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"The Lord Has Led Me, and He Will Lead You: " The Role of Gospel Music in the Formation of Early Twentieth Century Chicago Culture

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“THE LORD HAS LED ME, AND HE WILL LEAD YOU:”
THE ROLE OF GOSPEL MUSIC IN THE FORMATION OF
EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY CHICAGO CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the role that gospel music played in the culture of early to mid-twentieth century Chicago. In order to better understand why the popularity of gospel music increased dramatically in the first half of the century, this paper looks at a number of Thomas Andrew Dorsey's songs. Dorsey's lyrics discussed life's difficulties and acknowledged pain and suffering, while at the same time offering hope for a better future through God. By understanding the social conditions of Chicago at this time, it becomes clear why these themes were appealing to Chicagoans of all backgrounds. In addition to impacting individuals' lives, gospel also affected Chicago's culture by uniting disparate groups by fostering compassion and negotiating racial tension through its performance at outdoor music festivals. The widespread appeal of these songs also worked to humanize the suffering and hope of African Americans. By relating to these songs, people of all backgrounds were also relating to the experience of African Americans, which fostered a compassionate understanding among whites and blacks. Furthermore, performances of gospel music at festivals brought migrants, old settlers, and whites together, literally and figuratively, by opening the events to people of all races and by emphasizing the similarities of attendees' American and Protestant identities. Catherine Bell's theory of ritual in her work *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* also helps make sense of how these festivals united Chicagoans by explaining how the performance of gospel music allowed people of various backgrounds to become involved in the formation of a new, more interracial Chicago culture.

INTRODUCTION

A 1990 survey of 2,150 African American churches showed that 96.9 percent approved of the use of gospel music in worship services.¹ With such a high percentage of approval, it is hard to believe that gospel music was ever at the center of controversy, but during the first half of the twentieth century there was debate about whether gospel was respectable and religiously appropriate for use within the African American community.

Though gospel music originated in eighteenth-century America, it lacked popularity until the early twentieth century. At this time there was a huge influx of African Americans from the rural South into the urban North known as the Great Migration. Before the First World War, the vast majority of African Americans, about 90 percent, lived in the rural South.² Once emancipated, most former slaves had no opportunity or incentive to leave the South, but this changed with the First World War. Because of the war, the United States' economy boomed and the number of jobs in urban centers increased dramatically. Jobs in the urban North were available to African Americans for the first time, and many took this opportunity to relocate from the rural South.³

Scholars have generally agreed that the Great Migration was a turning point in the history of African American religious music. Though the genre had been developing for years, it was not until after the migration that gospel music became popular and gospel choirs became commonplace. Researchers have suggested reasons the music's popularity increased during this time, and this thesis supplements these works. This paper looks at gospel music in early to mid-twentieth century Chicago to better understand why gospel became popular among old settlers,⁴ migrants, and whites, and it investigates the role that gospel music played in the creation of a larger, more interracial Chicago culture.

Chapter one is a review of some of the scholarly literature that has been written on gospel music. Researchers have attempted to discuss gospel in a variety of ways, and the first chapter outlines some of the most common trends in the literature. Although gospel music only recently

¹ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black in the African-American Experience* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990), 379.

² Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 14.

³ Sernett, 38.

⁴ The term "old settler" was used to describe African Americans who were living in Chicago before the First World War and the Great Migration. The terms "old settlers" and "northern African Americans" will be used interchangeably throughout this paper to refer to this segment of the population.

emerged as a distinct musical form, scholars have nonetheless written extensive histories of the genre. Some have traced the history back to African roots while others have focused on the twentieth century, but regardless of the time frame, most histories of gospel deal with many different people and places, making these narratives broad. Other scholars have focused on differentiating gospel from other forms of African American music. Gospel developed directly out of earlier kinds of music, making it difficult to distinguish it from these earlier forms. Therefore, many researchers set out to investigate what made gospel music unique, and this became another common trend in the historiography. Because the gospel tradition was full of magnetic personalities and influential figures, biographies have also become common in the literature. By focusing on individuals within the gospel community, these works have not only provided us with interesting facts about these people's lives, but they have also helped to illustrate larger developments and issues in the history of gospel. A final trend, which has become increasingly popular, is to investigate how the Great Migration affected the development and popularity of gospel. Because the popularity of this music soared in the post-migration North, scholars have attempted to better understand the changes that led to this popularity.

The second chapter is related to this literature in that it utilizes biography and lyrical analysis in order to better understand the increased popularity of gospel music in the years following the Great Migration. It attempts to explain the increased popularity of gospel in post-migration Chicago by looking at the life and work of Thomas Andrew Dorsey, one of the most famous and prolific gospel composers of the twentieth century. Dorsey was in a unique social position after moving to Chicago. Although technically a southern migrant, he was able to relate to old settlers and eventually interact with Chicago's white population, and this allowed him to create music that was appealing to Chicagoans of all races and backgrounds. In order to expand on this point, the chapter looks at some of Dorsey's most famous song lyrics, and by understanding the themes of these songs, it provides a window through which to understand the stark social conditions of Chicago during this time. Dorsey's lyrics were related to and developed out of the conditions of Chicago life, and by understanding this, they provide us with information about how people understood their circumstances and how they dealt with difficult situations.

During the first half of the twentieth century, Chicago's population faced a plethora of difficult changes. Large-scale immigration and the Great Migration impacted the entire city,

affecting living conditions and the job market. The migration also led to an increase in racial tension, and the World Wars and the Great Depression also hit hard, making the early to mid-1900s a particularly difficult time for the people of Chicago. By recognizing how far-reaching these problems were, we can better understand why Dorsey's music appealed to such a wide variety of people. Because nearly everyone in the community suffered during this time, and because Dorsey's songs acknowledged life's suffering and promised relief through faith in God, a huge portion of the population was primed and ready to embrace his hopeful message.

Chapter three focuses on performances of gospel at music festivals in Chicago in order to show how these performances united people of different races and backgrounds and to demonstrate how African American participation in these festivals helped to forge a new, more interracial Chicago culture. Outdoor music festivals were important traditions in Chicago, and African American participation in these fêtes was significant. Not only did African Americans perform at these concerts, they were also widely respected and regarded as some of the best performers at the events. Festivals were open to the public, and they had interracial audiences as well as mixed-race performances. Chicago newspapers often sponsored these festivals, and they recognized the impact that their events had on society. They were aware that these events helped shape the larger culture, and that by including all races and classes, while emphasizing common bonds of patriotism and Protestant Christianity, they were working to improve race relations in the city.

Chapter three also employs Catherine Bell's theory about ritual as presented in her work *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. By understanding the performance of gospel music as ritual action, we can read the increase in the popularity of gospel music as the negotiation of cultural influence and control between different groups. Furthermore, Bell explains that rituals work to integrate and differentiate communities,⁵ and this view will help us understand gospel's popularity as resulting from a coalescence of influences binding Chicagoans together.

⁵ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 125.

A Note about Terminology

In order to investigate how Chicagoans reacted to the increased popularity of gospel, one must first understand the terms they used to discuss religious music. This may seem like a simple task, but it is in fact fairly difficult. Distinctions between types of African American religious music are not, and never were, as clear-cut as one might expect. Though some songs were easily identified as spirituals, and some artists were well known as gospel musicians, there was a great deal of ambiguity about how music was categorized and performers labeled in the early to mid-twentieth century.

Recent scholarship on African American music has tended to emphasize the differences between gospel and African American spirituals.⁶ In hindsight, scholars have agreed on a number of characteristics that distinguished these musical forms. For example, spirituals were generally understood to be folk songs that developed during the time of slavery and were sung without instrumental accompaniment, which was essential to gospel performance. Also, spirituals were passed down orally through generations, so the specifics of their origins were unknown, while the composers of gospel songs tended to be professional musicians in twentieth century urban settings. With regard to the music itself, spirituals tended to be relatively simple in harmony and melody, and the lyrics were in a folk vernacular. Gospel songs, however, were more complex than spirituals in their melodies and harmonies and were in a twentieth century vernacular.⁷ Although scholars agree that even in hindsight differences were subtle and difficult to recognize, they have nonetheless wanted to distinguish between these two forms. This was not, however, always the case.

Outlining the differences between gospel and spirituals was even more difficult when gospel music was first emerging than it is now. When describing the development of gospel music out of the spiritual tradition, John W. Work, a musician and scholar of African American music, claimed that “the style of singing spirituals and the type of song have not disappeared . . .

⁶ Pearl William-Jones, “Afro-American Gospel Music: A Crystallization of the Black Aesthetic,” *Ethnomusicology* 19:3 (1975): 379; Romeo Eldridge Phillips, “White Racism in Black Church Music,” *Negro History Bulletin* 36:1 (1973): 18-19; Romeo Eldridge Phillips, “Some Perspectives on Gospel Music,” *The Black Perspective in Music* 10:2 (1982): 171; Vada E. Butcher, “William-Jones Pearl: Afro-American Gospel Music: A Brief Historical and Analytical Survey (1930-1970),” in *Development of Materials for a One Year Course in African Music for the General Undergraduate Student* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Education, 1970): 201-203; Mancel Warrick, Joan R. Hillsman, and Anthony Manno, *The Progress of Gospel Music: From Spirituals to Contemporary Gospel* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007); Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 459-60.

⁷ Butcher, 202-203.

only passed into another type of singing and song.”⁸ That is to say, according to Work, the genre of gospel music developed nearly seamlessly out of the spiritual tradition. This slow and subtle shift from spirituals to gospel has made it difficult to distinguish one from the other, and this difficulty was particularly pronounced when gospel was first developing in the early twentieth century.

Another significant problem in distinguishing types of sacred music was that, for quite a long time, African Americans did not have a name for what are now considered gospel songs. Although these religious songs were different than spirituals in a number of ways, the most obvious being that they had instrumental accompaniment, they were nonetheless referred to as “spirituals” or just “church songs.”⁹ It took years for terminology to catch up to the musical trends and, until terms were established, “spiritual” was used to describe traditional folk music as well as emerging gospel.¹⁰ Because it was not until the latter part of the twentieth century that the term “gospel” came to distinguish these new songs from traditional spirituals, without knowing the details of the work it is impossible for scholars to know for sure if a so-called “spiritual” was a spiritual as defined today, or an early African American gospel song. It is similarly difficult to know when to accept that the terminology was finally established and accurately distinguished these musical forms. For example, in *Chicago Daily Tribune* articles published as late as 1948 and 1955, Mahalia Jackson, one of the world’s best-known gospel singers, was described as a “singer of spirituals,” rather than as a gospel performer.¹¹ Furthermore, in 1941 Thomas A. Dorsey, the “father of gospel,” described his own music as “spirituals.”¹² Because Jackson and Dorsey were gospel performers, and are not known for their use of spirituals, these descriptions are evidence that people were conflating these terms well into the twentieth century.

Another problem with differentiating musical styles in newspapers is the use of the term “gospel” to describe white southern gospel music, which was significantly different than African American gospel.¹³ Although one can trace the roots of both southern gospel and African

⁸ Southern, 459.

⁹ Southern, 457.

¹⁰ Robert Darden, *People Get Ready!: A New History of Black Gospel Music* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 181-2.

¹¹ “Progressives Open 4th Ward Campaign at Party Tuesday,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, April 4, 1948, S4; “The People’s Music,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 20, 1955, 12.

¹² Thomas A. Dorsey, “Gospel Songwriter Attacks All Hot Bands’ Swinging Spirituals,” *Chicago Defender*, February 8, 1941, 21.

¹³ The term “southern gospel” refers to music that developed out of the experiences of white, working-class southerners and was written and performed by whites.

American gospel music to southern revivalism, most scholars agree that these traditions developed in dramatically different ways,¹⁴ with southern gospel growing out of the experiences of rural, working-class whites.¹⁵ Because the term “gospel” was used to refer to white southern music as well as African American gospel music, it is difficult, and sometimes impossible, to distinguish one genre from the other. In radio and television schedules, for example, there is no way to know whether the gospel music being performed was southern or African American.

In an attempt to remedy the problems posed by the term “gospel,” this paper will refer to African American religious music as newspapers at the time discussed it. Since early twentieth century audiences were not yet distinguishing between “gospel music” and “spirituals,” it seems not only difficult, but also unimportant, for me to impose such a distinction. Therefore, this paper will treat early to mid-twentieth century African American religious music as a whole, and although the terms “gospel” and “spiritual” may be used to refer to music that would no longer be categorized as such, this is because this distinction was not imposed during the time frame that I am investigating.

¹⁴ Michael P. Graves and David Fillingim, eds., *More Than “Precious Memories”: The Rhetoric of Southern Gospel Music* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2004), 131; Don Cusic, *The Sound of Light: A History of Gospel Music* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1990), 81-82.

¹⁵ Graves, ix.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW

Early Discussions of African American Religious Music

African American religious music has been a topic of scholarly discussion for years. Long before Thomas Dorsey began writing gospel songs in Chicago, W.E.B. Du Bois was writing about African American spirituals. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois maintained that spirituals were “the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the sea” and that this music was the greatest gift that African Americans could share with the wider American culture.¹⁶ Du Bois also went on to write about gospel music, and though he held spirituals in high esteem, he felt different about gospel. He rejected the idea that conventional African American religious music should be discarded for classical music and Protestant hymns, but he did not embrace gospel, which he described as “flippant music and mediocre poetry” in his essay “The Problem of Amusement.”¹⁷

St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton were also pioneers of the study of gospel music. Drake and Cayton’s work *Black Metropolis* was a massive volume that attempted to describe African American life in Chicago in the early twentieth century. Though this study covered a host of topics, the authors took care to discuss religious music and how the Great Migration changed the musical culture of Chicago. For example, they discussed the connection between social class and musical preference. According to Drake and Cayton, lower class and older African Americans tended to prefer southern folk or gospel music in their religious services while upper-class churches and younger church-goers often favored more restrained, classical music or white Protestant hymns.¹⁸ They also noted that between 1940 and 1945 gospel music became increasingly popular and that by 1945 most large African American churches had gospel choruses, a “concession to lower-class taste.”¹⁹

¹⁶ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; reprint, New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2005), 178.

¹⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Problem of Amusement,” in *W.E.B. Du Bois on Sociology and the Black Community*, edited by Dan S. Green and Edwin D. Driver (1897, reprint, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1978), 234.

