preaching for Fry Brown goes beyond gendered and religiously constructed understandings of who is a preacher. Women have found a renewed agency in the performative function of preaching through "proclamation." The act of proclamation is not bound to religious dogma but to the preacher's knowledge of the Spirit – to perceive and listen to the Divine. A preacher is a proclaimer because God—not an organized body of church government—ordained that certain words are to go forth. Applying this logic, to the Hip-Hop MC preacher figure, he or she becomes a proclaimer because God ordains him or her to go forth and some of the people later affirm what God has done. Women preachers were once as reviled by the Church[79] as is the Hip-Hop preacher figure by some today.

Divine Similarities

Although Hip-Hop developed in spaces beyond the traditional African American church, the presence of the Divine has always shadowed Hip-Hop music and in some cases taken center stage as in the case of the successful gospel rappers. Further, the presence of the Divine also cannot be missed in some of Hip-Hop's MCs and their adherents. Accordingly, it is not surprising that Hip-Hop influences while influencing the theological tenants of faith communities. How individuals experience God and through what mediums, has always evolved. Hip-Hop music and culture have become one of those mediums. It can speak to the "digital

[78] Teresa L. Fry Brown, *Weary Throats and New Song*, 15-17.

[79] Ibid., 15.

generation" in a way that those of the "analog generation,"[80] who will not make room for digital methods do not.

Noting another similarity between the Black preaching tradition and Hip-Hop culture, Imani Perry points out that "rap music fits within the call-response trope."[81] Call and response is a historical marker of the Christian African American worship experience.[82] Perry delves further into the call-and-response nature of Hip-Hop:

> Classic calls, repeated again and again over the years, include "Everybody say ho!" then answered by the crowd's "Ho," which is repeated three times, each time slightly differently, and concludes with a variation on "Somebody scream!" causing screams to rise from the audience. Some call-and-response patterns offer directions for various parts of the crowd to say different things according to location, gender, place of origin, or some such defining characteristics. Call and response are not limited in Hip-Hop to verbal response but might also manifest itself in body movements. So, when the MC says, "throw your hands in the air," "raise the roof," or "give it up," the motion and visual become part of the composite musical experience…
>
> This kind of artist-audience relationship is rooted in the tradition of functional art in that it stresses community heterogeneity of individuals in the composition.[83]

Other similarities between the Black preacher figure and the Hip-Hop MC are summed up by Smith and Jackson in their book *The Hip-Hop Church*. They indicate that like the Black Preaching tradition, rap has "historically spoken into social movements and struggles." They also say that Black preaching includes "rhythm and song" and is the "originator of the whoop," and Black preaching is full of emotion and passion. Further, like some rap, Black Preaching

[80] Otis Moss, III, *Blue Note Preaching*, 46-50.

[81] Ibid., 34.

[82] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 167-168.

[83] Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood*, 72-73.

"demands a response from the listeners, not only through call and response but also through a commitment to action."[84]

Smith and Johnson also highlight that as there are types of MCs, there are types of preachers. According to them, the types of Black preachers include "whooping preachers, storytelling preachers, prosperity preachers, social justice preachers, and holiness preachers and some Black preachers are a mix of a couple of types, and maybe the same could be said of MCs as well."[85]

Smith and Jackson agree that there is room in the church for the Hip-Hop MC preacher figure when they assert,

> Just as Black preaching is an art form, so is rapping. Used to glorify God, rapping could be just as useful today with urban youth and young adults as is preaching, if not more so. Black preaching is not over. History suggests that Black preaching will endure. Rapping has changed cultural communication and preaching is not an exception.
>
> Let us continue to build bridges between the MC and the preacher. Bridges can be built when two things that have been separate are revealed to have some shared history and values—in the analogy used earlier in this book, some "well" of common ground.[86]

If the Hip-Hop MC preacher figure needs more time to prove her or himself, this time would be well spent by having the Black church find ways to support the preaching of the Hip-Hop MC instead of finding ways to ensure that historical Black preacher figures keep holding the microphone.

Otis Moss III suggest that the four pillars of Hip-Hop provide a "narrative and framing for preaching."[87] He uses the four elements of Hip-Hop, (graffiti, break dancing, DJing, and

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[84] Efrem Smith and Phil Jackson, *The Hip-Hop Church*, 158.

[85] Ibid., 158-159.

[86] Ibid., 160.

rapping) to make the point. First, Moss says that "graffiti is really an aesthetic expression, the appropriation of space" and he uses stained glass as an example.[88] Then he discusses break dancing as being about movement and kinetic energy and suggests that preachers should let their preaching be embodied.[89] Relative to DJing, Moss sees this as just another appropriation of technology, as were pipe organs when they entered the church.[90] Finally, he says that rapping, "which is oral dexterity, rhetorical proficiency. . . is how you spit your lyrics when you communicate."[91]

Not only do the four-pillars of Hip-Hop apply to preaching, and the Hip-Hop MC uses call and response as do many Black preachers, the MC also uses metaphors and similes.[92] Imani Perry notes that metaphor and simile function in three ways:

> First, they fulfill the apparent task of explication. The MC tells the listener about him or herself, or whatever another subject is up for discussion, through comparison with or use of the characteristics of other objects, creatures or entities. Second, they serve as excellent tools for exhortation and proclamation because though the metaphoric naming of great things, the MC proclaims his or her own greatness. … But perhaps most important, metaphor and simile engage the imagination and expand or transform the universe in which the MC dwells. With them, the author creates a space of possibility.[93]

Henry Mitchell, in his book *Celebration and Experience in Preaching*, agrees on the power of metaphors and similes; he lists them as "vehicles of meaning."[94] Mitchell also includes narratives

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[87] Otis Moss, III, *Blue Note Preaching*, 56

[88] Ibid., 56.

[89] Ibid., 56.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood*, 65.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Henry H. Mitchell, *Celebration and Experience in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 38, 45.

among his "vehicles of meaning."[95] Imani Perry also points out another similarity as she writes of Hip-Hop songs, "These formats largely derive from Black oral and literary traditions. The narrative is the classic form."[96] Narrative preaching is also a classic form commonly used by Black folk preachers.[97]

Walls Up, MCs Out

Despite all the similarities between the Black preacher figure and the Hip-Hop MC relative to lineage, and similarities of performance aesthetics, many will undoubtedly avoid the idea that the Hip-Hop MC can be a preacher figure due to the vulgarity, misogyny, and violence found in a great deal of rap music, which is the music of Hip-Hop culture and the domain of the Hip-Hop MC. The population of artists who frequently represent women in this manner is too large to characterize fully here, but N.W.A.'s (1991) "One Less Bitch" serves as a prime example:

> In reality, a fool is one who believes that all women are ladies / A nigga is one who believes that all ladies are bitches / And all bitches are created equal / to me, all bitches are the same / money-hungry, scandalous groupie hoes! /that's always ridin' on a nigga's dick / always in a nigga's pocket /and when a nigga runs outta money, the bitch is gone into the wind / to me, all bitches ain't shit. …[98]

The job of the Hip-Hop MC is not to coddle the comfortable, but to put a finger squarely in the face of the markets, methods, and milieus from which emanate the capitalistic structural elements that devour the poor. However, while doing this, the Hip-Hop MC preacher figure must

[95] Ibid., 38, 40-41.

[96] Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood*, 77.

[97] Henry H. Mitchell, *Celebration and Experience*, 87.

[98] Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal, eds., *That's the Joint*, 598.

not fall into the nihilism that allows for the debasement of Black women in the name of being authentic to the ghetto context. Undoubtedly, too many Black and Brown folk are daily living in torture-chambers. However, MC preachers will not enable their release or their uplift by demeaning women caught in the same torture-chambers, as are too many young men who are engaging in nihilistic behavior.

Interestingly enough, although churches harshly condemn gangster rap MCs for their vulgarity and sexism, and they should, the Black Church has historically treated women as less than equal, stopped them from preaching in pulpits, silenced them, Black-balled them and worse. It appears that the Church somehow believes that it automatically stands on a higher moral plane than Hip-Hop MCs.

Tricia Rose, author of *Black Noise: Rap Music and-Black Culture in Contemporary America,* writes of the value of rap music, the music of the Hip-Hop MC.

> Rap music, like many dominant Black cultural forms before it, resonates for people from vast and diverse backgrounds. The cries of pain, anger, sexual desire, and pleasure that rappers articulate speak to Hip-Hop's vast fan base for different reasons. For some, rappers offer symbolic prowess, a sense of Black energy and creativity in the face of omnipresent oppressive forces; others listen to rap with an ear toward the hidden voices of the oppressed, hoping to understand America's vast, angry, and "unintelligible" population. Some listen to the music's powerful and life-affirming rhythms, its phat beats and growling bass lines, reveling in its energy, seeking strength from its cathartic and electric presence...The drawing power of rap is precisely its musical and narrative commitment to Black youth and cultural resistance, and nothing in rap's commercial position and cross-cultural appeal contradicts this fact.[99]

Rose identifies how the resonance of rap addresses those in pain, as well as those seeking pleasure. Just as with the best of Black preaching, rap allows one to ingest a word that can be life-affirming. Thus, even the darker side of rap has not caused its adherents to dismiss the entire

[99] Tricia Rose, *Black Noise*, 19.

offering though there are places where popular culture, more broadly, and Hip-Hop, individually, require serious critique.

Since its arrival in the New York Bronx in the 1970s, Hip-Hop culture and its music have become international art forms. Hip-Hop music has offered a message that some believe the Black church was no longer offering to those in urban centers of poverty and crime. The Hip-Hop MC emerged and joined a long line (400 years) of bards that began with the African griot, the conjurer, the Plantation Folk preacher, the Talented Tenth preacher, and the folk preacher of the masses.

The MC gained cultural claim by Hip-Hop adherents for "keeping it real." Preaching can be improved if it emulates Hip-Hop's notion of realness by not putting style before substance, structuring sermons for maximum impact, being honest about the details of life, accepting that everyone has core beliefs, and identifying with listeners by using the right details and the right amount of detail.

The MC operates in a culture and is more than just lyrics. The culture is for the inner-city and expressed through Breakdancing, MCing, Graffiti ("aerosol art"), deejaying, street fashion, street knowledge, and street entrepreneurialism. The Five Percenters, begun in New York by Clarence 13x, was one of the early religious communities to impact Hip-Hop, as they gained prominence just as Hip-Hop music ascended in New York.

Due to the Transatlantic slave trade, the religious faith of Blacks has always been polyrelgious mixing of aspects of African traditional religion and American Christianity. One essential practice used in Africa and America is conjuring, which is a form of magic invoked by Blacks for protection and healing. African American history is replete with freedom fighters who mixed conjuring and forms of Christianity for liberation purposes. Thee Smith puts forth the

view that conjure includes ritually patterned behaviors and performative uses of language and symbols, that it conveys a pharmacopeic intent, and that it employs biblical figures issuing in biblical configurations of cultural experience.

Hip-Hop also uses ritually patterned behavior including call and response and performative language and symbols. The primary symbols of Hip-Hop are the ghetto in all its complexity and subversiveness. It harms through its use of nihilistic language and the demeaning of women and members of the gay community. It helps by being subversive as it offers cultural codes to comment on and sometimes challenges culture. Its religious figure of focus is Jesus who was accused of being a criminal and crucified in the most demonic way possible for his culture. Hip-Hop can relate to the suffering of Jesus who preached liberation for outcasts.

The preaching of the Hip-Hop MC preacher figure will contain the gritty language of Hip-Hop, address real-life issues and delivered in a poetic form which could be the next predominant sermonic form for the Black church. Just as Hip-Hop and some homiletical scholars are making room for the Hip-Hop MC preacher figure, Hip-Hop Gospel also has brought more adherents to Hip-Hop. Since Hip-Hop Gospel is inside the church, it may help open the door for preaching inside the Church by the Hip-Hop MC preacher figure.

Today, the Hip-Hop MC has arisen as another influential voice that has become resident in many spaces religious and secular. Although not birthed out of the Church, it is so prevalent that it is now in constant contact with those inside the Church and persons outside the Church who believe in God but avoid structured religion. It has a sound that resonates with that of the Black preacher figure given the similarities of Black preaching and Hip-Hop music. Despite the similarities (use of call and response, use of metaphors, and narratives), the Hip-Hop MC is still receiving the cold shoulder in the Church due to its sometimes-vulgar language, debasement of

women, and bashing of gay persons. The Hip-Hop MC cannot enter the Black church with clean hands. However, the Black church does not have clean hands either, having long mistreated women and kept them out of leadership while using their free labor. It has also dehumanized gay people and continues to do so.

Chapter 5

The Preacher as MC: Foolish Witness to the Talented Tenth Imagination

The image of the Hip-Hop MC can lead to a reimagination of homiletics by its inclusion in the current array of images present in homiletic literature. I have demonstrated that the MC is part of a larger preacher tradition outlined in the literature of W. E. B. Du Bois. The MC is an amalgam of various expressions of African folk sensibilities expressed and embodied through the process of American acculturation. The MC is a manifestation of the preacher of the masses, a conjurer of metaphors showing and telling with vivid and juxtaposing word-images. The dominant image associated with the Black preaching tradition is enmeshed in Talented Tenth sensibilities. Therefore, the MC remains an untapped image for preaching. I contend that adding the MC into an already vibrant array of images currently shaping the homiletic imagination for the preacher that homiletic scholars have contributed will reimagine the field of homiletics and strengthen the quality of what is considered standard Protestant preaching. New images present new options leading to reimagination.

The Significance of Imagination and the Role of Metaphor in Re-imagination

It is essential to understand the imagination as critical to the enterprise of preaching and the identity of the preacher. Noted preacher and scholar of preaching, Barbara Brown Taylor, argues, "The church's central task is an imaginative one. By that, I do not mean a fanciful or fictional task, but one in which the human capacity to imagine—to form mental pictures of the self, the neighbor, the world, the future, to envision new realities—is both engaged and transformed."[1] The institution of the church and the people who are the church assemble in an

[1] Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (Lanham, MD: Cowley Publications, 1993), 41.

experience of the imagination. The purposes of the experience are engagement and transformation of the imagination.

Taylor states that everyone has imagination, but through the process of socialization and notions of reality, many people operate within a dilapidated imagination. Evidence of imaginative dilapidation is how a child's "imagination thrives on the sensual details that their elders have learned to take for granted."[2] Therefore, the imagination or the process for re-imagination is "a process of conversion—or reconversion—a recovery of what we once knew and forgot."[3] This is true for how humans understand themselves. Brown states, "Wittingly or unwittingly, we human beings are driven by our images of ourselves, of other people, of God and the world—images that come to us both from within and without."[4]

The culture and its symbols influence the imagination, especially religious images, and iconography, as these totems invite the imagination to reconsider the certain and question the boundaries of so-called reality. The power to conceive and manifest through words is a form of conjure with a caveat. "Are we really prepared to confess that God is the property of our imaginations? No. But we may be prepared to confess that our imaginations are the property of God."[5] The ability of humans to create a picture in their mind of something that is imperceptible to the tangible world and experience it in such a visceral way to the point where there is a limited distinction between conceptual and actual reality must be renewed and converted. The image of the Talented Tenth, which began as an outlier image, became predominant concerning Black preaching. The human imagination is not static, but in fact, "turns out to be a place where vision

[2] Ibid., 42.

[3] Ibid., 43.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., 46.

is formed and reformed, where human beings encounter an inner reality with the power to transform the other realities of life."[6]

The imagination is a place of hope and challenge. Taylor testifies to the imagination being an unending source of enchantment. The process of imagining or re-imagining allows her "to find the hidden figures, to confront the ordinary in full confidence that would yield the extraordinary if only I looked hard enough if only I kept at it and did not give up."[7] This tenacity of imagination requires a giving up of "the notion that I know what I am looking at when I look at the world."[8] The process of re-imagining is a process of recovery that requires the humility and curiosity to set aside the "reality" of the present world to conceive other "realities" and images. The preacher becomes a metaphor and engages in metaphorical and symbolic play for the effective and holistic development of the congregation. The future of churches and the preachers who serve them connects to the ability of scholars to help conceive new preaching realities by offering lively and pertinent metaphors for the preacher to reimagine the practices of preaching.

The use of metaphor, the juxtaposing of contrasting images for comparison and contrast, is a powerful tool for re-imagining preaching. It is little wonder that thinking of the preacher as a witness, a herald, a shepherd, a midwife, a fool, an MC, or other image employs metaphorical language. Exploring and developing the implications of these metaphors allow for the construction of new homiletic theories. There are significant works that discuss the concept of metaphor—including Janet Soskice's *Metaphors and Religious Language*—which call for a more

[6] Ibid., 49.

[7] Ibid., 52.