¹⁸ St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (1945, reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 673.

¹⁹ Drake, 676.

Du Bois, Drake, and Cayton were some of the first scholars to discuss the evolution of gospel music, but scholarly interest in the genre did not end with them. While these men were discussing gospel music as it was becoming popular, later scholars have also looked at the emergence and impact of gospel music and have done so from a variety of perspectives.

Expansive Histories of Gospel

The literature on gospel has included a number of expansive histories. Though scholars have generally agreed that the twentieth century was an integral time for the development of gospel music, they have recognized that it did not develop in a social vacuum and therefore earlier musical forms undoubtedly influenced the genre. In order to better explain the music's roots, many scholars have compiled long histories of gospel.

Lawrence Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, published in 1977, was an important work in the historiography of gospel music, even though gospel was only rarely mentioned in the text. In this book Levine set out to provide a history of African American culture, and he wanted to connect it to its African past. Levine was one of the first scholars to take seriously the idea that aspects of African culture survived slavery and impacted black culture in America, and this was a much more significant contribution to the study of gospel music than his explicit discussion of the genre. Many later scholars used Levine's insight about the influence of African traditions on America's black culture in order to write histories of gospel, and this was his lasting impact on the study of gospel music.²⁰

Robert Darden's 2005 book, *People Get Ready!*, was an example of an expansive history of gospel music. Rather than focusing on a specific time or place, Darden attempted to trace the development of gospel music over hundreds of years, beginning with gospel's African roots. Darden, like Levine before him, maintained that American gospel and West African music were similar in performance and musical styling and that this proved a connection between African and African American musical cultures. He went on to discuss the development of slave spirituals and the importance of this music to African Americans suffering through the Civil War and Reconstruction. He then tied Reconstruction spirituals to the Great Migration and discussed the role that the migration played in the development of barbershop quartets, but he said very

²⁰ Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

little about the impact that the migration had on African American church music.²¹ Darden also discussed contemporary gospel music, as late as the 1990s, increasing the range of his book. The scope of this work was huge, and the author's primary concern was tracing the entire history of gospel and connecting it to African roots. As a result, he was not particularly concerned with how gospel changed in twentieth century America or why it became popular in African American churches during the migration.

Sacred Song in America, published in 2003 by Stephen Marini, also recognized African roots in gospel music. In this work, Marini maintained that West African traditions impacted the development of African American music, but although African roots could be identified in African American gospel, evangelical Protestantism impacted and altered the tradition in important ways. While keeping in mind the influence of evangelical Protestant culture, Marini traced the development of African American religious music from slave songs to the rise of gospel music in the twentieth century, which he described as a fusion of gospel hymns and blues. He also recognized the important role that Thomas Dorsey played in the history of gospel music, referring to him as the "father of gospel blues" and emphasizing his role in the careers of Roberta Martin and Mahalia Jackson, two of the most famous gospel singers of the twentieth century. Marini also recognized Dorsey as having a major impact on the development and popularity of gospel church choirs because Dorsey was the founder of the world's first gospel chorus. In his chapter "Gospel Music: Sacred Song and the Marketplace," Marini also discussed contemporary gospel music and the Dove Awards, which rounded out his extensive history of the genre.²²

Horace Clarence Boyer's 2000 book, *The Golden Age of Gospel*, was yet another example of a broad overview, though he did not attempt to trace the history of gospel to Africa. *The Golden Age of Gospel* nonetheless covered over 200 years, and focused primarily on the mid-twentieth century. Boyer attempted to connect the gospel sound with African American slave songs and maintained that "ring shouts," which developed during the Second Great Awakening, were essential to the development of gospel music. In order to cover over 200 years, Boyer focused on a number of American cities and gospel composers and singers from these

²¹ Darden explains that during the Great Migration gospel music became popular in the North, but he does not explain the process through which this occurred.

²² Stephen A. Marini, *Sacred Song in America: Religion, Music, and Public Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

The Dove Awards are presented by the Gospel Music Association to recognize achievement in contemporary gospel music.

areas. He looked at Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, St. Louis, Tennessee, and New York and discussed the most influential gospel performers in these cities. He also focused on a number of groups that traveled the country in the 1950s and '60s performing gospel songs. Though Boyer covered a variety of topics and spent a significant amount of time on the twentieth century, he included very little discussion of the Great Migration and how this shift in the population affected America's musical culture.²³

Mellonee Burnim took a similar tack in her chapter, "Religious Music," in the 2006 edited volume *African American Music*. She traced the history of gospel from spirituals to contemporary gospel music and explained that although these genres developed more than 100 years apart, they served similar functions in African Americans' religion and culture, and that function was to "articulate, embrace, and celebrate those beliefs, attitudes, and values that affirm and distinguish them as a people in the United States."²⁴ She explained how slave songs developed into ring shout spirituals, and then arranged spirituals, which altered the ways African Americans created religious music and the ways they sang these songs. According to Burnim, these arranged spirituals later gave way to the gospel songs of Charles Tindley in the first decades of the 1900s and then the songs of Thomas Dorsey in the 1930s and '40s.²⁵

In addition to the above mentioned histories, which outlined the development of gospel music over hundreds of years, other scholars chose to focus on shorter time frames, limiting their discussions to the twentieth century. For example, in 1990 Jon Michael Spencer wrote about the history of gospel music in terms of three distinct, twentieth century periods: the Transitional or Pre-Gospel period (1900-1930), the Traditional Period (1930-1969), and the Contemporary Period (1969-present). Although Spencer maintained that these were distinct periods in the development of gospel and that the music changed in important ways during each of these periods, he argued that the music composed during all three eras was similar in one way. According to Spencer all gospel songs were anticultural in their themes. That is to say, the lyrics emphasized the conversion and salvation of the individual, not of society, and they called for the

²³ Horace Clarence Boyer, *Golden Age of Gospel* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

²⁴ Mellonee V. Burnim, "Religious Music," in *African American Music: An Introduction*, ed. Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia K. Maultsby (New York: Routledge, 2006), 73-4.

²⁵ Burnim, "Religious Music."

singer to turn away from the world and focus on heaven and God. Furthermore, because of the heavenly focus of these lyrics, Jesus became central and was “everything” in these songs.²⁶

Angela M.S. Nelson also divided the history of gospel music into these three time periods in her 2001 chapter “Why We Sing.” Although she and Spencer had similar frameworks, Nelson had a different goal. She focused on contemporary gospel music but first wanted to ground its appeal in a historical context. Therefore, she showed how gospel appealed to African Americans on a psychological level from its establishment to the present day, and in order to make this point she outlined the history of gospel music from pre-gospel, to classic, and then contemporary gospel. In so doing Nelson was able to illustrate that the genre was rooted in, and continued to be affected by, African Americans’ need to overcome adversity and deal with oppression.²⁷

Biographies

Though there have been a number of broad histories written about gospel music, not all scholars chose to discuss gospel in this way. Many decided to focus on individuals within the gospel community, and there have been a number of biographies written about gospel musicians and composers. Mahalia Jackson, for example, has been the focus of numerous biographies.²⁸ In addition to traditional biographical works, Jackson has also been the focus of many children’s books, and she published an autobiography titled *Movin’ On Up* in 1969.²⁹ Sister Rosetta Tharpe and the Dixie Hummingbirds have also had works written about them,³⁰ and *We’ll Understand It Better By and By* was an edited volume that contained six short biographies of influential gospel composers including, Charles Tindley, Thomas Dorsey, and Roberta Marin.³¹ These biographies

²⁶ Jon Michael Spencer, *Protest and Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

²⁷ Angela M.S. Nelson, “Why We Sing: The Role and Meaning of Gospel in African American Popular Culture,” in *The Triumph of the Soul: Cultural and Psychological Aspects of African American Music*, ed. Ferdinand Jones and Arthur Jones (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2001).

²⁸ Laurraine Goreau, *Just Mahalia, Baby: The Mahalia Jackson Story* (Gretna, La.: Pelican, 1975); Jules Victor Schwerin, *Got to Tell It: Mahalia Jackson, Queen of Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

²⁹ Mahalia Jackson, *Movin’ On Up* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1966),; Montrew Dunham and Cathy Morrison, *Mahalia Jackson: Gospel Singer and Civil Rights Champion* (Carmel, Ind.: Patria Press, 2003); Barbara Kramer, *Mahalia Jackson: The Voice of Gospel and Civil Rights*, (Berkeley Heights, N.J.: Enslow, 2003); Roxane Orgill, *Mahalia: A Life in Gospel Music* (Cambridge, Mass.: Candlewick Press, 2002); Darlene Donloe, *Mahalia Jackson: Gospel Singer* (Los Angeles: Melrose Square, 1992).

³⁰ Jerma Jackson, *Testifying at the Cross: Thomas Andrew Dorsey, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, and the Politics of African American Sacred and Sacred Music*. PhD dissertation, Rutgers, 1995; Gayle Wald, *Shout, Sister, Shout! The Untold Story of Rock-and-Roll Trailblazer Sister Rosetta Tharpe* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007); J. Jerome Zoltan, *Great God A’mighty! the Dixie Hummingbirds: Celebrating the Rise of Soul Gospel Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

³¹ Bernice Johnson Reagon, ed., *We’ll Understand It Better By and By: Pioneering African American Gospel Composers* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1992).

were important because they provided insight into the lives of gospel greats, and they allowed the reader to see how these people's lives affected their music and how gospel music changed the individuals' lives.

In addition to biographies that were intended simply to give an overview of individuals' lives, there have also been a number of works that used biography as a way to confront larger historical topics. For example, many authors have used the lives of individual women to show the impact that women in general had on the development of gospel music. African American women were highly involved in the gospel community; Mahalia Jackson and Clara Ward recorded the first two gospel records that sold a million copies,³² and Roberta Martin and Lucie Campbell were influential and well-respected gospel composers. Biographies of these women have not only informed readers about their lives, but they also allowed them to better understand the influence that women had on the gospel tradition.

James Haskins's *Black Music in America*, published in 1987, was an example of a book that used biographies to tell the history of African American music. This work was expansive, with chapters about slave music, ragtime, blues, and jazz in addition to gospel music. Haskins discussed these musical genres by providing short biographies of famous musicians, and Mahalia Jackson was the singer highlighted in the discussion of gospel. According to Haskins, Jackson had a unique experience growing up in New Orleans. Around the city she was exposed to brass jazz and blues, while at home her minister father only allowed religious music. Because she was raised in a religious household but was also exposed to jazz and blues, she was in a unique position to appreciate the ways in which composers like Thomas Dorsey merged these musical traditions to create gospel hymns.³³

Mellonee Burnim's 2006 chapter, "Women in African American Music," also focused on the lives of female gospel singers. Lucie Campbell was one of the women who Burnim highlighted, and this was particularly interesting because although Campbell was an influential member of the gospel community, she has often been overlooked in discussions of gospel music. In addition to composing over 100 songs and directing a choir of over 1,000 singers, Campbell served as Director of Music for the Christian Education Department of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. Burnim also highlighted Mahalia Jackson and Willie Mae Ford Smith in this

³² Mellonee V. Burnim, "Women in African American Music," in *African American Music: An Introduction*, edited by Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia K. Maultsby (New York: Routledge, 2006), 493.

³³ James Haskins, *Black Music in America: A History Through Its People* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1987).

chapter. Both of these women were famous gospel singers and gained substantial followings. The emphasis of this work was to illustrate the possibilities that gospel music provided African American women. The women she mentioned were not successful because they were born into privilege, but succeeded because of their talents and, according to Burnim, they were “liberated and empowered” by their participation in the gospel tradition.³⁴

Jerma Jackson’s *Singing in my Soul*, published in 2004, also utilized biography. She touched on a number of topics, including religious music after Reconstruction and gospel after the Second World War, but the focus of the book is Sister Rosetta Tharpe, a famous gospel singer who was most popular in the 1930s and 1940s. Jackson kept coming back to the life of Tharpe in order to illustrate her more general points about the development of gospel music in America. For example, the book described gospel music as a form of missionary work for African American women, and Jackson used Tharpe as an example of this. Although Jackson was telling a story about gospel music that was bigger than Rosetta Tharpe, *Singing in my Soul* was in many ways a biography of her because the author used her life to illustrate a larger social context.³⁵

In addition to these biographies, which focus on women in gospel music, Tony Heilbut’s 1971 book *The Gospel Sound* also provided biographical information on a number of gospel performers and composers. He included chapters about Sallie Martin, Thomas Dorsey, Ira Tucker and Alex Bradford, to name a few. Whereas the focus of many other biographies was to provide information about the role that women played in the history of gospel music, this work attempted to describe the difficulties that gospel musicians faced, regardless of their gender. According to Heilbut, “The old cliché about suffering for your art was confirmed every day by gospel singers.”³⁶ Performers were paid very little; traveled in harsh, segregated conditions; dealt with crooked, under-funded promoters; stayed in rundown motels; and rarely gained wide recognition for their talent. Though gospel musicians lived less than ideal lives, they nonetheless continued to perform their music, and this was the point that Heilbut wanted to drive home. These musicians were singing about suffering and tough times while experiencing hard situations, and this allowed them to relate to and connect with their poor, downtrodden

³⁴ Burnim, “Women in African American Music,” 508.

³⁵ Jerma Jackson, *Singing in my Soul: Black Gospel Music in a Secular Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

³⁶ Anthony Heilbut, *The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), xii.

audiences. Their situations also confirmed that these performers were not singing for fame or recognition but believed they were singing for a higher purpose and doing God's work.³⁷

Bernice Johnson Reagon's *If You Don't Go, Don't Hinder Me* also used biographies in her investigation of gospel music. In this 2001 publication, Reagon traced the history of gospel music and how it changed through the works of Charles Tindley, Thomas Dorsey, Roberta Martin, Reverend Smallwood Williams, Pearl William Jones, and Richard Smallwood. By including so many biographies, Reagon provided a different perspective than authors who focused on one or two figures. Not only did these biographies provide a sense of how gospel music has changed over time, they also helped illustrate the many influences that worked on gospel music. Gospel evolved because of the influences of both men and women, singers and composers, legends and many who have been largely forgotten, and this work served as a caveat and reminded scholars not to give too much credit to any one person or group when trying to understand the development of gospel music.³⁸

Differentiating Gospel from Other Musical Forms

Scholars have also looked at gospel music in order to differentiate it from other musical forms. Rather than providing a history of how the genre developed out of other musical traditions, these scholars wanted to explain how gospel was different from those other forms. Because gospel music developed out of other styles of African American music, it was difficult to distinguish gospel from those other genres. Therefore, many scholars were determined to show how gospel was unique, and they have done this in a number of ways.

Horace Clarence Boyer made an early attempt to distinguish gospel music from other styles based on how gospel was sung in his 1979 article "Contemporary Gospel Music." He argued that the performance of gospel music, rather than its composition or lyrics, was what truly distinguished it from its predecessors. Boyer said, "Gospel singing is distinctive for its treatment of four elements of the music: timbre, range, text interpolation, and improvisation."³⁹ He went into great detail, defining each of these terms and explaining how they were executed in gospel performances and how these performances differed from the presentation of other musical

³⁷ Heilbut.

³⁸ Bernice Johnson Reagon, *If You Don't Go, Don't Hinder Me: The African American Sacred Song Tradition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).

³⁹ Horace Clarence Boyer, "Contemporary Gospel Music," *The Black Perspective in Music* 7:1 (Spring 1979): 5-58.

genres.⁴⁰ Boyer, who earned a PhD in music, provided an important perspective, and his expert explanation of composition, technique, and performance was an important contribution to understanding how gospel music was unique.

In 1985 Mellonee Burnim also set out to show how gospel music differed from other musical forms by evaluating gospel performance. Burnim assessed the music performed in two churches in Indiana, one in Bloomington and the other in Indianapolis. Through her work, Burnim determined that gospel music was more complicated than other musical genres and described gospel as a “musical complex, which embodie[d] ideology, aesthetic, and behavior.”⁴¹ She maintained that the performance of gospel music worked to demonstrate blackness, through behavior; affirm blackness, through the aesthetic; and define blackness, through the ideology of the music. Because all of these aspects were essential to the larger tradition, Burnim contended that studies that focused on song lyrics and musical systems were incomplete and scholars had to consider performance in order to fully understand the role of gospel music in religious communities.⁴²

Although Boyer and Burnim did not draw distinctions based on song lyrics, many scholars did consider the lyrics of gospel music and determined that the words of gospel songs differed in important ways from other styles. For example, in his 1986 article, “Biblical Characters, Events, Places and Images Remembered and Celebrated in Black Worship,” Charles Copher looked at 300 gospel songs composed between 1895-1935 in order to determine the topics most commonly discussed in the lyrics. He discovered that when compared to other forms of religious music, gospel songs tended not to focus on biblical characters or events, but rather focused on Jesus, and Copher listed many of the titles used to refer to him. Copher also noted that gospel songs were more likely than spirituals to mention the second coming of Christ and the crucifixion and resurrection, which showed a more positive, optimistic perspective than spirituals.⁴³

Copher was not the only scholar to look at lyrics in order to categorize songs based on their themes. Six years earlier, in 1980, Mary Tyler’s dissertation, “The Music of Charles Henry

⁴⁰ Boyer, “Contemporary Gospel Music.”

⁴¹ Mellonee V. Burnim, “The Black Gospel Music Tradition: A Complex of Ideology, Aesthetic, and Behavior,” in *More Than Dancing: Essays on Afro-American Music and Musicians*, ed. Irene V. Jackson (Westport Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 147.

⁴² Burnim, “Black Gospel Tradition: A Complex of Ideology, Aesthetic, and Behavior.”

⁴³ Charles B. Copher, “Biblical Characters, Events, Places and Images Remembered and Celebrated in Black Worship,” *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 14:1, 2 (Fall, Spring 1986).

Pace and Its Relationship to the Afro-American Church Experience,” examined songs composed by Charles Henry Pace. Pace was a composer and conductor in the 1920s-1940s in Chicago and later in Pittsburgh. He founded the Pace Jubilee Singers in Chicago in 1925 and in 1938 formed the Pace Gospel Choral Union. Tyler looked at Pace’s compositions and analyzed musical qualities, such as harmony and scale, but she also took into account the lyrics of his music. After examining Pace’s lyrics, Tyler concluded that his songs could be grouped in five gospel-specific categories: personal testimony, questioning belief, messages based on scripture, dialogue with God, and guidance for listeners.⁴⁴

William Dargan and Louis-Charles Harvey also looked at gospel lyrics in order to determine their most common themes. In 1983 Dargan completed his dissertation, which focused on 104 songs that were part of worship services in a Holiness church in Washington, D.C., and he determined that the most common topics discussed were power, praise, salvation, and struggle.⁴⁵ In 1986, Harvey considered a much larger sample, analyzing 1,700 gospel songs. He determined that one song in three focused on Jesus and said that in these songs, “the most fundamental statement made about Jesus Christ is that he is Everything. He is Everything because he is Friend, Protector, and Liberator.”⁴⁶ That same year, Henry Mitchell and Nicholas Cooper-Lewter also looked at the lyrics of gospel songs in their book *Soul Theology*, and they developed ten categorizations for gospel songs. Six of them dealt with God while four categories related to humanity. In addition to developing these categories, Mitchell and Cooper-Lewter also made the claim that African Americans were drawn to gospel music because the songs’ themes provided them with comfort and support.⁴⁷

The Role of the Great Migration in the Evolution of Gospel

One of the more recent trends in the study of gospel music has been to focus on the role that the Great Migration played in the development of this musical style, and these studies often focused on Chicago as the “birthplace” of gospel. The Great Migration had a significant influence on many northern cities, and Chicago was one of the most affected by the influx of southern migrants. Consequently, there have been a number of books written about how the

⁴⁴ Mary Ann Lancaster Tyler, “The Music of Charles Henry Pace and Its Relationship to the Afro-American Church Experience.” PhD dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1980.

⁴⁵ William T. Dargan, “Congregational Gospel Songs in Black Holiness Church: A Musical and Textual Analysis.” PhD dissertation, Wesleyan University, 1983.

⁴⁶ Harvey, 27.

⁴⁷ Henry H. Mitchell and Nicholas Cooper-Lewter, *Soul Theology: The Heart of American Black Culture* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986).

Great Migration affected Chicago. Though the migration instigated many changes in this city, according to Allan Spear, religious life was the aspect of Chicago culture that was most dramatically affected by the migration.⁴⁸ As a result, religion has often been discussed in books about the Great Migration and has occasionally been the main focus.

One important book to take into account when discussing how the Great Migration affected northern culture was John Giggie's 2007 work *After Redemption*, and this book was important precisely because it did not deal with the migration. Giggie wrote about how African American religious culture evolved in the South during the years 1875-1915. Though this may seem irrelevant to discussions of the migration, it was in fact an important contribution to the literature. Whereas most accounts of the development of African American religious history have focused on slavery and the migration as the seminal points in the history, Giggie challenged this view and described how black religion changed during the years between the Civil War and World War I. According to *After Redemption*, this was a rich time for the development of African American culture, and many of the debates and negotiations that scholars have generally associated with the move north actually began in the South. For example, there was conflict between Baptist, Methodist, and Holiness communities in the delta during Reconstruction, just as there was in the North during the migration. They debated the role of the Holy Spirit in worship and Holiness groups' use of more demonstrative and popular forms of music in church services. This work was important because it showed that many of the debates that occurred in the North, and have been associated with the Great Migration, were in fact issues in the South before the migration even began. Additionally, it illustrated that although scholars tend to treat southern migrants as a homogeneous group who universally preferred emotional religious practices, this was simply not the case, and southern African Americans fell on both sides of the debate over emotionalism in religion.⁴⁹

Another important work in creating a more complex picture of the Great Migration was James Gregory's *The Southern Diaspora*, published in 2005. Though scholars tended to conceive of the Great Migration as a shift in the African American population, millions of white southerners also migrated north during the twentieth century. In fact, white southern migrants

⁴⁸ Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a New Negro Ghetto 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967). 169.

⁴⁹ John M. Giggie, *After Redemption: Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta 1875-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

consistently outnumbered African American migrants throughout the twentieth century.⁵⁰ Because white migration was so significant, Gregory attempted to tell a more complete narrative of the Great Migration and included the history of both white and black migrants in his book. Gregory only briefly discussed how music changed as a result of the migration, but he did touch on it, and he included that the migration of African Americans significantly affected the popularity of gospel. He also mentioned the impact that black migrants had on the development of jazz and blues and that white migrants had on the northern musical culture by bringing southern country and hillbilly music north. By discussing the migration of whites and blacks together, Gregory reminded scholars that the African American migration did not occur outside of the larger culture and that changes in white society were also important for fully understanding the impact of the Great Migration.⁵¹

Black Chicago, published by Allan Spear in 1967, was an early example of a more traditional narrative that investigated how the Great Migration affected Chicago's African American population. Though he focused solely on the black community, Spear's discussion was still broad, and religion was only one of many topics he confronted. In his discussion of religion, Spear focused on the increase in storefront churches in post-migration Chicago, and he said almost nothing about how the migration affected mainstream churches. He maintained that southern migrants wanted emotional, demonstrative church services like they had in the South, and when they were unable to find such services in Chicago mainline institutions, migrants often joined or established storefront churches. This led to an increase in the number of small Holiness and Pentecostal groups, which embraced emotional prayer and gospel music.⁵² Though this was an important change in Chicago's religious makeup, migrants also had a significant impact on mainstream religious culture, which Spear did not consider.

Nicholas Lemann was another author who wrote about how the Great Migration affected American culture, and like Spear, he did not focus on religion. In his 1991 book, *The Promised Land*, Lemann wrote about a longer time frame than most scholars, and defined the Great Migration as lasting until the 1970s. He also investigated the impact that the migration had on multiple cities, Clarksdale, Chicago, and Washington, which provided a picture of how the

⁵⁰ James E. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migration of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 14-15.

⁵¹ Gregory.

⁵² Spear.

population flux affected both northern and southern towns. By discussing such a large time period and a number of cities, Lemann provided a new perspective, but because of his scope, the impact that the migration had on religious culture was often overlooked. *The Promised Land* did mention the increase in storefront churches in Chicago and discussed the opportunities that uneducated “jack-leg” preachers found in the city, but this was where the discussion ended, and he did not mention the impact that the migration had on mainline denominations.⁵³

Milton Sernett’s 1997 publication, *Bound for the Promised Land*, was first and foremost concerned with the causes of the migration and how the culture of the North changed once it began. Like earlier authors, Sernett confronted the increase in storefront churches that accompanied the migration. This was not, however, the focus of his work and, unlike earlier authors, he used this change in the religious makeup of northern cities to explain the impact that migrants had on the larger culture and mainline churches. Rather than focusing on the more exotic and eccentric religious practices of some migrants, Sernett emphasized that they resisted change and maintained aspects of their southern culture, even when pressured to assimilate. He wrote, “African Americans who relocated ‘up North’ brought religious folkways with them that they did not abandon overnight, despite efforts to acculturate them made by both national and local representatives of the larger African American denominations.”⁵⁴ Similarly, Sernett stressed that because migrants resisted assimilating entirely into the larger culture, there was a large portion of the population that was ready to appreciate and accept gospel music. Though Sernett’s discussion of gospel was fairly minor, the information that he did provide, combined with his discussion of the impact that the migration had on other aspects of northern culture, explained a great deal about the role that the migration played in the development of gospel music and its impact on mainline Protestant churches.

Wallace Best’s 2005 book, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, was similar to Sernett’s in that the primary focus of the work was the Great Migration, and the popularity of gospel music was only a secondary topic. He did, however, pay more explicit attention to gospel. In his chapter “The Frenzy, the Preacher, and the Music,” Best described how the influx of African American southerners forced old-line institutions to alter some aspects of their worship in order to appease migrants. He maintained that in order to appeal to southerners, northern preachers

⁵³ Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991).

⁵⁴ Sernett, 208.

integrated more emotional and expressive forms of worship into their services, and gospel was one of these forms. Like Sernett, Best asserted that migrants were hesitant to sacrifice their southern folk heritage, particularly their religious culture. Best went into more detail, however, explaining how this translated into more expressive, emotional worship in mainline services. He explained, “Migrants were generating certain changes in many black Chicago Protestant churches as they sought to transport and reconstitute a religious culture, forged in southern and rural contexts, to the urban north.”⁵⁵ According to Best, after the First World War churches could succeed or fail based on their attitudes toward migrants, and because migrants wanted southern-style worship, in order to compete for congregants, northern preachers began to make concessions and encouraged a mixed style of worship.

Michael Harris took a slightly different approach in his 1994 book *The Rise of Gospel Blues* by focusing on the migration time period through the biography of Thomas A. Dorsey. Rather than attempting to tell a broad history of the development of gospel at this time, Harris focused on the life and work of the “father of gospel blues.” He attempted to use Dorsey’s biography as a “micro perspective from which to unravel...[the] story” of gospel music.⁵⁶ In his analysis Harris, like most scholars who focused on gospel music during this time, attributed the popularity of the music to compromises made between migrants and old-line religious leaders. He acknowledged that the migration made competition for church members intense and that in order to compete with storefront churches, mainline institutions began integrating gospel music into their services. Harris also maintained that Thomas Dorsey’s gospel songs were particularly appealing to migrants because they were emotional and expressive, like the music that southerners missed. He also added that gospel gave old-line religion a new and unique sound, which it needed in order to revitalize its old members as well as attract new ones. By using Thomas Dorsey’s life as a paradigm, Harris was able to trace the development of gospel music out of jazz, illustrate the impact of the Great Migration on the North’s musical and religious culture, and provide detailed information about the life of one of the most prominent gospel musicians of the twentieth century.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Wallace Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 17.

⁵⁶ Michael W. Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues: The Music of Thomas Andrew Dorsey in the Urban Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), xix.

⁵⁷ Harris.