[8] Ibid.

expansive rhetorical and literary consideration for metaphor, but for this discussion, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's seminal work *Metaphors We Live By* provides a helpful way to understand metaphor leading to a reimagining of homiletics.[9]

Lakoff and Johnson's significant contribution in *Metaphors* is to recover metaphor from a narrow construal within literature. The authors forward the notion of metaphoric engagement by foregrounding the cognitive and behavioral aspects of metaphor, arguing that metaphor is more than just a figure of speech that places two incredible images in a linguistic relationship by speaking about one thing in a manner that is used to describe or discuss the other. The concept of metaphor often remained unexplored within the realm of language alone, disconnected from its implications about how they operate upon consciousness and how they manifest in the world. Lakoff and Johnson contributed to this dissertation by offering their assertion that, "Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is metaphorical. The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details."[10] Metaphors are not merely functions of language. They order our lives in ways that are conscious and unconscious. Lakoff and Johnson posit that metaphors "structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities… what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor."[11] Language becomes *evidence* of how metaphors *work* instead of merely what metaphors may *say*.

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[9] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980).

[10] Ibid., 3.

[11] Ibid.

Metaphors work as an internal narrative or system of narratives because “human thought processes” are largely metaphorical.[12] The images carry within themselves an internal logic that the consciousness finds relevant for comparison for self-understanding. The expression of a metaphor becomes linguistic evidence of a larger consciousness of the person. "Metaphors as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person's conceptual system."[13] Humans are what they imagine themselves to be, and pictures or images are central to that act. Homiletician Warren Wiersbe also discerns the power of metaphor by saying:

> One of the bridges between the world around us and the world within us is a system of symbols that we call language, and language is metaphorical. It communicates in *pictures*. God's creation is a theater, and the human mind is a picture gallery, and we link the two by using words.[14]

The metaphorical language people use is a function of mediating the internal “picture gallery” with the “theater” of the outside context. Wiersbe comments, “Since preachers want their people to learn, to think, and to have new and maturing experiences, they had better get acquainted with this thing called metaphor.”[15]

For Lakoff and Johnson, humans conceive of themselves in metaphor, and their conceptual framework is image-based, metaphorical. The conceptual metaphor is not just an idea, but "plays a central role in defining everyday realities."[16] Thus, new metaphors must be created to change the dominant approach defining the realities of everyday life. A conceptual

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[12] Ibid., 6.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Warren W. Wiersbe, *Preaching & Teaching with Imagination: The Quest for Biblical Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 41.

[15] Ibid., 42.

[16] Ibid.

metaphor not only provides a visual image but also informs behavior. Metaphors are systemic. "Because the metaphorical concept is systemic, the language we use to talk that aspect of the concept is systemic."[17] A conceptual metaphor has within itself an internal logic of actions and ideas that define it. The use of metaphor provides an expectation of action. Those actions are logical and systematic because of how semantic entailment operates. The constant usage of the same metaphors can lead to habituated action and the calcification of the imagination. The field of homiletics continues to reimagine itself through the process of conjuring images and metaphors for the preacher. Seeking to avoid the staleness that happens to even the sturdiest of images, scholars of preaching continue to offer new conceptual metaphors for the preacher for the reimagining of preaching. In this endeavor, I am no different.

There are benefits and inherent limitations of the use of metaphorical language to understand the role of the preacher. Namely, as much as metaphors illuminate and re-convert the imagination, they are also partial, fleeting, and brittle. No one metaphor encapsulates everything; therefore, an array of metaphors is active in a person's imagination. The strength of a metaphor is in its fragility. A tenuous dependence is built into the structure of a metaphor as it depends upon its relevance to the experience of the person. A fresh metaphor can quicken the mind and enliven the body through an alternate angle of inner vision. A conceptual metaphor, at its best, opens the windows of the imagination and circulates a fresh breeze of embodied possibility. A limitation of metaphors is that they are only as powerful as they are relevant. No single metaphor can encompass the fullness of the human experience. Thus, art quests after fresh ways to encounter the beauty of everyday life. As times change, symbols acquire new and layered meanings, and metaphors require revisiting according to usefulness. As much as metaphors disclose new

[17] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors*, 7.

concepts of self-expression and originality, new metaphors are always present, offering fresh perspectives to trusted imaginings and conceptions.

Homiletics routinely assigns metaphors to the task of preaching and the role of the preacher. In order to highlight how Lakoff and Johnson's understanding of conceptual metaphor functions, Thomas Long's understandings of the herald will be used as an example to demonstrate how the conceptual metaphor operates in self-understanding of the preacher.

The Preacher as Witness

The Witness of Preaching written by Thomas G. Long is a significant homiletic work built around the image of the preacher. Among its many contributions to the field of homiletics, it provides an alternate approach to understanding preaching, with particular emphasis on context, community, and the identity as the ground for faithful preaching through the exploration of conceptual metaphor. Counter to preaching books that focused on methods for sermon development and delivery as foundational understandings, Long calls for preachers to reimagine faithful proclamation by being mindful of themselves as part of a contextual whole, bound to bear a faithful witness *to* the community from the same also coming from the community.

In discussing the subject of *Witness*, Long states, "This is a book about preaching, and we will soon turn our attention to that particular ministry and to the many tasks involved in creating sermons. It would be a mistake, however, to jump immediately into that understanding, as if sermons had no context and preachers had no community.[18] Long points to a "mistake" that may be emblematic of a more profound impediment within the broader social imagination evident in homiletics namely, sermons disconnected from context and preachers disembodied from their

[18] Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 3.

communities. Long builds a homiletic model desirous of reconciling preaching to its contextual responsibilities and the preacher figure as a member of the community.

The concept of community is indispensable in the homiletic theory articulated by Long. What is at stake for Long "is the most urgent matter of how worship leaders, including preachers, understand themselves and their leadership roles in relationship to the whole community of faith."[19] Exploring the worship space in a Christian church as a way for making sense of the preacher figure and its relationship to its community, Long argues, "[r]egardless of where the worship leaders emerge physically and architecturally, theologically they come from *within* the community of faith and not *to* it from the outside."[20] The preacher comes from within the community to exercise leadership in worship. This observation may seem to be simplistic, but there is something deeper to detect. Preachers are only as effective as their connection to the community. Before one desires to preach, the preacher must imagine themselves as part of the community to whom they preach. The community preaches through the preacher because it is an act of the people and the preacher arrives at the preaching "task from the midst of the community."[21]

The sermon and the person of the preacher are both manifestations of a group of people living together. Long articulates context as *somewhere* when he cautions that failing to recognize that "[p]reachers come to the pulpit from *somewhere*, and unless we can name that place, we risk misunderstanding who we are and what we are supposed to be doing."[22] That *somewhere*ness Long stresses is a community of people gathered for worship, engaged in a shared imagination,

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 2.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Thomas G. Long, *Witness of Preaching*, 3.

bound by similar contexts. If a preacher understands himself or herself as disconnected from the community it serves, the likelihood of misunderstanding the preacher's role and the role of preaching increases. Failure to attend to the *somewhereness* or contextual uniqueness of the community derails the effectiveness of even the most helpful preaching insights and tips. The preacher "comes from these people, not to them from the outside."[23]

The preacher figure is authorized and empowered by a community of people to speak to them, for them, and with them. "So when a preacher stands in the pulpit, reads the Scripture, and preaches the sermon, this action is but another form of one common ministry to which the whole world is called."[24] However, this common ministry is a unique witness expressed within a particular context evidenced in how the preacher emerges "fresh from engagements with the community of faith."[25] These engagements are indeed contextual, structured along classification and ideologies with social, political, religious, ethnic, racial, class, and gender implications. Preachers bear a contextually particular witness of a community of faith's journey to be faithful witnesses. "Whether we have been praying, talking, teaching, preparing, or listening, we have been immersed in the lives of these people to whom we speak, which is another way of saying that, symbolically at least we rise from pulpit to pew."[26] Understanding preaching that is relatable to the "pew," the community, and context of the church helps to correct the "mistake" of misdirected and disconnected approaches to preaching.

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., 4.

[25] Ibid., 3.

[26] Ibid.

The preacher can feel “loneliness” or “distance” through the act of preaching.[27] Long diagnoses this feeling in part “because we allow our theology of the church to grow slack” by not embracing a “realistic theology of the church.”[28] The concept of the "pew" is related to a "realistic theology of the church." Long, quotes Craig Dykstra, "A basic reality of congregational life is that we are engaged in socially acceptable (indeed, socially celebrated) patterns of mutual self-destruction."[29] The preacher is not exempt from this disease of imagination. It is the lack of recognition of this which can impact successful preaching. The communal act of worship, of which preaching is part, is a space where one can “discern a congregation pointing beyond itself” to God as revealed in the Scriptures and remembered in the Sacraments.[30] Preaching is an opportunity in worship for the pew to transcends “patterns of mutual self-destruction” while existing within them. Relevant preaching comes from the preacher arising “from the congregation of Christ’s people, both faithful and faithless, of which we are part.”[31]

Building upon an emphasis on the contextual and communal underpinnings of preaching Long seeks to reimagine preaching by exploring metaphorical understandings of the role of the preacher. Long establishes his image of the witness by building onto the "master images" of the herald, storyteller/poet, and pastor. There are many other approaches to preaching images by authors such as *The Preacher and His Models* by James Stalker, *The Preacher’s Portrait* by John Stott, and *Images of Pastoral Care* edited by Robert Dykstra.

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[27] Ibid., 5.

[28] Ibid., 6.

[29] Ibid., 7.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

Rather than developing his notion of an image from an externalized perspective, self-understanding is Long's point of departure exploring and explaining the prominent images that shape homiletic thought because, Long asserts, when preachers are proclaiming in the preaching event, they have an approximation of an image to frame how they see themselves. This metaphor functions as a controlling image—reminiscent of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's understanding of a conceptual metaphor—that informs how a preacher sees herself and their function in the preaching moment.

Self-understanding is a foundational concept. Long situates the role of the preacher as a creation of the people, the congregation. The preacher does not descend from a spaceship into the pulpit not carried in as royalty, but as one among many chosen to speak. The preacher's self-understanding relates to a local worship community, those persons embedded in a broader social context. The preacher's outer image is not created in isolation but affirmed in and through the congregation. Though the outer image is important, how the preacher understands herself or himself is the primary focus. Conceptual metaphor is a way for preachers to try on various mental images, which inform the actions of the preacher. The unique nature of the call to preach places the preacher in a position to envision an image that helps to guide the perspectives and practices of preaching the gospel.

Self-understanding is a significant emphasis for Long and manifests itself in the *event* of preaching. Long describes preaching as an event with the people, in active creation with the congregation. This event, much like a recipe, must have its necessary ingredients: congregation, preacher, sermon, and the presence of Christ. The congregation is the body of believers who gather together for worship and mutual edification. This worshipping body of people has been called out by God to come together in worship. During this event, the preacher arises from the

people and speaks to the people as one of them on behalf of God. This dual residency among but outside of the people creates a liminal space of identity. Occupying a liminal space requires, for many people, an image or label on which to apply a fixed meaning in a transient reality. Long's argument couched in a spatial understanding of pulpit and authority sets the scene for the mounting pressure and dis-positional nature and context for preaching. The sermon is not a piece of paper with notes or a style of delivery, more aptly, it is an event of mutual speaking and listening, allowing oneself to be part of a whole while making personal meaning. Lastly, Christian proclamation must evoke and invoke the presence of Christ. Christ must be present for preaching to go forth. Christ's power provides spaces for transformation. Simply stated, the preacher's mental picture informs ministry praxis and preaching.

Witness concerns itself with the image or controlling metaphor of the preacher. The person of the preacher is an active player on the stage of life, sitting in the audience as a member but also acting on the stage of culture. Long, in his construction of the preacher image, examines his proposed image for the preacher in three ways: how the image works to create self-understanding, now the image provides a theological framework for preaching, and how the image guides in the craft of the sermon. I will explore how Long engages these areas from a contribution and caution perspective while observing his proposed image on historical and theological grounds.

Long presents three dominant images called master metaphors: the herald, the pastor, and the storyteller. The herald model of preaching reflected the times that conceived it — finding its roots in Victorian modes of rhetorical communication, preaching functioned from a space of authority. Beyond cultural factors, Karl Barth's neo-orthodoxy championed the herald as an outgrowth of his larger dialectical theological framework. God sources the act of preaching

through the mouth of the herald. The herald has little concern for the stylistic concerns that other metaphors accentuate because speaking for God is first and rhetorical flare understood to be a sign of vanity. Because preaching is heralding, the focus is the message and not the talent of the messenger. The message and the power invested into the herald by a higher power not only authenticates the herald's message but relegates the herald's personality as subordinate to the message and the causal power for the utterance. This image, warns Long, has the propensity to disregard practical elements of communication, aesthetics, and culture as superfluous and tangential.

The image of the pastor is a counterweight to the previous image of the herald. The herald focuses on proclaiming for God; the pastor is more attentive to how the sermon is heard and received. The pastoral preacher must know the people in order to function effectively. Her concern for the parishioner, even preaching in a manner that functioned as therapeutic, all demonstrated a preaching image that resisted an insensitive and dogmatic herald approach. The pastoral approach challenges more authoritarian modes of communication by foregrounding the listening audience and seeking preach in resonant ways. A weakness of this approach sprouts throughout popular culture, preaching that counsels and coaches but lacks the claims to divine authority inherent in the herald metaphor.

Preaching is understood as art when the preacher is a storyteller. The poetic nature of preaching seemed to be found wanting in the previous master metaphors. From the storyteller perspective, preaching is folk art. The artistic opportunities for homiletic expansion increased when a new metaphor appears amongst trusted homiletic images. The rise of the understandings of practical theology as folk art and the renewed virtuosity of narrative theology formed a theological and homiletic foundation for the metaphor of poet to flourish. This figure emphasized

the crafting of stories and plots as sermonic practice. This figure, like the pastor, strives to be connected and relevant to the needs and realities of the people.

Offering a generous gift to the conversation of preaching images, Long offers the preacher as a witness. Though this metaphor may seem new, the metaphor is rooted in the biblical text. The witness has a layered meaning because it is not only a biblical term but also a legal term. The legal and biblical framing of witness opens new ways to imagine the discursive acts of preaching or witness-bearing.

Bearing witness, according to Long, offers practical benefits. Primarily, bearing witness alters claims of *authority*. The herald claimed that she spoke for God from a position—the pulpit—that granted authority. Bearing witness does not claim authority by an externalized power source. The witness is authoritative because of the democratic nature of having a story to share. The power of the preacher is located within the authority the congregation grants for proclamation. The preacher's authority for proclamation emanates from encounters with the text. The preacher preaches on behalf of the people. The desire to earnestly testify to what they have seen and heard motivates faithful proclamation. Authority is granted by the people for the preacher to bear a faithful witness amongst the assembled. Secondly, the witness has a new *approach,* not acting as a Lone Ranger, but physically and imaginatively embedded in the life of the community. This image goes to the text with a community of people and beyond. All preachers are not tucked in the dark corners of libraries preparing for a sermon. Preachers who bear witness do so amongst the people, even in going to the text in sermonic preparation. Thirdly, the preacher should give *attention* to the form of communication. The witness-bearing expands genres and forms of preaching stressing the need for truth to be articulated in its form—usually narrative but in a wide array of methods and style. Fourth, the task of witness-bearing

requires personal *investment.* Witnesses are asked to testify because of their particular experience, therefore, cannot neutral. This lack of neutrality is requisite for bearing witness because it is a fully embodied activity, possibly costing one's life. Lastly, the witness image connects to the worship life of a community. Preaching is part of a great theological reenactment, witnessing and facilitating the witness of the church congregation. The preacher bears witness to the reality and hope present in this struggle in the presence of the assembled.

The understanding of witness as a means for sermon development remains a salient issue. The witness metaphor moves from theoretical understandings of preaching to the practical craft of sermon development. This particular shift is not mundane. The witness must testify, utilizing the form most natural and responsive to the biblical text. The entire text is not narrative, but much of it is in story form. The narrative aspect of sermon form and development are not overlooked but advocated in several theories. The narrative impulse can be seen in the shape of the narrative in Eugene Lowry's "Lowery loop," or plotting the biblical narrative in another sermonic aspect. Witnesses must be able to communicate their truth in a form that maximizes the effectiveness of narrative while minimizing places of cognitive dissonance. The witness provides ways of exploration and self-expression that may spark the creative flame of advanced study of how sermons can incorporate a witness motif.

The evaluation of the historical and theological grounds of the metaphor of witness produce results beyond mere pro and con understandings. The historical and theological aspects of the metaphor witness are worth consideration. The historic grounds of the image of the witness, when plugged into larger thematic framings of homiletics, help to clarify more significant trends.

The historical understanding of the metaphor witness emerges during the 1980s. Other images began to surface around that time that point towards a shift in preaching. The herald image peaked and began to lose momentum entering the 1900s. If understood in chronological order, the herald produced the pastoral image. The storyteller is a linguistically attuned pastoral image, but the witness must be present as a functional image that encourages the development of preaching identities. In short, the history of images of the preacher needed to evolve, and the witness is a significant positive outcome of the historical trajectory of controlling metaphors in preaching.