Davarian Baldwin's *Chicago's New Negroes*, published in 2007, provided yet another perspective on gospel music and the Great Migration in his chapter "Sacred Tastes." Though he acknowledged the role that migrants played in influencing the religious culture of Chicago, he was more concerned with how gospel became a respectable form of religious music in the post-migration North. According to Baldwin, the increased popularity of gospel music and the eventual recognition of the genre as acceptable changed the parameters of religious respectability in dramatic ways. "By the late 1930s, the gospel sound had gone from 'the devil's music' to the most notable indicator of black Protestant church life,"⁵⁸ and Baldwin hoped to explain how this came to be when only a few decades earlier emotive music was considered by many within the African American community to be disgraceful and anti-modern. He also wanted to confront scholars who have painted a romantic picture of the evolution of gospel, which made its development seem spontaneous and organic, when in reality African Americans worked to consciously develop their own "notions of style, status, and spiritual respectability."⁵⁹ In order to make these points, one main focus of Baldwin's chapter on music was how the marketing of gospel songs affected their "respectability." He maintained that the commercialism of music in the 1920s allowed for wide distribution of African American religious music, taking it out of the storefront churches and into the larger culture. He also pointed out that gospel leaders, like Thomas Dorsey, used their training as vocal coaches and musical arrangers to cultivate more sophisticated gospel songs and performances, making these works more highly regarded.⁶⁰

As we can see, scholars have agreed that the Great Migration had a significant impact on gospel music and that without it the history of gospel would look quite different. They have also generally agreed that the number of migrants that flooded northern cities, like Chicago, forced old-line churches to alter their practices in order to appeal to recent southern arrivals. Although these are both important points, there is more to be considered.

Most of the work written about gospel music and its increase in popularity during the Great Migration focused on the African American community in near isolation. They discussed the impact that migrants had on the community and maintained that old-line churches and old settlers actively compromised with migrants by accepting gospel music in their worship.

⁵⁸ Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 158.

⁵⁹ Baldwin, 182.

⁶⁰ Baldwin, 181-182.

Although I do not deny that this occurred, I believe that the social context in which gospel music flourished was more complex than these narratives imply and that other segments of Chicago's population also affected the popularity of gospel music.

These books all approached the history of gospel music in different ways, but they had one thing in common. There was little to no discussion of the larger culture in which gospel developed, and the popularity of gospel music appeared to be entirely the result of African American initiative and opinions. This simultaneously tied these books not only to the discussion of gospel music in America, but more broadly to debates about the role that historical circumstances have played in the creation of cultures. For generations there have been scholars of African American religion who have argued that African American culture was the result of historical conditions. Melville Herskovits was an early proponent of this claim and believed that cultural dissimilarities found between races were not the result of innate differences but rather resulted from differing circumstances.⁶¹ Curtis Evans made a similar claim and argued that we must "rethink the possibilities about what people, especially oppressed groups, are able to achieve and desire within the confines of their cultural heritage."⁶² Unlike authors who emphasized the power that the African American community had over the creation of their culture, Herskovits and Evans would argue that because of historical circumstances, Chicagoans were greatly limited when forming their culture. By applying this perspective to understanding the increased popularity of gospel music, I came to realize that in order to fully understand why this musical genre became accepted I had to look at the situation in which it developed. In order to accomplish this, the following chapter looks at the songs of Thomas Dorsey because his work was related to the culture of Chicago. He composed songs based on his own experiences and wrote lyrics that he hoped would speak to people and help them through difficult times.⁶³ Because his work was influenced by life in Chicago, investigating his lyrics provides a way to understand the conditions of the city. Dorsey's lyrics help illustrate the difficulties that Chicagoans faced and also provide a sense of how many of them dealt with trying times.

⁶¹ Melville Herskovits, "The Dilemma of Social Pattern," *Survey Graphic: Harlem Mecca of the New Negro* 6:6 (March, 1925), 676-678.; Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).

⁶² Curtis Evans, "Urbanization and the End of Black Churches in the Modern World," *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 76:4 (December 2007): 804.

⁶³ Levine, 183.

CHAPTER 2

“WHEN YOU SING THEM YOU ARE DELIVERED OF YOUR BURDEN”⁶⁴

The Songs of Thomas Andrew Dorsey

Thomas A. Dorsey, the “father of gospel blues,” was one of the most popular and prolific gospel composers of the twentieth century, producing over 400 gospel songs in his lifetime.⁶⁵ Dorsey moved from Atlanta to Chicago in 1919, and it was there that he began writing gospel music.⁶⁶ Dorsey was himself a southern migrant who settled in Chicago during the height of the Great Migration. He was born into a poor family in rural Georgia and moved to Atlanta at age eleven, just like many migrants who moved from southern rural areas to southern cities before eventually migrating north.⁶⁷ This having been said, Dorsey’s situation was quite different than that of most migrants. In Atlanta he was a fairly successful blues composer and performer, which gave him an advantage once he settled in the North. After moving to Chicago, Dorsey did not become a laborer, like many migrants, but worked in service positions and for the railroad while attempting to forward his music career. Although Dorsey did not gain immediate fame, he was fairly successful and was able to make a name for himself within months of arriving in Chicago.⁶⁸ Furthermore, Dorsey traveled back and forth between Atlanta and Chicago for years before finally settling in Chicago in 1919, which made his transition less abrupt than it was for others who moved to the North and immediately lost all direct contact with the South.⁶⁹ Because Dorsey did not have to confront many of the difficulties that the average migrant faced, his life was in many ways more similar to old settlers’ lives, because they were established and comfortable with their surroundings, than the lives of migrants. Although Dorsey was technically a southern migrant, we can see how his circumstances were unique and how his situation allowed him to occupy a liminal position within Chicago’s society. He could relate to migrants as well as old settlers, and, as his music became increasingly popular and well respected, he was even able to move within liberal white circles.

⁶⁴ Levine, 174.

⁶⁵ Harris, xix.

⁶⁶ Harris, 48-9.

⁶⁷ Harris, 15, 30.

⁶⁸ Harris, 50.

⁶⁹ Harris, 48.

Thomas Dorsey was part of three distinct Chicago groups while not being fully a part of any one.⁷⁰ This allowed him insight into the experiences of these groups' members, and when looking at Dorsey's lyrics we can see how his songs would have appealed to Chicagoans of all backgrounds. His lyrics also allow us to approach Chicago's history in a new way, because they provide a lens through which to understanding the difficulties that Chicago's population faced in the early to mid-twentieth century.

Scholars have already convincingly argued that southern migrants in Chicago were drawn to gospel because its emotionalism and sound were reminiscent of southern church music. Although I do not doubt this, I believe there was more to its appeal, and maintain that the genre's recognition of suffering and offer of hope also contributed to its appeal among migrants. Though southern spirituals, like gospel, acknowledged pain and suffering and provided comfort to the singer, they did so in a very different way. Rather than emphasizing that God would help the singer make it through difficult times, spirituals used biblical stories "as a means of constructing ironic tension between the hierarchy of oppression under which slaves lived and the larger spiritual reality of divine justice."⁷¹ Spirituals acknowledged the suffering of African Americans and referenced biblical stories in order to illustrate why the treatment of slaves was unjust and went against God's will, and this provided them with strength to get through difficult times. These songs did not suggest that God would help the singer through trying situations, but rather comforted African Americans by pointing out their oppressors' hypocrisy, illustrating the moral superiority of blacks, and allowing them to identify with the suffering of biblical characters. This "provided scaffolding that enabled singers to climb from feelings of sorrow to feelings of joy."⁷² Gospel songs, however, provided comfort by stressing that God would help the singer get through difficult times and by offering hope for a better future.

After moving north, most migrants found themselves in desperate situations, and gospel music provided hope that these conditions could be overcome. Rather than uplifting these African Americans by stressing their moral supremacy or connecting them to biblical characters, gospel songs were optimistic that a better life was possible. This positive outlook was so integral to the gospel message that, Thomas Dorsey explained, if you "make it anything but good news, it

⁷⁰ Dorsey would have certainly been more accepted within the African American community, especially early in his career, but he was nonetheless more familiar with diverse groups than most Chicagoans, regardless of race.

⁷¹ Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, "Spirituals and the Quest for Freedom," in *Modern Christianity to 1900*, ed. Amanda Porterfield (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 319.

⁷² Kirk-Duggan, 319.

ceases to be gospel.”⁷³ By considering this genre’s popularity in terms of the hope it offered to the downtrodden, we not only better understand why migrants were drawn to gospel music, but we are also able to make sense of why this music was embraced by old settlers and whites as well. Members of these groups would not have been particularly drawn to the music’s southern character, so there must have been something else about the music that they found appealing. I maintain that they, like migrants, related to gospel lyrics’ themes of suffering and redemption.

Dorsey composed his first gospel song, *If You See My Savior*, in 1926, and he wrote the song after the sudden death of his friend and neighbor.⁷⁴ The song’s lyrics included the following:

If you see my Savior tell Him that you saw me
And when you saw me I was on my way.
You may reach some old friends they may ask about me
Tell them I’ll be coming home someday.
You may come across my father and my mother
...
You may chance a little further up the road to see my sister and my brother,
But just try to see my Savior first of all.⁷⁵

Dorsey wrote these lyrics to help him cope with losing a friend, but in them we can see why they would have appealed to a wide range of Chicagoans. For example, Dorsey’s invocation of reuniting with loved ones in heaven would have been attractive to many people. When migrants moved to the North many left behind family and friends without knowing if or when they would see them again. Therefore, the hope of being reunited with loved ones in the afterlife would have been appealing to many migrants, and the same was true for those who lost friends and family in

⁷³ Levine, 183.

⁷⁴ Harris, 96.

⁷⁵ Thomas A. Dorsey, “If You See my Savior,” *Precious Lord: The Great Gospel Songs of Thomas A. Dorsey* (Sony, 1994).

I transcribed these lyrics from the 1994 Sony album *Precious Lord: The Great Gospel Songs of Thomas A. Dorsey*. Gospel music was written in such a way as to facilitate improvisation, and Dorsey’s songs were no exception. There are a number of instances on this album where improvisation is obvious, so it is likely that the lyrics of this performance also differed from the originals. This having been said, improvisation was not meant to alter the overall narrative or meaning of the song. Rather, it was intended to give the artists more opportunities to be expressive and to integrate their own style into the performance. For these reasons, the improvisation associated with gospel songs and the extemporaneous changes that likely characterize this version of *If You See My Savior* do not pose a problem for this research. (Harris, 101-2)

the World Wars. Because Chicagoans of all races and classes could relate to losing loved ones, they could all find comfort in this song's prospect of one day reuniting with them.

Though Dorsey's invocation of the afterlife occasionally offered the heavenly promise of reunion with loved ones,⁷⁶ his songs relating to life after death more often focused on the relief from pain and suffering that heaven guaranteed. He often emphasized the anguish of this life in his lyrics just to compare this suffering to the eternal peace that awaited the faithful.⁷⁷ For example, in his work *Peace in the Valley* Dorsey wrote:

I am tired and weary but I must toil on
Till the Lord comes to call me away
Where the morning is bright and the Lamb is the light
And the night is as fair as the day.
There'll be peace in the valley for me someday,
There'll be peace in the valley for me.⁷⁸

Again, we can see why lyrics like these would have appealed to a wide variety of people, particularly in Chicago during the early to mid-twentieth century. No one in Chicago was untouched by racial tension, the Great Depression, and the World Wars. All of the city's population suffered, albeit to varying degrees, and all could find comfort in the hope of a peaceful afterlife free from toil.

Though many of Thomas Dorsey's works emphasized the afterlife, most of his songs' lyrics focused on this life, and they regularly stressed the need for Christians to do good deeds and help others. His lyrics often highlighted the importance of Christian good will by forcing the singer to confront her own behavior. For example, the lyrics of *Today (Evening Song)* consisted of a list of questions about one's behavior, asking, "Did I counsel with the sad / Try to make some poor heart glad / And share with them what I had / Today?"⁷⁹ *My Desire* also confronted issues of behavior by describing how a Protestant Christian should strive to act.

It's my desire to do some good thing ev'ry day,

⁷⁶ Thomas A. Dorsey, "If You See My Savior," *Precious Lord*; Dorsey, "I'm a Pilgrim," *Great Gospel Songs of Thomas A. Dorsey* (Winona, Minn.: Chappell/Intersong, 1988), 26-27.

⁷⁷ Dorsey, "Ev'ry Day Will Be a Sunday By and By," *Great Gospel Songs*, 18-19; Dorsey, "Someway Somehow, Sometime Somewhere," *Great Gospel Songs* 34-35; Dorsey, "When I've Done My Best," *Great Gospel Songs* 44-45; Dorsey, *Precious Lord* "I Don't Know Why"; Dorsey, "Never Turn Back," *Precious Lord*; Dorsey, "I Don't Know Why," *Precious Lord*.

⁷⁸ Dorsey, "(There'll Be) Peace in the Valley (For Me)," *Great Gospel Songs*, 2-3.

⁷⁹ Dorsey, "Today (Evening Song)," *Great Gospel Songs*, 38-39.

It's my desire to help the fallen by the way,
It's my desire to bring back those who've gone astray
It's my desire to be like the Lord.⁸⁰

These songs also emphasized the role that God played in the lives of Protestants by asking God to help the singer act properly.⁸¹ Lyrics like these would have resonated with a large portion of Chicago's population, especially during the World Wars. Although these conflicts made life difficult for many Chicagoans, they nonetheless came together in support of the war and the troops. Chicago residents rallied, bought bonds, and rationed food in an attempt to support the war efforts.⁸² Though the wars certainly affected the lives of most Chicagoans in a negative way, they nonetheless came together in support of the cause and were willing to sacrifice for the greater good. Dorsey's songs that stressed the virtue of such behavior would have undoubtedly appealed to many of the people who were making these sacrifices because the lyrics reiterated that although sacrifice was difficult, it was important and was what God demanded of good Christians. Furthermore, it is likely that members of the Social Gospel Movement in particular would have been drawn to these lyrics. The movement emphasized the need for Christians to help the poor and less fortunate even at their own expense. They believed this was what God insisted they do, and songs that stressed that helping others was a universal Christian call would have been particularly appealing to members of the Social Gospel movement because they reaffirmed the significance of selfless action.

Discussion of heavenly rewards and the importance of right behavior were certainly mentioned in many of Dorsey's songs, but more often than not his lyrics focused on turning to God for strength and comfort in this life. In these songs Dorsey wrote about the burdens of life and how difficult it could sometimes be to continue on. They were not dirges, however, and always went on to explain the freedom from suffering that was possible if people trusted in God, and this was in keeping with gospel music's focus on "good news" and hope for the future. An example of one such song was Dorsey's most famous gospel composition, *Take My Hand, Precious Lord*, which says:

Precious Lord take my hand lead me on, let me stand,

⁸⁰ Dorsey, "My Desire," *Great Gospel Songs*, 6-7.