The enduring quality of *The Witness of Preaching* is made manifest in how Long provides fresh wind to the metaphorical understandings of the role of the preacher. He recaps the three master metaphors while offering a fourth trusted metaphor—the witness. This witness is a metaphor of substantial theological weight, taking great care to discuss how this image of the preacher works to create a self-understanding while attending to the theological frame for understanding the nature of preaching and how this image guides the craft of sermon creation.

L. Roger Owen offers a critique of Long's witness metaphor in an article in *The Christian Century* commemorating *The Witness of Preaching*'s 30th anniversary.[32] Owen recognizes *The Witness of Preaching* as a seminal text in homiletics, acknowledging its popularity and usage in homiletic classrooms, including his. Owen notes how aspects of *Witness* have been updated through its three editions noting the inclusion of women's voices in the text and footnotes and expanding the cultural spaces where the preacher as a witness is observable. The text remains influential to Owens teaching even as his growing awareness of contextual realities expanded.

[32]L. Roger Owen, "The Witness of Preaching after three decades," *The Christian Century*, December 6, 2017. Online at https://www.christiancentury.org/review/books/tom-long-witness-preaching-after-three-decades?reload=1535197517834.

Owen argues that Long's approach does not represent the changing cultural realities although Long does engage the work of Cleophus LaRue, the African American homiletician. Interestingly, Owen adds *Celebration and Experience in Preaching* by Henry Mitchell in response to a diversifying student population. Owen reports that one of his students, an African American, commented at the end of the class critiquing the lack of diversity within the *Witness* text and limitation within the witness approach. Owen offers the same criticism and also offers a possible solution. Owen writes:

> Even with the most recent revisions, it would be a stretch to say that the third edition of *The Witness of Preaching* engages African American homiletics. The authors whose works receive critical discussion remain the same: Fred Craddock, Eugene Lowry, Paul Scott Wilson, and David Buttrick—all white men. One might reasonably expect that homileticians like Henry Mitchell, Samuel DeWitt Proctor, Teresa Fry Brown, Gardner Taylor, and James Earl Massey would also be considered necessary conversation partners. I wonder if the student mentioned above would see in this third edition the preaching tradition that shaped him affirmed as something worth learning from.[33]

Two observations come to mind reflecting upon Owen's suggestion. Before Owen added Mitchell to his course syllabus, he taught preaching indebted to the same sources he faults Long for leaning on. The names of the African American homileticians Owen cites produced works before and after *Witness*. Therefore, those sources were also available to Owen as well, yet he did not incorporate them until recently. His critique of Long's lack of engagement with African American preaching in the text is a valid critique, but Owen must also recognize his complicity in the matter.

Owen's position of intensified appreciation is an indicator of the state of homiletics. There is a general underappreciation of African American homiletics, particularly in the syllabi of homiletics professors. As more white homileticians begin to rethink homiletics beyond the

[33] Ibid.

dominant sphere, it is right to ask questions of the seminal texts that shape the curriculum. While asking Long to offer a more expansive tent in *Witness*, white homiletics must also confront the fact that no one preaching text will provide a shorthand for an entire tradition. Owen's awareness of what is missing in homiletics requires more than the revision of one text. What he is calling for is a rethinking of teaching homiletics that takes the African American perspective seriously. What Owen is calling for in terms of may not be an expansion of Long's understanding of Witness but, in fact, an entirely new work with Long's witness image as its base. This dissertation is such a work.

Second, Owen offers a Talented Tenth answer to help remedy homiletics. I argue that this is a helpful way to begin the conversation about the tradition of African American preacher and preacher figure because these works are available and accessible. However, these authors or another other cannot speak for the whole of the tradition. Owen's reliance on Mitchell as the voice of Black preaching speaks to the need for more scholars of African American preaching and more resources for scholars. If Owen's response is an indicator of broader homiletic thought, the influence of Talented Tenth thought continues to shape not only the preacher's self-understanding but also shape the teaching of homiletics. White and Black homileticians are engaged in a shared Talented Tenth imagination whereby white academic preaching seeks to address its weaknesses through engagement with its African American counterpart, with many folk expressions and perspectives absent. The preacher of the masses, notably the MC, can be a way to rethink the preaching and teaching of preaching.

The image of witness is foundational, one where the MC finds particular resonance. The MC is a particular type of communally-empowered, contextually-cultivated witness. The MC is a witness from the vantage point of the marginalized, disenfranchised, and rugged aspects of the

American culture. The MC bears witness about the injustices, corruption, and evil that are ever present while attesting to the struggle, joy, love, and hope of everyday people. The MC is a witness-bearing wordsmith that mix, mingle, harmonize, and raps these aspects of life, showing and telling people the truth with vivid metaphors and images.

Because no image or metaphor is complete in and of itself, I argue that *Witness* and the image it offers are foundational as much as they are fragile. Long responds to Owen's critiques by acknowledging that the book focuses on the interior design of sermons neglecting broader aspects of the image and its homiletic implications.[34] Long also addressed the lack of engagement with non-white sources, through suggesting a well-rounded plate of resources in the syllabus. After issuing three editions of one of the most influential books on preaching ever, Long states:

> It is a beginner's textbook about the basic building blocks of preaching. Sometimes worthy conversation partners are omitted simply because they're talking about something else. But I confess that some potentially helpful contributions from other scholars are missing from *Witness* surely because of the limits of my vision and capacities. I stand where I stand, and alas, I cannot see all I wish I could see from that place.[35]

Is it an unfair critique to expect *Witness* to function as an encyclopedia of preaching or a compendium of different styles? Maybe. Inherent in the structure of a metaphor is its ability to reveal new possibilities and conceal other realities. As an African American homiletician, it is encouraging to see white colleagues advocate for more voices in preaching literature and courses about preaching. Hopefully, professors will heed Long's advice and offer a more comprehensive preaching course but rethink the role of preaching in theological education.

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[34] Thomas G. Long, "The focus and function of *The Witness of Preaching*," *The Christian Century*, December 6, 2017. Online at https://www.christiancentury.org/article/books/focus-and-function-witness-preaching.

[35] Ibid.

The power of the witness image is its ability to generate new possibilities by its capacity for people to imagine the preacher afresh. In that self-understanding, other images are visible in conversation with the witness image and the *Witness* text. Regarding the future of the text and the image it made popular, Long reflects:

> *The Witness of Preaching* is in its third edition, and I suspect that will be the last. At my age, I am much more likely myself to be revised than the book is. The Academy of Homiletics has grown much larger, and when I look out and see the bright, dedicated, and very creative younger scholars populating the discipline, I rest easy.[36]

The preacher as MC is an image that seeks to engage the strengths of the Witness of Preaching text and engage the witness image towards situating the MC as a modern prophetic witness, a preacher of the masses.

The MC as Bearer of Foolish Witness

The Talented Tenth imagination may concede that the MC is a witness. The MC raps in vivid detail the realities of the human condition of a poor and oppressed people. Often the means of dressing in clothes, jewelry, and other items that seem foolish to the white and Black middle-class sensibilities of the popular culture. At other times the MC as witness incurs opposition because the MC's language or content is considered foolish or obscene, needing to be confronted and quelled. Ebony Utley, a scholar, writing on Hip-Hop culture, reflections on instances where the MC, operating in ways foolish to the mainstream, were confronted. Utley states:

> Hip-Hop has haters. In the early 1990s, critics like C. Delores Tucker, Tipper Gore, and the Reverend Calvin O. Butts III publicly condemned rap music and advocated for censorship. When 2 Live Crew's *As Nasty As They Wanna Be* (1989) was deemed obscene by a circuit court ruling. The police arrested a store clerk for selling the album and also arrested group members for performing songs from the album. In 1990, a U.S. Court of Appeals overturned the ruling and recognized 2 Live Crew's First Amendment rights. Ice

[36] Ibid.

> T, on the other hand, acquiesced to his critics and pulled "Cop Killer" from his 1992 Body Count album because of controversial rap lyrics attracted national attention, including disdain from then-president George H. W. Bush.[37]

The Hip-Hop group 2 Live Crew and MC Ice-T were culturally criticized and legally punished because of the words in their songs, with condemnation culminating at the highest levels of power. Whether one agrees with the messages or the artists, it is interesting to note how each level of power operated to keep the MC from bearing a witness that is foolish to the Establishment.

Could the foolish nature of witness attributed to the MC be a reason that when assessing "the need to restore prophetic preaching to a place of urgency in the life of American church," homiletical scholar Marvin McMickle asked a relevant question, which also operates as the title of his book, *Where Have All the Prophets Gone*?[38] His effort to "identify forces and false practices that have obscured or replaced prophetic preaching in so many churches" drives his desire to empower those who are doing the work while recruiting others to "rise above topics that seem so popular these days, and lay claim to the prophetic tradition of the Bible.[39] "Prophetic preaching," for McMickle, "shifts the focus of a congregation from what is happening to them as a local church to what is happening to them as part of society," particularly the "least of these."[40]

The hermeneutic McMickle calls for, one with a prophetic orientation operates in other spaces beyond the Black Church or traditional pulpits. The MC embodies these sensibilities as a

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[37] Ebony A. Utley, *Rap and Religion: Understanding the Gangsta's God* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2012), 70.

[38] Marvin A. McMickle, *Where Have All the Prophets Gone? Reclaiming Prophetic Preaching in America*, (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006), vii.

[39] Ibid., viii.

[40] Ibid., 3.

starting place for expression and witness-bearing. Whereas McMickle asks a question pointed towards the homiletic community, the answer may be closer and more foolish than first anticipated.

There seems to be a connection between being a witness and being a fool, the act of bearing a foolish witness. This connection becomes clear when exploring the metaphor of fool in relationship to the preacher. In the book *Preaching Fools: The Gospel of Rhetoric and Folly*, Charles L. Campbell and Johan H. Cilliers focus on the subversive aspects of this figure of the fool, providing historical and theological context. I believe the MC, a witness who appears foolish to Talented Tenth sensibilities, provides an entry point into preaching practices that have the capacity for breathing afresh into the tradition and mobilizing atomic clusters of transformation and connecting them for increased existential change—all ultimately flowing from a reconnected spirituality. In order for the Talented Tenth preaching imagination to expand, it must become more "foolish" in its approach, disturbing the artificial stratification that separates the Talented Tenth from the masses involves bearing a witness that engages in the "foolish" elements that preachers of the masses understood as essential to success and survival.

The title of the first chapter, "Folly at the Heart of Preaching," succinctly states the thesis of Campbell and Cilliers' work. From a Pauline perspective, they argue that "[t]he gospel is foolishness. Preaching is folly. The preacher is a fool. Paul's words have haunted us over the past few years. They have haunted us as we teach preaching amid a world shaped by almost overwhelming powers of domination and violence and death."[41] Campbell and Cilliers argue that preaching is indeed a foolish affair, but that is in line with the more considerable foolishness of the cross. "The cross was an interruption that recalled the disruptive way of Jesus, who in love

[41] Charles L. Campbell and Johan Cilliers, *Preaching Fools: The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly* (Waco: Baylor University Press).

challenged the powers of domination and violence and death, even though it cost him his life."[42] In a comedic irony, the instrument of the cross which was an instrument of Roman capital punishment becomes a "vulgar joke" itself. "For crucifixion intentionally served a grotesque parody of inappropriate breach of hierarchy by those, such as rebellious slaves, who would not stay in their place."[43] The cross became a symbol of hope and redemption.

The theology of preaching is not only based on Pauline sources. Jesus engages in folly, playing the role of a fool to the Roman government and Jewish authorities. The crucifixion context displays Jesus operating within a fool motif. The crucifixion process is a "kind of mock kingship."[44] The process of crucifixion was a physical punishment combined with the ridicule of others. "The mocking crowd enacted the gallows humor; they were part of the public performance. The soldiers and the crowds all participated in the course and vulgar joke."[45] Leading up to the actual crucifixion, "Jesus anticipates this double irony of the cross with his parody of kingship at the time of triumphal entry into Jerusalem.[46] The Jesus of Christianity in many ways rejected the Talented Tenth sensibilities of his day by becoming the joke himself. By embodying the contradiction between the Kingdom of Heaven and Rome's empire on earth, Jesus navigates and negotiates power through the ability to be considered foolish.

Foolishness is often the last attribute with which the Talented Tenth would want to be associated. It is precisely this attribute that white supremacist ideologies use to label African Americans. Talented Tenth sensibilities shunned forms of behavior, communication, and culture

[42] Ibid., 19.

[43] Ibid., 23.

[44] Ibid., 24.

[45] Ibid., 24.

[46] Ibid., 25.

deemed too much like the "foolish" masses; therefore, avoiding slang talk was avoided. Outward appearance was to be neat and clean. An appreciation of was middle-class white cultural expressions was encouraged. The deep formation of African American ministers in Talented Tenth sensibilities may have made the gospel "too serious." In many respects, the job of theological education is to make professional preachers. The process of professionalization implicit in the Talented Tenth image of the preacher, I argue, can flatten the theological nuance of the biblical text. This folly obscures how Jesus, the cross, the Apostle Paul, and the entire enterprise of preaching is a foolish endeavor.

Hip-Hop culture seems to embrace the comedic and foolish elements of Jesus. Writing about "why do rappers include God in their raps about murder, misogyny, and mayhem," in her book *Rap and Religion: Understanding the Gangsta's God*, Ebony Utley recasts Jesus' life according to a perspective more faithful to the Hip-Hop culture.[47] Utley states,

> Jesus was gangsta. Jesus fraternized with sexually licentious women, cavorted with sinners, worked on the Sabbath, had a temper, used profane language with religious people, praised faithfulness over stilted forms of religious piety, and honored God more than the government. Gangstas respect Jesus because they see the parallels between his life and theirs. Consider Jesus' life story. His mother was homeless at the time of his birth. He was reared by a stepfather whose family tree was filled with some unscrupulous characters guilty of murder, incest, and rape. Jesus grew up as a poor minority terrorized by state-sanctioned oppression. As a single male in his late 20s/early 30s, Jesus and his posse made public appearances at parties where he appreciated people's affinity for wine. Jesus was self-taught and unemployed but went about the business of dropping knowledge wherever he could get an audience. He was betrayed by one of his boys and couldn't get a fair trial and was executed. The Jesus story is the gangsta's story.[48]

For some, comparing Jesus to a type of gangsta motif borders on sacrilege. The truth of the depiction remains salient. Jesus was not born into nor ever attained the level of Talented Tenth

[47] Ebony A. Utley, *Rap and Religion*, 7.

[48] Ibid., 49.

status in his day. His background and lineage attest to a complicated family tree and a far-from-normal birth scenario. MCs including those who embody a gangsta image within the persona, can strip away some of the Christological artifices and find deep semblance with Jesus of Nazareth.

The image of MC from a theological aspect is rooted in the MC nature of Christ. I believe that Jesus functioned as an MC in first century Palestine. Hip-Hop MC stic.man's definition of the MC is similar to the definition of the preacher given by Du Bois. The MC is a poet, chief, judge, prophet, comedian, medicine man, and mediator. These multifaceted understandings are functions of the utility this figure must have exhibited to organize and engage the masses. This figure told stories that critiqued social and political structures, using metaphors to counter the fallen powers subversively. The oppressed context of inner-city America correlates with Jesus' earthly ministry. Utley argues that Jesus was a gangsta. Her definition is not a reference a murderous, thuggish pathology; instead, her context for gangsta is a person marginalized by the powers which engage them.

This perspective is not inconsistent with current manifestations of gangsta culture. This cultural and theological relatively finds utterance when Utley says Jesus was friendly to shunned women, kept the company of sinners, worked on the Sabbath, had a temper, used profane language with religious people, praised faithfulness over stilted forms of religious piety, and honored God more than the government. Jesus is an MC because he employs the linguistic fragments and metaphors of the marginalized to entertain, delight, empower and challenge the powers. Jesus came to the marginalized and engaged in the most fragile form of change—language—to shift the culture. Because Jesus functioned as an MC, occupying decentralized

spaces, spinning rhetorical metaphors that unsettled the secular and religious faculties of the culture, MCs often find resonance with Jesus, down to the persecution and crucifixion.

Jesus fooled the world as an MC. He transgressed boundaries and placed himself in position to be objectified, laughed at in life and during his death. Jesus, like many fools, is not bound by space or time. Jesus was continually traveling, transgressing boundaries, and transforming minds, which can be considered the work of the fool because it seems laughable that God would enter the world as a joke, a spectacle of oppression instead of the Caesar, the titular head of earthly authority.