⁸¹ Dorsey, "I'm Going to Live the Life I Sing About in My Song," *Precious Lord*; Dorsey, "Search Me Lord," *Precious Lord*; Dorsey, "Hide Me in Thy Bosom," *Great Gospel Songs*, 60-61.

⁸² Perry Duis, "World War II," *Encyclopedia of Chicago* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 2005), <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1384.html>.

I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.
Thru the storm, thru the night lead me on to the light,
Take My Hand Precious Lord lead me home.⁸³

This song acknowledged pain and suffering but did not simply lament life. Rather, it asked God for help to get through the pain. It was not a song of defeat or sorrow, but one of hope. Though things may have been hard and the singer was weak and worn, God could lead her and relieve her suffering. This focus on pain paired with faith in God and hope for the future was characteristic of many of Dorsey's songs and one of the most appealing aspects.⁸⁴ Nearly every member of Chicago's community could relate to a song about suffering. A large portion of the population lived in rundown conditions and held grueling jobs. Others worried about the population's changing composition and what it meant for their situation and status. The World Wars and the Great Depression also affected everyone, making anxiety and suffering almost inevitable for Chicagoans regardless of race or class, and songs that acknowledged this suffering while providing hope that God could free them from it would therefore have been appealing to much of the population.

Another way that Thomas Dorsey's songs provided hope for the future was to insist that people could recover from loss. Not only would God comfort people in bad times, but God could also bless them and make them happy again. As mentioned above, Dorsey himself began writing gospel music in reaction to the death of a friend, and he devoted himself to writing gospel full time when his wife and son died unexpectedly in 1932.⁸⁵ Dorsey understood suffering and loss first hand and came to believe that God would help him through it. When discussing the death of his family, Dorsey explained the pain that he felt, but went on to say that later in life God blessed him with another family. This was the kind of hope that he wanted to represent in his lyrics. He

⁸³ Dorsey, "Take My Hand, Precious Lord," *Great Gospel Songs*, 4-5.

⁸⁴ Dorsey, "Angel Keep Watch Over Me," *Great Gospel Songs*, 8-9; Dorsey, "Consideration," *Great Gospel Songs*, 10-11; Dorsey, "Say a Little Prayer for Me," *Great Gospel Songs*, 13-14; Dorsey, "I Thought of God," *Great Gospel Songs*, 22-23; Dorsey, "I'm a Pilgrim (I'm a Stranger)," *Great Gospel Songs*, 26-27; Dorsey, "Jesus Remembers when Others Forget," *Great Gospel Songs*, 28-29; Dorsey, "My Soul Feels Better Right Now," *Great Gospel Songs*, 32-33; Dorsey, "There is No Friend Like Jesus," *Great Gospel Songs*, 36-37; Dorsey, "Walk Close to Me, O Lord," *Great Gospel Songs*, 40-41; Dorsey, "While the Evening Shadows Fall, There's Morning in my Heart," *Great Gospel Songs*, 46-47.; Dorsey, "What Could I Do if It Wasn't for the Lord?," 48-49; Dorsey, "It Is Thy Servant's Prayer, Amen," *Great Gospel Songs*, 58-59; Dorsey, "Never Leave Me Alone," *Great Gospel Songs*, 68-69; Dorsey, "The Lord Has Laid Hands on Me" *Great Gospel Songs*, 70-71; Dorsey, "Let us Go Back to God," *Great Gospel Songs*, 72; Dorsey, "That's Good News," *Great Gospel Songs*, 78-79; Dorsey, "Old Ship of Zion," *Precious Lord*; Dorsey, "The Lord Will Make a Way Somehow," *Precious Lord*; Dorsey, "If You Never Needed the Lord Before," *Precious Lord*; Dorsey, "I Don't Know Why," *Precious Lord*; Dorsey, "How Many Times?" *Precious Lord*.

⁸⁵ Harris, 150.

believed that God would bless and help others recover from loss as well, saying, “the Lord has led me and he will lead you.”⁸⁶ His song *Jesus Remembers When Others Forget* was a good example of this kind of hope. It said:

When I am burdened, when I am sad,
When I’m in sorrow, He makes me glad
And if I trust Him, I’ll never regret
For Jesus remembers when others forget.⁸⁷

Whereas *Take My Hand, Precious Lord* emphasized that God could help people get through tough times, this song illustrated Dorsey’s belief that God would not only lead people through but also make them glad again. This positive outlook would be greatly appealing to the people of Chicago. Whether they were mourning the loss of their homes and southern culture, suffering through the depression, or lamenting the anguish of war, these lyrics promised relief and a better life.

Thomas Dorsey hoped that his gospel songs would resonate with people, help them through difficult times, and raise their spirits. He said, “We intended gospel to strike a happy medium for the downtrodden. This music lifted people out of the muck and mire of poverty and loneliness, of being broke, and gave them some kind of hope anyway.”⁸⁸ His lyrics acknowledged the difficulties of life and pain and suffering, but at the same time they provided hope that God would make the future better. Whether in heaven, in this life, or through the good work of Christians, people’s situation would improve, and this message of hope surely resonated with Chicagoans of all backgrounds. Many Chicago residents in the first part of the twentieth century lived harsh and painful lives, and by further understanding their situations we can better appreciate why Thomas Dorsey’s songs would have appealed to them.

Chicago in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

Pre-Migration Period

The people of Chicago faced a number of difficulties and problems at the turn of the twentieth century, and these problems did not let up through the mid-1900s. Most of these unfortunate circumstances and events affected southern migrants, old settlers, and northern

⁸⁶ Dorsey, “Commentary on Precious Lord, Take My Hand,” *Precious Lord: The Great Gospel Songs of Thomas A. Dorsey*.

⁸⁷ Dorsey, “Jesus Remembers When Others Forget,” *Great Gospel Songs*, 28-29.

⁸⁸ Levine, 183.

whites in one way or another, and all of these groups felt pressure and stress associated with them. The remainder of this chapter will investigate the situations in which southern migrants, African American northerners, and whites found themselves in early to mid-twentieth century Chicago.⁸⁹ By understanding the circumstances in which Chicagoans lived, while keeping in mind the themes of Thomas Dorsey's songs, we can better appreciate why his gospel music was so appealing to such a large and diverse portion of the city's population.

Immigration. Although African American northerners, migrants, and whites had very different experiences in early to mid-twentieth century Chicago, there were some major events that affected them all. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Chicago's population was unstable and was in constant flux. Between the years 1870 and 1900, Chicago's population ballooned from 300,000 to 1,700,000. Over 250,000 immigrants moved to Chicago in the latter part of the century, and by 1890, 40 percent of the city's population was born outside of the United States with another 38 percent being first generation. This meant that nearly four-fifths of the city's citizens had foreign-born parents. The most numerous nationalities represented in Chicago at this time were Germans, Irish, Scandinavians, Russian Jews, and Italians.⁹⁰ Because American-born Chicagoans often associated immigrants with immorality and depravity, their influx, although good for labor, concerned many Chicagoans who worried that immigrants would make the city unsafe and corrupt.⁹¹ In addition, the city was simply not prepared to deal with such huge growth. Not only were neighborhoods overcrowded, the city also had major problems with municipal services and did not have adequate garbage disposal, sewage disposal, water supply, or public transportation. Many of these services were not mastered until well into the twentieth century, affecting the quality of life for many Chicagoans, especially those who lived in poor immigrant communities.⁹²

The poor quality of life that was common for immigrants at this time led to action by members of the Social Gospel movement. Members of this movement believed that it was their responsibility as Christians to help the less fortunate and to sacrifice their personal well-being for

⁸⁹ I will discuss the population in terms of three main groups: Southern migrants, Northern African Americans, and white Chicagoans. Although none of these groups was entirely homogeneous, the forces that acted on them were sufficiently distinct to allow for them to be considered as separate entities.

⁹⁰ Louise C. Wade, *Graham Taylor: Pioneer for Social Justice 1851-1938* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 55.

⁹¹ Mina Carson, *Settlement Folk: Social Thought and the American Settlement Movement, 1885-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 13.

⁹² Wade, 55.

the greater good of society.⁹³ One of the most prominent members of the Social Gospel movement in twentieth century Chicago was Graham Taylor, the founder of Chicago Commons. Taylor was “eager to promote understanding between divergent classes, races, and religions” through his work.⁹⁴ He believed that the only way to help immigrants and the working class was to understand their situations, so he decided to live among them and established Chicago Commons, a settlement house, in an immigrant neighborhood in the northwestern part of the city in 1894. At this time over 35,000 people were living in an immigrant area of Chicago known as Packingtown. Most of these immigrants, primarily German and Irish, lived in overcrowded, unstable frame houses, and even those living in tenements lived in hot, crowded conditions and did not have plumbing. According to one historian, “Enveloping Packingtown was the smoke from the railroads, the stench of the stockyards, the odor of an open garbage pit...”⁹⁵ Members of the Social Gospel Movement worked in these kinds of neighborhoods, trying to improve conditions, and by the end of the nineteenth century they had made a significant impact on society. In addition to the aid and support that followers of the Social Gospel provided by establishing settlement houses, they also made assisting the less fortunate a Christian act and responsibility.

The logistic problems caused by this huge increase in the population were not the only issues with which the city was dealing at this time. In 1893 the city’s beloved mayor, Carter Harrison, was assassinated by a disturbed man who was angry that Harrison had not appointed him as the city’s chief attorney.⁹⁶ Harrison was shot in his office, shocking the city. Soon after the assassination, the city found itself in the midst of a harsh depression, during which time two national banks closed in addition to a number of private banks. This depression led to a high percentage of unemployment in the summer of 1893, with many laborers finding themselves out of work and homeless. According to one author, “desperate men and women – homeless, jobless, hungry, and numb from the bitter winds blowing off Lake Michigan – staged ‘huge demonstrations.’”⁹⁷ Decades before the Great Migration, Chicago was already dealing with a

⁹³ Carson, 13.

⁹⁴ Wade, 3.

⁹⁵ Wade, 60.

⁹⁶ Edward M. Burke, “Assassination of Carter Harrison,” *Encyclopedia of Chicago* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 2005), <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/2386.html>.

⁹⁷ Wade 71.

number of problems that made life in the city difficult and unforgiving for much of the population, and conditions only worsened in the years to come.

World War I and the Great Migration

America's involvement in the First World War lasted less than two years, but even so, the war greatly affected the United States. Over four million American troops were mobilized during the conflict, and there were an estimated 364,000 U.S. casualties.⁹⁸ Many of Chicago's young men went to fight in Europe, leaving behind concerned loved ones. In addition to the stress and grief Chicagoans felt because of the departure of these men, their leaving also added to the sense of instability that Chicagoans were already experiencing because of the dramatic increase in the immigrant population in the previous years. Chicago's population became increasingly unstable during the war years, and conflict within the city's ethnic communities worsened.

Chicago had a substantial German population, and prior to the war, they were well assimilated and generally had higher incomes than other ethnic minorities.⁹⁹ With the war, however, things changed, and anti-German sentiment increased dramatically.¹⁰⁰ British propaganda that portrayed Germans as "bloodthirsty Huns who bayoneted babies" was being circulated in Chicago, and many German Americans were fired from their jobs. German monuments were also repeatedly defaced, and because of these circumstances, many people with German backgrounds began distancing themselves from their cultural heritage.¹⁰¹

In addition to the impact that the war had on Chicago's German community, it also greatly affected the African American community. With the outbreak of war in 1914 the number of European immigrants that came to Chicago dramatically decreased, while the number of jobs simultaneously increased.¹⁰² The ensuing need for laborers is what instigated the Great Migration and resulted in a swell in the African American population of the city. With the migration came a new set of concerns and problems. The increase in the black population augmented tensions between African Americans and whites in Chicago. The most notable manifestation of this tension occurred in 1919 when a five-day race riot broke out after an African American teenager

⁹⁸ James L. Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War I* (New York: Harper, 1981), 310.

⁹⁹ Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 24.

¹⁰⁰ Charles J. Masters, *Governor Henry Horner, Chicago Politics, and the Great Depression* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007), 45.

¹⁰¹ Spinney, 166-167.

¹⁰² Sernett, 37.

was attacked by whites while swimming at the beach.¹⁰³ The riot left at least 38 people dead, over 500 injured, destroyed over \$250,000 in property, and left over 1,000 people homeless.¹⁰⁴

Although there was tension between white and black Chicagoans prior to the Great Migration, the sudden increase in the number of African Americans led many people, both white and black, to overestimate the negative impact that the newcomers had on race relations, and this caused increased anxiety.¹⁰⁵ Tension between white and black Chicagoans affected everyone in the city and was a universal cause of problems and stress among migrants, old settlers, and whites.

Racial Tension and Violence. Although Chicago's population was in constant flux long before the Great Migration and the city faced a number of issues before World War I, the migration brought a whole new set of problems to the fore. The most obvious group affected by the Great Migration was Southern migrants, but Northern blacks and white Chicagoans were also affected by the 170,000 African Americans that moved in to the city between 1910 and 1930, and they experienced a number of related problems.¹⁰⁶ One major issue with which Chicagoans were forced to deal was an increase in racial tension. As mentioned above, many blamed the increase in the migrant population for the racial tension that culminated in the race riot of 1919.¹⁰⁷ St. Clair Drake described the situation by saying, "There were some...particularly among Old Settlers, who viewed the riot as the tragic end of a golden age of race relations. They were very bitter against the southern Negroes, who, they felt, had brought this catastrophe upon them."¹⁰⁸ Regardless of how misplaced the blame or how flawed the idea of a "golden age" was, it did not change the fact that the migration exacerbated pre-existing tension between the races and led to an increase of racially motivated violence in post-migration Chicago. Milton Sernett described the situation by saying the "ingredients were present for intensified racial conflict during the Great Migration."¹⁰⁹

Although one reason why so many African Americans moved North during the early 1900s was to escape the ever-present threat of violence in the South,¹¹⁰ white violence towards

¹⁰³ Sernett, 127.

¹⁰⁴ Drake, 65.

¹⁰⁵ Sernett, 125.

¹⁰⁶ Spinney, 168.

¹⁰⁷ Drake, 66.