The MC's self-understanding is multifaceted. The MC is a fool to the powers that are not afraid of self-revelation, critique, and liminal spaces. Those who live out the image of the fool often know that they are the fools, functioning in intellectual and cultural spaces in which they are always the invited outsiders. It is conceivable to imagine that Hip-Hop culture takes the material symbols of success and poverty and engages them in ways that are non-normative, placing them in a foolish posture. The MC is the culture's fool through the re-appropriation of cultural symbols, images, and metaphors of success and struggles in ways that critique and also celebrate elements of achievement. The fool embodies the imaginative dissonance of the dominant culture through the manipulation of images and expectations. Thus, the process of reimagination is evident.

The MC's self-understanding is also grounded in the combination of the sacred and secular blending of the figure. The fool "melts the solidity of the world" because it functions as a mirror, reflecting the absurdity of the world to itself.[49] Campbell and Cilliers further explain the concept of "melting the solidity of the world" by saying:

[49] Campbell and Cilliers, *Preaching Fools*, 102.

> For fools do not conclude anything: they are thoroughly inconclusive figures. They melt the solidity of the world, interrupting conventions, myths, rationalities—and conclusions—written in stone. Fools instigate and sustain liminality, unsettling our idolatrous iron theologies and our circled-wagon quests for security. They keep us on the move in the space between form and reform, fragment and figure, being and becoming. They turn boundaries into horizons and repeatedly seek to change our perspective.[50]

MCs, like the fool, operate best when they help people imagine differently, changing outcomes and complicating certainties. The fool is active in approaching the world in ways that invite and evoke responses that reveal the imaginations of others, allowing the possibility for reflection and transformation. Campbell and Cilliers argue that "the pulpit is not spared, for fools also interrupt and unsettle preaching. . . Like fools, the gospel interrupts all conclusions and creates a liminal space where new perspectives are possible. And in that space, preacher, and congregation alike learn to look and dare to speak."[51] The preacher's self-understanding creates a space, a moment in time, where people can enter into new possibilities through the foolishness of their everyday selves.

Self-understanding for the MC image is grounded in a complicated Christology. Utley argues for the similarity of the experiences of Jesus of Nazareth and biographical sketch of "the average rapper." She states:

> Both Jesus and the average rapper experienced state-sanctioned surveillance and subjugation. As the God "out there" sent "down here," Jesus is the crucial piece that bridges God and humanity. Jesus' physical experience of walking the earth and his psychological experience of being persecuted intimately entangles him with human beings. Although the Jesus of Christianity is a God that resides in heaven, the gangsta's Jesus tangible. Jesus down here serves multiple purposes for the gangsta. Jesus is sometimes a companion. Other times gangstas appropriate Jesus's crucifixion to depict suffering visually. Furthermore, when rappers wear the iconic "Jesus piece," lavish jewelry emblazoned with an image of Jesus's face, Jesus becomes the puzzle piece that connects Christianity and capitalism.

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[50] Ibid., 102.

[51] Ibid., 102.

> Rappers acknowledge these pieces of Jesus by focusing on God "down here" as a companion, a crucified figure, and a commodity.[52]

The "average rapper type" is a helpful way to gain an understanding of how these images overlap. The MC is the bearer of a foolish witness to Talented Tenth sensibilities because the MC calls the Talented Tenth understanding into question in an embodied form. The MC bears witness to a Jesus that is earth-bound and human, subject to a violent and corrupt political structure. Jesus of Nazareth may be understood by the masses today in the same way he understood the masses of his day being a revolutionary and a teacher. The scholarly theological aspects of Christology are, if not shunned, at least not as important as a more intimate and functioned relationship with Jesus of Nazareth mediated through understanding Jesus as a companion, a crucified figure, and a commodity.

Jesus as a companion is not a new concept, but for those trapped in America's urban centers, this image provides socio-political and geographic specificity for claims of God's omnipresence. Jesus of Nazareth is not confined to the church building; in fact, the gangsta's Jesus is found exclusively outside the church building. The crucified Jesus has appeal for Hip-Hop because "Jesus involves himself in the human experience but cannot miraculously alter it even to save his own life. The rules on earth govern his behavior. The crucified Jesus, however, has greater power because he embodies the potential to resist death."[53] Jesus embodied an ethic of symbolic, rhetorical, and physical resistance to the powers of his day. Without wealth and earthly power, Jesus would seem foolish. Still, yet, his wisdom displayed a way to make a change indeed, resist the forces of death through how one lives their life. The commodified Jesus is symbolized and materialized by a jewelry-encrusted charm bearing his face or the cross.

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[52] Ebony A. Utley, *Rap and Religion*, 50.

[53] Ibid., 57.

Utley argues that for the MC the Jesus piece "symbolizes a non-judgmental, compassionate figure who promises a better (fiscal) future in the midst of poverty," is a "material item that bridges God's riches 'out there' in the new heaven with conspicuous consumption 'down here,'" and makes tangible "[t]he relationship to rappers, their Jesus pieces, and capitalism is indeed complex because it is inextricably linked to slavery."[54] The commodified aspects of Jesus for Hip-Hop becomes a symbol of foolishness, offering Jesus and the cross in ways grotesque to the Talented Tenth imagination. The overlap is also present. Depending upon denomination or tradition, some pastors, bishops, and other religious leaders also wear religious iconography studded with jewels. Maybe the grotesqueness of the MC's religious icons points back to how the Christian church styles itself amidst its complicated relationship with capitalism. The MC may be an embodied Jesus piece of the culture, provoking everyone to look at Jesus afresh by being construed as foolish by Talented Tenth sensibilities.

The MC often looks like a fool when the MC engages in a contest with governmental and social powers, but this contention has wrought some nourishing fruit for social and cultural transformation. The concept of aesthetic is understood to be a zeal for the beautiful. The MC must always be mindful of aesthetics, especially if she desires to do what MC's do, which is commonly called "Moving the Crowd." Therefore, it is essential to explore how the metaphor of MC will aid in sermon development, particularly in contextual awareness.

In the book *The Mis-Education of the Negro,* African American scholar Carter G. Woodson criticizes the strategies and methods utilized to inculcate Blacks into American society via the educational system. Woodson lamented the condition of theological education for African Americans. He notes, "Yet those who see how they have failed because of these things

[54] Ibid., 65-66.

nevertheless object to the unification of the churches as taught by Jesus of Nazareth, whom they have all ceased to follow because of thumb-worn books of misguided Americans and Europeans."[55] Woodson noticed that this deficiency in how students preached. Recalling an experience where an observer saw a "Negro college graduate, trying to preach to a church of the masses," the preacher,

> [r]eferred to all the great men in the history of a certain country to show how religious they were, whether they were or not. When he undertook to establish the Christian character of Napoleon, however, several felt like leaving in disgust. The climax of the service was a prayer by another "mis-educated" Negro who devoted most of the time to thanking God for Cicero and Demosthenes. Here, then, was a case of the religion of the pagan handed down by the enslaver and segregationist to the Negro.[56]

The lack of contextual awareness exhibited by the preacher and the person who prayed, Woodson argues, is a result of having their imaginations shaped in ways that prized European knowledge over their folk knowledge causing them to not connect with the congregation.

Woodson notes another example where a "mis-educated" Negro preached a "scholarly" sermon titled "The Humiliation of the Incarnation" citing heavily the theologian John Knox. The sermon did not connect with the audience. Woodson's analysis proves descriptive.

> The minister attended a school of theology. Unfortunately, from Woodson's perspective, the preacher merely memorized theological words and phrases that ultimately meant little to the preacher and almost nothing to a majority of the congregation. The school followed the traditional course for ministers, devoting most of the time the "fine art" of theological education. He had given attention to polytheism, monotheism, and the doctrine of the Trinity. He had also studied the philosophical basis of the Caucasian dogma, the elements of that theology, and the schism by which fanatics made religion a football and multiplied wars only to moisten the soil of Europe with the blood of unoffending men.[57]

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[55] Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-education of the Negro*, 64.

[56] Ibid., 64-65.

[57] Ibid., 65-66.

Theological education shaped the preaching imagination in a decidedly European manner. Preaching became a space where white theology and European theologians would validate one's education, while that training would often prove to be ill-fitted for preaching to the masses. The broader context for European wars was unknown to the Negro preachers. Therefore, European theology would not make much sense or be of immediate help to the realities of oppressed African Americans. The education, or according to Woodson, "mis-education" preachers received in theological school in the 1920s and 1930s has not changed much. The living contextual realities of the present remain overemphasis in the archaic, the ancient, and the European. Woodson observed:

> This minister had given no attention to the religious background of the Negroes to whom he was trying to preach. He knew nothing of their spiritual endowment and their religious experience as influenced by their traditions and environment in which the religion of the Negro has developed and expressed itself. He did not seem to know anything about their present situation. These honest people, therefore, knew nothing additional when he had finished his discourse. As one communicant pointed out, their wants were not supplied, and they wondered where they might go to hear a word which had some bearing upon the life which they had to live.[58]

Woodson argues that theological education did not train Negro preachers to be relevant to their people. In fact, "mis-education" made this type of preacher increasingly irrelevant amongst the masses. Woodson is clear that theological education that reinforced the Talented Tenth imagination made many preachers unable to preach to whites and contextually irrelevant to the majority of African American life.

Though this problem has racial manifestations, white homileticians also encountered how religious school shapes students for "fine art" instead of "folk art." Homiletician Leonora Tubbs Tisdale argues, "The minister's upbringing and pre-seminary acculturation are not the only

[58] Ibid., 66.

factors that contribute to the cultural dislocation new clergy experience. A study undertaken by the Alban Institute indicates that seminary education itself may exacerbate ministerial culture shock by immersing future pastors in a set of values that are at odds with those valued and cherished by many local congregations."[59] Tisdale counters this trend, in part by theorizing preaching as "folk art." Building upon the work of Elizabeth Achtemeier and Charles Rice's exploration of the intersection between art and preaching, Tisdale argues that,

> While agreeing with Achtemeier and Rice that preaching is (at its best) art, it is the particular concern of this book that preaching, given its congregational locus, should also be conceived as folk art. Preaching as folk art, on the other hand, presses toward proclamation that attends as closely to the congregation in its artistic design as it does in its theological construction. The preacher is not only a "local theologian," engaging in a dance of the imagination in order to discern fitting and faithful themes for proclamation. The preacher is also a "folk artist"—searching for the expression of local theology through symbols, forms, and movements that are capable of capturing and transforming the imaginations of a particular local community of faith.[60]

The contextual grounding of the sermon in the folk experience helps to combat the belief that the sermon is "fine art" that can only be appreciated by the initiated and enlightened. A "thick description" provides serious contextual consideration to preach resulting in an instrument for understanding better the social, political, economic, gendered, and racial realities that impinge upon the lives of the congregants.

Tisdale, harkening back to Lakoff and Johnson, engages in conceptual metaphor to address the underappreciation of context in homiletics. The "preacher as a folk artist" image for the preacher also re-contextualizes how to view the sermon. Assigning a metaphor for contextualized proclamation like "folk dance" entails the notion that the preacher is a folk artist. Giving proper attention to the daily context of people with as much diligence as often "mis-

[59] Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 7.

[60] Ibid., 122.

educated" preachers give to European and European American theology will increase sermonic effectiveness. It is akin to keeping one's eyes on that ball that they are trying to hit.

Calling the Talented Tenth preacher image back to the other ninety percent is essential for the fulfillment of the goals shared by Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois. The MC image allows the preacher to understand the contextual nature of the church beyond the walls of the church. They are reviving the folk artist motif through the MC grounds the preacher in a socio-politically specific context from which to observe, often starkly different from how one would construe the church context. It would seem foolishness to ask the Talented Tenth preacher to embrace the perceived foolish of the MC. However, as I have argued in this chapter, bearing a foolish witness is at the heart of the gospel.

Conclusion

The previous chapters make a solid and crucial case for considering the MC and other "preachers of the masses" when imagining what Black preaching is - and so as we think about what *all* preaching should be. Primarily, I believe in the wisdom and perspective of the masses and hope to continue to add their voice to homiletic literature. The exploration of popular but under-studied persons in the preacher of the masses' tradition will lead more students of African descent into a richer appreciation of their preaching forerunners. Considering what came before is the essential task in order for a preacher to clearly gain self-understanding and imagine a future. By offering a discussion of the existing influence of Talented Tenth ideology, I hope to equip preachers with a historical concept of the image that is often at work in subconscious ways. Addressing its ongoing influence will begin to open more expansive ways to engage the world—with particular attention to the next generations of parishioners—an area in which Hip-Hop culture has proven to excel.

The overall argument of this dissertation is to promote the MC as a resource for a new homiletic. As noted earlier other African American homileticians gestured towards a project of this sort but stops short of calling for a new homiletic. Otis Moss III brought the folk wisdom and cultural exploration of Hip Hop to the highest spaces of white preaching respectability while linking it to other expressions of African American life. Moss ultimately presented a jazz-infused homiletic method as a way to forward conversations in preaching through the concept of "blue note preaching." The post-Soul context of Hip-Hop culture, for Moss III, is where he employs a "Jazz Methodology" for sermon development. I depart from Moss III at that point because I believe that a Hip-Hop Methodology, one from the voice and vernacular of the culture, would be more effective. Moss encourages preachers, in a vague sense, to begin to imagine themselves as MCs for the purposes of effective communication but does not go further. Moss III's concept of

Blue Note preaching with a Jazz Methodology is a helpful voice to expanding the current conversations in the literature and in churches around the country. I believe it does not go far enough. If Hip-Hop culture and the MC are brought into current preaching conversations, it is quite possible that the conversation topics may not only evolve but change altogether. I argue that this should happen and Moss III's work helps to make that possible.

Frank A. Thomas also brings Hip-Hop into homiletic discussions but not towards an entire homiletic approach. For Thomas, JAY Z becomes a theorist in the exploration of what is "real." The close relationship between words and action through a poetic form is a major reason why rap music is effective, Thomas argues. The realness of an artist, the synchronicity of the rapper's actions and words, is a model that homiletics can learn a great deal. Yet, Thomas does not propose to reorganize the current homiletic imagination, but he makes interesting connections. Thomas notes that JAY Z stresses that a great MC gets the small details right when conveying images. Thomas applies Henry H. Mitchell's concept of "identification" as a homiletic principle to explain how it works. Thomas, then pivots from JAY Z to Gardner C. Taylor as a homiletic expression of that principle in action. Thomas makes a connection to how preaching can be enhanced but he does not address the Talented Tenth imagination active in the current literature, which make it more difficult for the reimagination of the field. Interestingly, JAY Z and Gardner C. Taylor lived in two different imaginative worlds on Marcy Avenue in Brooklyn, especially during the 1980s. Scholars rightly learn about Gardner C. Taylor and those of his preaching tradition but much more should be said about JAY Z and those crude bards of Hip-Hop culture.

Admittedly, building upon existing knowledge to offer something new is a challenging task. My understanding and sympathy for Mitchell's context and aims became more palpable as I

sought to bring the MC into the homiletic conversation. Mitchell felt the need to confirm and challenge white homiletical wisdom that were already established images for preaching. Though this approach is fraught with complication, it provides a sturdy foundation to build a new homiletic method. The structure of the last chapter models this approach.

A goal of this work is to produce a new basic text from the MC perspective. The scope of the book is to re-envision every aspect of preaching from language to form to exegesis – the whole ball of wax. This work will reimagine what is possible by offering a new model for preaching possibilities that will re-imagine the way we understand God, ourselves, and our neighbors. The homiletical textbook I envision would focus more on a constructive turn towards imagining a new method. I hope to explore in more detail the ways Black preaching gets construed if we take the MC seriously as a preacher of the masses. Subsequently, what, then, does that teach preachers in every tradition? Approaching these questions, I believe, will expand the homiletic imagination in African American homiletic literature.

I imagine that scholars, teachers, and preachers would read the previous chapters and would desire more voices from Hip-Hop culture to be present. The wisdom found in the proclamations of some great MCs, reflections on their styles, and a gathering up of insights from them that would critique and transform preaching will strengthen this work in a book form. I hope to build upon the homiletical foundation laid in this dissertation to provide a work that bridges Hip-Hop culture and homiletics by placing artists and preachers in direct conversation. A feature that would also break homiletic ground would be to bring MCs into direct conversation with those who engage in a Talented Tenth homiletic. The insights gained by placing JAY Z in conversation with Cleophus LaRue and Kenyatta Gilbert would be invaluable. What would Queen Latifah offer to a Womanist homiletic? How does the historical social location of Hip-

Hop culture influence its hermeneutical lenses? How does the conversations influence white homiletics and preaching more broadly?

The outcome of such a work would be to blend the theological training supplied to those of the Talented Tenth imagination with the social and cultural relevancy of the of Hip-Hop MC in the same manner that C.L. Franklin embodied in his time and contemporarily seen in Otis Moss III. There are already persons who engage in this work of constructing a pliable theology and preaching method of those who come from the masses, gained a theological education, and work to counter the "misshaping" and "miseducation" that Woodson argues occurs in the ivory tower.

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