¹⁰⁸ Drake, 66.

¹⁰⁹ Sernett, 126.

¹¹⁰ Sernett, 35.

blacks was also common in the North. White Chicagoans were known to target African Americans who moved into white neighborhoods, acted as strikebreakers, or simply ventured into the wrong place at the wrong time.¹¹¹ One of the major reasons for the increased hostility between whites and blacks was that during the war years white laborers were concerned that the influx of cheap southern labor would not only leave them out of jobs, but would also drive down wages in the jobs they were able to secure.¹¹² As a result, white Chicagoans targeted migrants specifically, but also harassed those Northerners, white and black, who encouraged migration or attempted to help the newcomers.¹¹³

The Great Migration also led to an increase in the political power of the African American community, which placed another stress on race relations.¹¹⁴ For the first time, white Chicagoans were forced to engage the African American community and take their political concerns into consideration. In the early 1900s, African Americans were generally hostile toward Democrats, which did not bode well for the party in Chicago. In particular the success of the Republican Party in the elections of 1915 and 1917 was seen as proof of the growing political power of African American voters,¹¹⁵ and Democrats were forced to try to appeal to them. Eventually Republicans were not able to take black votes for granted, and both parties had to work to maintain the support of African Americans. Republicans began promising them jobs and protection in order to secure their support, and these new attempts to woo this population irritated and frightened many whites who did not like the idea of blacks, particularly migrants, being able to affect the city's politics.¹¹⁶

Housing and Living Conditions. In addition to problems related to the job market, the Great Migration also caused conflict over housing in Chicago. By 1920 the city's African American population reached 109,594, which was an increase of 148 percent since 1910. Between 1917-1918 alone fifty thousand blacks migrated to the city, and by the mid-twentieth century the black population had grown to 492,000.¹¹⁷ Although there were enough jobs for the

¹¹¹ Drake, 64, 303; Sernett, 127.

¹¹² Drake, 42.

¹¹³ Sernett, 126.

¹¹⁴ Sernett, 101.

¹¹⁵ Drake, 69.

¹¹⁶ Sernett, 167; Best, 18; Drake, 347.

¹¹⁷ Best, 19.

The *Chicago Tribune* reported that the African American population was 150,000 in 1920. It is likely that this is an exaggerated number, because, as Milton Sernett explains, Northerners often inflated migration statistics. "Finds 150,000 Negroes in Chicago," *Chicago Tribune*, August 14, 1920, 11; Sernett, 39.

African American community during the war, there was not nearly enough housing, which led to high rent and overcrowding. Because neighborhoods in Chicago were segregated and African Americans lived primarily in an eight-square-mile area known as the “Black Belt,” migrants had very few housing options, and they had to crowd the neighborhoods in which northern blacks had been settled for years.¹¹⁸ Not only were they forced to crowd into living quarters, but all African Americans were soon forced to pay increasingly high rent, which caused tension among migrants and old settlers. With such limited housing, landlords were able to demand a higher price for declining conditions. As a result, many migrants were forced to live in “old, dilapidated shacks near the railroad tracks and close to the vice area.”¹¹⁹

Once the housing crunch reached its peak and the Black Belt reached capacity, there was no option but for the black neighborhood to expand. Although this should have improved the housing situations for African Americans, in many ways it caused even more problems. White Chicagoans were concerned about maintaining a segregated society. Consequently, African Americans were not welcome in white communities, and blacks often encountered violent opposition to the expansion of the Black Belt. It was not uncommon for bombs to be thrown into the homes of African Americans who moved into predominantly white neighborhoods as well as into the homes of white and black real estate agents who brokered the moves. Between July 1917 and March 1921, at least 58 of these bombs were thrown.¹²⁰ This meant that the tradeoff for moving out of crowded, overpriced conditions in the Black Belt was to live in fear of violent opposition from white neighbors, which left the entire African American population in a no win situation when it came to housing during the Great Migration.

Another group troubled by living conditions in Chicago were members of the Social Gospel movement. This movement got its start in the late nineteenth century, and its members remained concerned for the poor and continued their work in the twentieth century. As mentioned above, members of this movement often moved into poor, dilapidated neighborhoods in hopes of improving their circumstances. This was particularly important in Chicago because poor housing conditions were so widespread. Chicago Commons, for example, maintained its presence in the city working with Spanish-speaking immigrants and African Americans as their numbers grew in the early to mid-1900s. They were also involved in attempts to integrate

¹¹⁸ Drake, 80.

¹¹⁹ Drake, 62.

¹²⁰ Drake 64.

neighborhoods.¹²¹ While the majority of the white community was violently opposed to the expansion of the Black Belt and interracial neighborhoods, those involved with Chicago Commons believed it was important and felt a religious obligation to support integration, even in the face of adversity.

Assimilation. The assimilation of African American migrants was probably the biggest issue concerning Chicago's population during the Great Migration, and in many ways it was what underlined the above-mentioned issues. Racial violence and whites' refusal to accept integration were largely based in an understanding that African Americans, and migrants in particular, behaved differently than whites. Though they experienced different pressures, migrants, old settlers, and whites were all concerned about the assimilation of the African American population.

During the time of the Great Migration, many whites and blacks believed that the only way for African Americans to succeed was to become as full a part of the larger culture as possible by accepting the "manners and social rituals" of northern, white culture. Some argued that because African Americans were not assimilated they were seen as a distinct group, which made it impossible for them to be perceived as individuals with different qualities. Whites did not see African Americans as individuals who differed in character and abilities, but rather saw them as members of a larger homogeneous group of inferior people.¹²² This was thought to be particularly problematic because negative attributes were the ones remembered and therefore associated with the entire black population. This was a concern of many Northern African Americans who viewed migrants as crude and worried that their uncouth behavior would soon be associated with all African Americans, undoing the progress that old settlers believed they had made.¹²³ If all of Chicago's African Americans were fully acculturated, however, assimilationists argued that whites would see blacks as individuals and they would therefore be "emancipated" and given "room and freedom for the expansion and development of [their] individual aptitudes."¹²⁴ Based on this understanding of assimilation, it was imperative for most, if not all,

¹²¹ Louise C. Wade, "Chicago Commons," *Encyclopedia of Chicago* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 2005), <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/244.html>.

¹²² Edward Kennard, *Essentialism and the Negro Problem* (Richmond, Va.: Saint Luke Press, 1924), 109. Drake, 563.

¹²³ Sernett, 42.

¹²⁴ Robert E. Park, "Racial Assimilation in Secondary Groups with Particular Reference to the Negro," *The American Journal of Sociology* 19:5 (1914), 607.

African Americans to acculturate as fully as possible because the refusal of some to do so hurt the prospects of all blacks.

Because assimilation was seen as essential to the success of African Americans, old settlers immediately pressured migrants to assimilate. The *Chicago Defender*, like many other African American newspapers, mentioned the concern of assimilation in a number of articles and editorials during this time. One such article stated:

Perhaps it is a matter of impossibility to change in a few months the habits and traits of an individual that has been molded for a quarter of a century or more by a stilted South. But such is the task Chicago and many other Northern cities have had thrust upon them during the past few years by reason of the vast number that have migrated from that section.¹²⁵

As this quotation shows, African Americans who lived in the North before the Great Migration were concerned about the assimilation of migrants. They were not debating whether it should occur, but were rather recognizing the difficulty that assimilating such a large number of migrants posed. Because old settlers believed they had integrated well into the larger, white culture, many saw these migrants as a threat to the positions they had established for themselves within the larger society.¹²⁶ They feared that these out-of-place southerners would “undo everything [they]...had worked so hard over time to build up.”¹²⁷ One worried old settler explained his concerns, saying,

If the white man should decide that the black man has proved he is not fit to have the right to vote, that right may be taken away. We might also find it difficult to receive other favors to which we have been accustomed, and then what would happen to us? We must remember that this is a white man’s country. Without his help we can do nothing. When we fight the white man we fight ourselves.¹²⁸

Northern blacks were concerned because they were in many ways at the mercy of whites, and they feared that unassimilated southern migrants would lead white Chicagoans to see African Americans as inferior and limit their rights even more.

¹²⁵ “Up North,” *The Chicago Defender*, November 19, 1923, 12.

¹²⁶ “Still They Come,” *Chicago Defender*, February 10, 1917, 8; Darden, 134.

¹²⁷ Sernett, 42.

¹²⁸ Drake, 65.

In addition to the anxiety that old settlers felt over the issue of assimilation, migrants were also under a great deal of pressure. Though Northern blacks saw no option but for migrants to acculturate, many southern blacks wanted to maintain aspects of their culture. As a result, migrants often felt caught between appeasing whites and northern blacks and staying true to themselves. Articles in Chicago African American newspapers were written with advice for migrants on where to live, how to behave in public, and how to dress. In articles such as “Advice to Migrants” and “When you Come North” authors encouraged southern blacks to move into “clean” neighborhoods and to “select homes according to [their] means” rather than automatically moving into segregated, black neighborhoods. They also stressed the importance of behavioral restraint by insisting that African Americans speak quietly in public.¹²⁹ Additionally, there was a great deal of pressure to dress in an “appropriate” manner at all times. Articles such as “Overalls Were Not Made for Street Wear” stated, “When in Chicago, for goodness sake, do as Chicagoans do!” It explained that although wearing dirty work clothes in public was acceptable, and even expected in the South, it was considered uncouth in the North and therefore migrants should “do as Chicagoans do” and wear “presentable” clothes when about town.¹³⁰ Similar articles also encouraged African American women not to leave the house in slippers or aprons. They argued that if migrants acted in a more appropriate, northern way they would not only enjoy a better life for themselves, but they would also “make things easier for those who must come out of the South in later years.”¹³¹

Northern African Americans and whites pressured migrants to follow the lead of old settlers who had already determined that it was in everyone’s best interest for blacks to avail themselves of their southern folk culture and acculturate as quickly and thoroughly as possible. As Michael Harris put it, “Any migrant with the slightest disposition toward adopting new, northern ways was almost under a barrage of encouragement to do so.”¹³² This pressure to acculturate was particularly stressful for migrants because they so often did not want to give up their southern ways.

Although migrants were willing to leave behind their lives in the South for the hopes of a better life in Chicago, many were nonetheless hesitant to relinquish all aspects of their former

¹²⁹ “When You Come North,” *Chicago Defender*, May 30, 1925, A12; “Advice to Migrants,” *The Chicago Defender*, May 9, 1925, 4.

¹³⁰ “Overalls Were Not Made for Street Wear,” *Chicago Defender*, October 2, 1926, 4.

¹³¹ “When You Come North”; “Advice to Migrants.”

¹³² Harris, 119.

lives and hoped to maintain some sense of familiarity by preserving features of their southern culture, especially when it came to religion. Wallace Best described migrants' desire to preserve their religious culture, saying, "the trauma of being uprooted by the migration left many black southern migrants longing for churches that were 'more like the churches in the South.'"¹³³ Milton Sernett made a similar point, saying, "leaving the church community in which they had prayed and sung for many years was difficult for many migrants."¹³⁴ The South had an emotional hold on some migrants that made their transition into northern culture quite difficult. Although they hoped for a better life in Chicago, the shock of such a dramatic change was emotionally trying and difficult for many southerners.¹³⁵ They missed their families, friends, and the familiar setting and culture of the South. Because moving to a large northern city was so difficult for many southern blacks, they often worked to create familiarity in their new surroundings. One common way in which this was accomplished was by joining churches that could act as a "part of their old environment transplanted to the new place."¹³⁶ When migrants found churches that allowed for more emotional worship and singing, they felt a bit of familiarity in an unfamiliar world.¹³⁷

White Chicagoans were also concerned about the assimilation of southern migrants, and their stereotyped preconceived notions of how southern blacks behaved clearly fed their fears. Since there was nothing white Chicagoans could do to stop the flood of migrants into the city, many turned their focus to dealing with the problems they were sure would accompany the increase in the black population. There was a common belief among white Chicagoans that southern migrants were ill prepared for life in northern cities. According to these white voices, African American migrants were ignorant, irresponsible, lazy, and unsanitary, and as long as they remained this way they would continue to cause problems for the city of Chicago.¹³⁸ A 1917 article in the *Chicago Tribune* that reported on a riot in East Saint Louis, Illinois, warned that a similar outbreak of violence could happen in Chicago if the city continued to do nothing to alter the behavior of southern migrants. The article explained, "[I]n any city where ignorant Negroes –

¹³³ Best, 65.

¹³⁴ Sernett, 77.

¹³⁵ Sernett, 78; Jerma Jackson, *Singing in My Soul*, 93.

¹³⁶ Sernett, 136.

¹³⁷ Sernett, 208.

¹³⁸ Henry M. Hyde, "Half a Million Darkies from Dixie Swarm the North to Better Themselves," *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 8, 1917, 8; Henry M. Hyde, "Negroes Partly Responsible for Woes in North," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 10, 1917, 13; Henry M. Hyde, "Vice + Politics = Riots," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 7, 1917, 6.

particularly recent immigrants from the south – are allowed to go about as they please, race riots are certain to follow. The awful outrages here in East St. Louis were chiefly due to these causes. They will have the same effect in any city.”¹³⁹ Many articles published during the Great Migration illustrated the concern that white Chicagoans had for the “reputation and appearance” of the city.¹⁴⁰ White Chicagoans had preconceived notions about southern blacks’ abilities and habits, and they were clearly concerned that if they did not change their ways the city would suffer greatly.

Post-migration

The end of the war brought back many of Chicago’s young men and lessened anti-German sentiment, but it also caused a number of new problems and exacerbated some of the old. For example, the armistice did not induce celebration among many of Chicago’s ethnic enclaves. Because these people were so deeply connected to their homelands, the post-war changes in Europe caused tension and strife in Chicago. Germans, for example, were not only angry and frustrated by the ways they were treated during the war, they were also upset by the harsh sanctions that were placed on their homeland. Italians were also sympathetic to the plight of their countrymen. Italy was promised land in secret wartime deals, but after the war, President Wilson refused to honor these agreements, upsetting local Italians. Chicago’s Jews and Poles also fought among themselves because of Poland’s anti-Jewish pogroms, and when Ireland was not given autonomy after the war the Irish community became bitter that the United States had assisted the British in the war effort.¹⁴¹

Furthermore, interracial violence also became an increasing problem in the post-war years. If employment was a cause of tension during the war, it was an explosive problem after the conflict ended. When the war ended, the number of jobs decreased while the work force expanded. White immigration increased again, and soldiers returned from the war needing jobs. Soon after the conflict ended, all remnants of a spirit of cooperation over the war effort were gone and replaced with hostility over job disputes.¹⁴² Milton Sernett described the situation,

¹³⁹ Hyde, “Vice + Politics = Riots.”

¹⁴⁰ Dwight Cooper, “Proposing Segregation,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 16, 1919, 8.

¹⁴¹ Spinney, 171.

¹⁴² Drake, 65, 85.

saying, “Many industrial centers witnessed labor strife and became racial tinderboxes. Racial violence, sparked by a single incident, could and did erupt without warning.”¹⁴³

These ethnic and racial tensions were further aggravated by the recession that followed in 1919, and the city, which had not increased housing during the war, continued to face a housing crunch. Furthermore, the recession occurred just when laborers began fighting for better working conditions and pay. Chicago workers were concerned that in the post-war period they would be laid off, or at least would lose their wartime wages and hours.¹⁴⁴ At one point that year 250,000 Chicago workers were reportedly on strike, threatening to strike, or barred from working by their employers. Race relations also continued to decline, and white and black Chicagoans who dared to wander into segregated neighborhoods risked being violently attacked or killed.¹⁴⁵

Even the “roaring twenties” were not entirely free from conflict. Though Chicagoans experienced economic prosperity during this time, they also saw the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan. The rise of the Klan in Chicago was particularly significant because the city had substantial immigrant, Catholic, Jewish, and African American populations. Eighteen Klan groups formed in Chicago in the 1920s, with an additional twelve developing in the suburbs of Cook County, and there were anywhere from forty thousand to eighty thousand Klansmen in Chicago terrorizing minority groups during this time.¹⁴⁶

The Great Depression. Post-war disappointments and racial tension of the 1920s were followed by the Great Depression, which affected Chicago along with the rest of the country. Chicago, though, was hit particularly hard by the depression because manufacturing, which was a huge industry in the city, was severely affected by the recession. By 1933 only half of Chicagoans who worked in manufacturing in 1927 had retained their jobs.¹⁴⁷ During the depression African Americans were in an even worse situation than whites because 62 percent of African Americans, as opposed to 17 percent of whites, were unskilled laborers or worked in the service industry. This was problematic because workers in these jobs were often the first to be laid off.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Sernett, 126.

¹⁴⁴ Cohen, 12.

¹⁴⁵ Spinney, 171-172.

¹⁴⁶ Spinney, 175.

¹⁴⁷ Cohen, 217.

¹⁴⁸ Cohen, 331; Spinney, 193.

The city was also in financial crisis in the years preceding the depression, making the impact even greater. By February 1, 1932, less than a year and a half after the stock market crash, the city was entirely out of money and unable to handle the situation.¹⁴⁹ Evictions were common and homelessness was rampant.¹⁵⁰ Three hundred Chicagoans lived in one garbage dump with an addition fifteen hundred spending their nights under the Michigan Avenue Bridge. According to one report, “Several hundred homeless unemployed women [slept] nightly in Chicago’s parks,”¹⁵¹ and shantytowns began emerging in the outskirts of the city. Because being forced from their homes led people to live in such wretched conditions, they often reacted violently to eviction, and small skirmishes easily grew into full-fledged riots.¹⁵²

In addition to the economic problems that emerged during this time, the depression also had a negative impact on Chicagoans’ relationships with institutions of authority. Prior to the depression, Chicagoans felt that they could depend on the government and their religious institutions to support them and assist them when they were in need. Because of the severity of the crisis, however, these institutions were unable to sufficiently help the people of Chicago. This led many to become disillusioned and untrusting of the authoritative institutions in which they used to place their trust, and this added to their hopelessness and despair.¹⁵³ The lives of Chicagoans during the Great Depression were filled with uncertainty, suffering, and violence, and the community was unable to find assistance from the very institutions that were supposed to protect them. Though Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal helped Chicago’s situation by increasing the job market, it was not until the Second World War that Chicago was able to fully recover from the depression and prosper again.¹⁵⁴

World War II. The United States military needed supplies with which to fight the Second World War, and government contracts helped private business in Chicago flourish again. The government also maintained military facilities in Chicago, which brought millions of dollars into the city.¹⁵⁵ Although the war solved Chicago’s economic problems, it also resulted in a new set of concerns. Between September 1939 and the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Chicagoans debated the role that the United States should play in the conflict. The

¹⁴⁹ Masters, 98.

¹⁵⁰ Cohen, 312.

¹⁵¹ Spinney, 192.

¹⁵² Spinney, 193-193.

¹⁵³ Cohen, 218-226.

¹⁵⁴ Spinney, 198.

¹⁵⁵ Spinney, 198-200

newspapers were divided between isolationists and interventionists. R.R. McCormick, the publisher for the *Tribune*, favored isolation, while Frank Knox and Marshall Field, publishers for the *Daily News* and the *Sun* respectively, favored intervention. Because these men had forums in which to voice their opinions, debate over whether or not to enter the war was particularly energetic and prevalent in Chicago.

With the bombing of Pearl Harbor, however, debate over U.S. involvement ceased, and the entire country was quickly affected by the government's decision to enter the war. Hundreds of thousands of Americans went off to fight, leaving behind family and friends, and many of those soldiers did not return. By the war's end, "the average Chicago block had give seven residents to the military" and those not fighting in the war worried about loved ones, rallied, bought bonds, and rationed food in support of the effort.¹⁵⁶

Racial tension was also still an issue in Chicago at this time. The economic prosperity that the war brought to Chicago again attracted African American laborers, which resulted in a number of the same problems that accompanied the Great Migration. There were housing disputes and competition for jobs, and there was constant fear that these racial tensions would result in violence and rioting.¹⁵⁷

Another problem that the war failed to fix was Chicago's education system. During the war years, public education in the city was "a disaster."¹⁵⁸ Over the preceding decades the town's bureaucracy had become out of control and jobs within the education system were being given to unqualified workers. The situation was so dire that at one point the state threatened to take away the high schools' accreditations.¹⁵⁹ Though the war improved Chicago's economic situation, it did not solve all of the city's problems. While people of all backgrounds had friends and family risking their lives in Europe, African Americans and the poor also continued to face problems back home.

How Dorsey's Music Related to the Social Context

It is important to recognize the problems that Chicagoans faced during the early to mid-twentieth century in order to understanding why there was such an increase in the popularity of gospel music at this time. Gospel songs were unique in that they appealed to people's emotions.

¹⁵⁶ Duis.

¹⁵⁷ Roger Biles, *Big City Boss: In Depression and War: Mayor Edward J. Kelly of Chicago* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984), 125.

¹⁵⁸ Spinney, 203.

¹⁵⁹ Spinney, 203.

Their lyrics did not simply praise God or reiterate biblical stories; rather, these songs confronted human experience. They focused on pain and suffering while simultaneously providing hope for a better life through faith in God. Mahalia Jackson described why she loved singing gospel by saying, “gospel songs are songs of hope. When you sing them you are delivered of your burden. You have a feeling that here is a cure for what’s wrong. It always gives me joy to sing gospel songs. I get to sing and I feel better right away.”¹⁶⁰ This quote illustrates the confidence expressed in gospel music. Jackson described feeling certain that her condition would improve, and the emotional release that this confidence provided is key to understanding the popularity of this musical genre. The people of Chicago dealt with one overwhelming and stressful event after another, and, as this chapter has illustrated, no one, regardless of race or class, was untouched by them. Because all of Chicago was affected by these events, the emotional hope engendered by gospel songs was appealing to many southern migrants, old settlers, and liberal whites.

Now that we understand some reasons why gospel appealed to such a large portion of Chicago’s population, we can move on to investigate how the music was received and the role that it played in the culture of the city. The following chapter looks at the performance of gospel music at outdoor festivals and in African American churches in order to appreciate how whites and blacks received the music as well as how it worked to bring people of different races and backgrounds together.

¹⁶⁰ Levine, 174-5.

CHAPTER 3

CHICAGO MUSIC FESTIVALS AND THE CREATION OF CULTURE

Chicago Music Festivals

The Chicagoland Music Festival was the most popular outdoor concert in early twentieth century Chicago. It was a huge event sponsored by the *Chicago Tribune* that regularly drew more than 100,000 spectators from all over the Chicago area. It was open to everyone who could afford the 25-cent ticket, and white and black Chicagoans from all backgrounds stood side by side for the three and a half hour show.¹⁶¹

The first Chicagoland Music Festival, which is a good example of those that followed, featured a wide variety of musical acts beginning with an 80-piece band that played “The Star Spangled Banner,” complete with the sound of “bombs bursting in air.” This was followed by the performance of patriotic favorites by John Phillip Sousa such as *Stars and Stripes Forever* and *U.S. Field Artillery*. The crowd was also thrilled when a band that included a group of local blacksmiths performed the *Anvil Chorus* by hammering on anvils on a darkened stage to reveal the flying sparks. A 1,000-strong African American chorus then took the dark stage carrying lamps with the women dressed in white and then men in all black. J. Wesley Jones directed them in singing a number of religious songs, including “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” and they were, according to many, the highlight of the evening. The largest event of the night occurred when 2,000 white singers of all ages and backgrounds joined the African American choir to sing the *Hallelujah Chorus* from *The Messiah*.¹⁶² In addition to the numerous choirs and bands that performed, there were also a number of soloists involved in the festivities. In the weeks preceding the event, competitions were held throughout Chicago and the surrounding areas, and the winners of these competitions represented their regions at the festival. In addition to the privilege of performing, these individuals were also honored with medals for their outstanding

¹⁶¹ James O'Donnell Bennett, “150,000 Hear Feast of Song: Mass Soldiers' Field: Thrilled by Great Music, Tribune Festival Holds Multitudes,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 24, 1930, 1.; James O'Donnell Bennett, “Drum Throbs Open Festival Tonight: Musical Fete to be Series of Spectacles, 100,000 Seats Ready in Soldiers' Field,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 23, 1930, 1.

¹⁶² Bennett, “150,000 Hear Feast of Song”; Bennett, “Drum Throbs Open Festival Tonight.”

performances.¹⁶³ The festival closed with fireworks illuminating the dark sky while the 150,000 spectators joined in singing a number of patriotic anthems including *My Country 'Tis of Thee* and *Battle Hymn of the Republic*.¹⁶⁴

The performers at this festival ranged from professional musicians to men and women who rarely, if ever, performed in organized concerts.¹⁶⁵ Not only was the audience open to everyone, but there was also a concerted effort among the festival organizers to make the performances as inclusive as possible. The 3,000-member choir that sang the *Hallelujah Chorus* was open to anyone familiar with the song, and the lyrics to the final patriotic numbers were printed in the *Tribune* in the days prior to the festival so that the audience could bring them along and participate in the finale.¹⁶⁶

In addition to offering entertainment and providing publicity for their newspaper, the festival's organizers also understood the role that festivals had in the formation of Chicago's culture, and by sponsoring the fête they hope to influence the process. One way in which they hoped to impact the larger society was through uniting Chicagoans around music. Articles published in the *Tribune* explained this goal, with one saying, "the Chicagoland Music Festival is not directed at catering to the tastes of any one class or clique of music lovers. It aims at them all."¹⁶⁷ Another explained, "all seats are free; none will be reserved at a higher price. The millionaire business man and the struggling music student will be on the same basis."¹⁶⁸ The organizers made a conscious effort to design an event that would appeal to a large number of Chicagoans, and they explicitly worked to bring together people of all classes. When describing the purpose of the second annual festival, the *Tribune* explained, "The spirit of friendly competition and the desire to unite Chicagoland in song again will be the guiding hand."¹⁶⁹ The newspaper even explicitly stated the role it hoped to play in uniting the races, saying, "efforts on

¹⁶³ "An Elevator Boy Sings to Victory in Festival Test: Colored Baritone Stops Show on South Side," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 13, 1930, 3.; Bennett, "Drum Throbs Open Festival Tonight."; "It's Mammoth, This Songfest of Chicagoland: Four Thousand to Take Part in Program," *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 17, 1930, 5.

¹⁶⁴ Bennett, "Drum Throbs Open Festival Tonight."; Bennett, "150,000 Hear Feast of Song."

¹⁶⁵ "Music Festival Contests Offer Chicago a Treat: First Winners to Appear in Public This Week," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 10, 1930, 3.

¹⁶⁶ Edward Moore, "Music Festival Opened to All Who Like to Sing: Thousands Will Thunder Hallelujah Chorus," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 27, 1930, 11.; "It's Mammoth, This Songfest of Chicagoland."

¹⁶⁷ Edward Moore, "Music Festival Thrills Await You all Tonight: Soldiers' Field Open at 5 P.M.," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 16, 1933, 1,4.

¹⁶⁸ Edward Moore, "All Chicagoland to be Welcome at Music Fete: Event to Make History Next Saturday," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 18, 1930, 3.

¹⁶⁹ "1931 Musical Festival Plans are Under Way: Fifty Newspapers Will Join the Tribune," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 1, 1931, 19.

these public occasions are important because they do more by their talent and their good will to create kindly feeling between Caucasians and Negroes than does any other kind of propaganda that has that end in view. It was so at the Chicagoland Music festival.”¹⁷⁰

Not only did these events improve race relations by bring blacks and white together physically, but the festivals also emphasized similarity and created common ground between the races. When African Americans sang gospel songs, they were affirming their Protestant Christianity, which created a point of contact between them and white Protestants in the audience. Similarly, by including patriotic songs and encouraging the entire audience to sing them together, the organizers were reinforcing an American identity, rather than one based on race. Although the festival’s organizers surely knew that the whites attending this interracial gathering would be fairly liberal and that staunch racists would disapprove and stay away, this does not change the fact that the paper was actively trying to affect conditions in Chicago and that they wanted to foster interracial good will, if only among African Americans and more liberal whites.

In addition to bringing Chicagoans together, organizers also hoped that the festival would create an increased fervor about music in Chicago. One article exclaimed, “‘We’re going to make Chicago the music center of the world!’ By giving the finest in music to the general public through the medium of its greatest orchestras, bands, choruses, and individual artists Chicago is bound to see a revival of interest in music.”¹⁷¹ They hoped the festival would “grow and become a mighty movement for musical good in the years to come.”¹⁷² Founders of the festival hoped that their event would increase local interest in music, thereby improving the culture and reputation of Chicago. Those involved in the *Tribune*’s Chicagoland Music Festival understood the role they played in the formation of Chicago culture, and knowing the effect they had, they hoped to forward specific agendas through their involvement in this music fête.

The Chicagoland Music Festival is just one example of many outdoor concerts that were organized in early-twentieth century Chicago. These festivals and concerts had long been essential to the cultural history of Chicago, and they were so important that public spaces such as parks and open stadiums were specifically developed to support them. As early as the 1850s,

¹⁷⁰ James O’Donnell Bennett, “Singers to Give Chicago Jubilee Artistic Note: 2,000 to be Heard in Choruses in Loop,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 8, 1931, 1,12.

¹⁷¹ Albert J. Pagner, “The Music Center,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 9, 1937, 10.

¹⁷² Bennett, “Drum Throbs Open Festival Tonight.”

Chicago's ethnic enclaves organized concerts and festivals to celebrate their culture and musical heritage. In addition to providing summertime entertainment, outdoor concerts also worked to influence Chicago's culture, often in an explicit and self-conscious way. Private donors and the city were known to sponsor festivals to serve as "progressive campaigns to uplift public taste, reform recreation, and instill patriotism."¹⁷³ The festivals' sponsors were intentionally working to mold Chicago culture in hopes of creating what they considered to be a better society. By deciding to involve certain groups and planning particular performances, they were acting as cultural gatekeepers for the larger society and were therefore integral to the creation of culture in Chicago after the Great Migration.

Newspapers were particularly involved in summer music festivals in Chicago and consequently in the formation of Chicago culture. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* and the *Chicago Defender* were involved in musical traditions of the time, with both sponsoring large-scale summer music festivals. The *Tribune* established the Chicagoland Music Festival in 1930¹⁷⁴ and the *Defender* launched the American Negro Music Festival in 1939.¹⁷⁵ The *Defender* also sponsored the Bud Billiken's Easter Music Festival and the Bud Billiken's parade and picnic, both of which focused on the performance of African American religious music.¹⁷⁶ By sponsoring these events, which included and often focused on African American music, these papers were not only working to increase their African American readership, but more importantly, they were making their contribution to the construction of culture that was occurring at this time.

The *Chicago Daily Tribune* has been the most prominent Chicago newspaper for generations. In 1925 it led local sales with a circulation of 650,000 and was respected enough to gain national influence.¹⁷⁷ With such a large circulation, one can be sure that both African Americans and whites were reading the paper, but it was certainly not geared toward an African American audience and it was owned and operated by whites. The paper nonetheless published

¹⁷³ Derek Vaillant, "Outdoor Concerts," *Encyclopedia of Chicago* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 2005), <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/940.html>.

¹⁷⁴ Vaillant; Bennett, "150,000 Hear Feast of Song."

¹⁷⁵ "Daddy of Blues Here for Negro Music Festival," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 23, 1947, 10.

¹⁷⁶ Wallace Best, "Bud Billiken Day Parade," *Encyclopedia of Chicago* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 2005); "600 Billikens in Easter Song-Fest," *Chicago Defender*, March 30, 1946, 20; "To Pick Best Gospel Group," *Chicago Defender*, July 23, 1949, 28.

¹⁷⁷ Mark R. Wilson, "Chicago Tribune," *Encyclopedia of Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005), <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/275.html>.

articles about the African American community, African American music, and the interaction of whites and blacks in Chicago during the early to mid-twentieth century.

The *Chicago Defender* was another nationally influential Chicago-based paper and was first published in May of 1905. Soon after publication began, the *Defender* became the most prominent black newspaper in America.¹⁷⁸ Because the *Defender* was targeted to an African American audience and had such a wide readership, investigating how it reported on gospel music can tell us a great deal about how early to mid-twentieth century black Chicagoans reacted to this new genre and to performances of the music.

I see gospel as an expression of a new, more interracial northern culture that was built around the population's Protestant identity, and I understand gospel performance as a medium for negotiating racial tension in early-twentieth century Chicago. Looking at the city's most popular white and African American newspapers allowed me to determine how the Chicago community reacted to the rise of gospel and how the performance of African American religious music worked to unite the public and ease tensions caused by the Great Migration.

The Chicagoland Music Festival. The Chicagoland Music Festival was a huge fête held every August beginning in 1930. In its first year the festival drew a crowd of 150,000 people, and it continued to sell out Soldier Field for years to come.¹⁷⁹ Though a performance of African American religious music was only one of many attractions at the music festival, it received a great deal of attention, and according to the *Tribune*, it was a major draw. In addition to advertising for and reporting on the music festival generally, articles in the *Tribune* specifically mentioned the huge African American choirs that performed every year, making sure to include that the choir sang African American religious songs.¹⁸⁰ By the early 1930s, the all-black chorus with over 1,000 members was already known to be a favorite at the festival. A *Tribune* article from 1934 described the choir's performance, saying, "These singers have always been high favorites on the Chicagoland Music Festival programs, and they have always deserved their favor – never more so than last night."¹⁸¹ By the next year, the choir led by J. Wesley Jones was the sole focus of a number of articles. Rather than simply listing the group as one of many

¹⁷⁸ James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 69, 74.

¹⁷⁹ Bennett, "150,000 Hear Feast of Song"; Edward Moore, "Festival Thrills 100,000: Music Lovers Pack Immense Soldiers' Field," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 19, 1934, 1,4.

¹⁸⁰ Philip Maxwell. "J. Wesley Jones to Lead 1,000 in Two Spirituals: His 19th Appearance at Music Festival," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 5, 1950, 14.

¹⁸¹ Moore, "Festival Thrills 100,000."

performances, the paper began publishing articles describing the chorus, the songs they were planning to perform, reports on rehearsals leading up to the show, and how their religious music was unique and an important part of African American culture.¹⁸² According to the *Tribune*, the all black choir was not only enthusiastically received each year, but it truly was the highlight of the festival.¹⁸³

The *Chicago Defender* also published extensively on the Chicagoland Music Festival. While the *Defender* advertised for the occasion and mentioned the performance of the massive African American chorus,¹⁸⁴ it also focused on African Americans who were honored at the event. In 1930, for example, the *Defender* reprinted an article that appeared in the *Tribune* because it illustrated the success of J. Wesley Jones's chorus. The article said that the performance "stole the show" and that the chorus was placed "in seats of honor." It then went on to describe the hush that fell over the crowd when they began performing and the thunderous applause that followed.¹⁸⁵ The *Defender* did not reprint this article to save time or money; rather it was reprinted to reiterate how popular the chorus was among the larger Chicago population. This was not simply the *Defender* lauding the chorus they sponsored, but was an honor coming from a white author at a competing newspaper.

Not only was the African American chorus a hugely popular event at the festival, but smaller choirs and individual African Americans were also recognized for their outstanding performances. Though some of these recognized musicians performed secular music, many produced religious music. J. Wesley Jones, for example, was one individual honored for his contribution to the festival. In addition to recognizing his chorus, the festival also acknowledged him personally, paying tribute to him on multiple occasions.¹⁸⁶ John Burdette and Zola Emery

¹⁸² Edward Moore, "Chorus of 1,000 at Festival will Sing Spirituals: Great Negro Music Again to be Dramatized," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 9, 1935, 5; Kathleen McLaughlin, "Massed Negro Voices Lifted in Festival Songs: Chorus Rehearses for Event," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 10, 1931, 3.

¹⁸³ Edward Moore, "Negro Chorus Notes Feature of Festival: 2,000 to Take Part in Saturday Program," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 16, 1932, 5; Philip Maxwell, "Colored Chorus to Sing Festival Spirituals Again: J. Wesley Jones to Lead 1,000 Voices," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 4, 1936, 13.

¹⁸⁴ Nathum Daniel Brascher, "Random Thoughts," *Chicago Defender*, August 17, 1935, 11; "Center of Interest," *Chicago Defender*, September 7, 1957, 12; "J.W. Jones to Direct Huge City Chorus," *Chicago Defender*, September 8, 1951, 17; David W. Kellum, "Backstage," *Chicago Defender*, April 1, 1939, 18.

¹⁸⁵ James O'Donnell Bennett, "From Sunday's Tribune," August 30, 1930, 4 (reprint of "150,000 Hear Feast of Song: Mass Soldiers' Field; Thrilled by Great Music, Tribune Festival Holds Multitudes," *Chicago Tribune*, August 24, 1930).

¹⁸⁶ "Borge, J. Wesley Jones Share Festival Honor," *Chicago Defender*, August 8, 1953, 9; "Center of Interest," *Chicago Defender*, September 7, 1957, 12.

were also singled out for their performances, and the Mundy chorus received second place during one of the festival's many competitions.¹⁸⁷ As we can see, although whites developed the festival, African Americans were an important part of the line-up and were recognized as such.

The Chicagoland Music Festival brought the races together in a literal as well as a figurative sense, achieving one of the goals set forth by the founders.¹⁸⁸ The 100,000 spectators were racially diverse, and every August whites and blacks left their segregated neighborhoods and came together at Soldier Field to enjoy music performed by people of all races. Diversity was not only found in the audience, but also among the performers, with both whites and blacks performing individually and in interracial choruses. Furthermore, African American religious music was not simply one genre among many performed at the festival, but was a hit with all Chicagoans, regardless of race. The popularity of J. Wesley Jones's chorus and of individual gospel singers is evidence that Chicago's white and black communities both appreciated African American religious music and wanted to hear traditionally black songs during the largest musical festival of the year. Additionally, the performance of gospel music emphasized the Protestant Christianity of the African American performers, uniting festival participants through their shared religious worldview.

American Negro Music Festival. The Chicagoland Music Festival was not the only summer music celebration in Chicago. For years Chicagoans also gathered for the American Negro Music Festival, held every July beginning in 1939. J. Wesley Jones and Thomas A. Dorsey again directed a huge chorus of at least 1,000 voices.¹⁸⁹ Crowds for the festival topped 50,000, and According to a 1944 *Tribune* article, this festival was "proclaimed as one of the best musical events in Chicago."¹⁹⁰ This festival, like the *Tribune*'s fête, also emphasized what united Chicagoans in an attempt to foster interracial goodwill. For example, although the event was a self proclaimed "Negro music festival" it was held to support the Army-Navy Relief, identifying the event as a patriotic affair, which reaffirmed the black community's American identity.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ "Musicians Give Radio Programs," *Chicago Defender*, August 30, 1930, 5.; Trib Festival Winner Sings With Chorus," *Chicago Defender*, December 14, 1940, 2.; "Wins Second Place," *Chicago Defender*, August 30, 1930, 22.

¹⁸⁸ "1931 Musical Festival Plans are Under Way.," Bennett, "Singers to Give Chicago Jubilee Artistic Note."

¹⁸⁹ "Negro Festival of Music Will be Held Saturday: Joe Louis, Paul Robeson to be on Program," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 18, 1943, N5; Grace W. Tompkins, "1000-Voice Chorus to Feature Music Festival," *Chicago Defender*, June 17, 1944, 18.

¹⁹⁰ "Music Festival of Negroes to be on Friday," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 15, 1945, S1.; "Stars Will Sing at Fifth Negro Music Festival," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 2, 1944, W2.

¹⁹¹ Tompkins, "1000-Voice Chorus to Feature Music Festival."

Furthermore, although African American musicians performed a variety of musical acts at this festival, including classical, blues and boogie-woogie, religious music was always an important part of the program, and its Protestant focus worked to create common ground between whites and blacks, just as it did at the Chicagoland festival.¹⁹²

Although a rival paper sponsored the festival, the *Chicago Tribune* did not simply sell advertising space for the event, but wrote extensive articles describing the line-up. They mentioned artists from all over the country who would be performing and occasionally listed the religious songs that were on the program. “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” was a festival favorite, and Dorsey’s “If You Never Needed the Lord Before, You Sure Need Him Now” was also performed on occasion.¹⁹³ Another common topic discussed in these articles was the success of the festivals, and many columns discussed this success in terms of turnout. For example, a 1944 article, with a headline reading “Crowd Braves Rain to Enjoy Program,” focused on the 16,000 who attended the festival even though it was pouring rain.¹⁹⁴ Another article not only noted the impressive attendance of 20,000, but also emphasized the crowd’s approval of the event by describing their “screaming and shouting” for the entertainers.¹⁹⁵ In addition to measuring success by the crowds the festival drew, other articles focused on the quality of music performed at the fête. Gladys Priddy, for example, described the sixth annual festival by writing, “Music – deep, warm, and smooth – rose again in glorious cadences last night.”¹⁹⁶ According to the *Tribune*, large numbers of Chicagoans were not only coming out to the American Negro Music Festival, but it was a yearly success.

Like the Chicagoland Music Festival, the American Negro Music Festival also worked explicitly to bring the races together and foster interracial goodwill, and this was often a focus of *Defender* articles. In 1944 the American Negro Music Festival held a “kick-off luncheon” where over 200 community leaders, both white and black, met to “pledge their cooperation to the successful promotion of this gigantic event,”¹⁹⁷ and local leaders were not the only ones to recognize the importance of events like these for race relations. In March 1945, shortly before

¹⁹² “Present Annual Negro Festival on Friday Night: Proceeds Will Benefit Veterans’ Groups,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 7, 1946, SW6.

¹⁹³ “Record Crowd is Expected at Negro Festival,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 24, 1943, 11.

¹⁹⁴ “American Negro Music Festival Attracts 16,000: Crowd Braves Rain to Enjoy Program,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 9, 1944, 13.

¹⁹⁵ “20,000 Negroes Attend Annual Music Festival,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 17, 1949, 8.

¹⁹⁶ Gladys Priddy, “Negro Festival Sweet, Joyful and Plenty Hot,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 21, 1945, 12.

¹⁹⁷ “Map Plans for Negro Music Festival,” *Chicago Defender*, May 20, 1944, 2.

his death, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt wrote a letter to festival organizers expressing his approval of the events. Roosevelt wrote:

“I am glad to know that your organization is now completing plans for the sixth annual American Negro Music Festival. The 1944 programs, witnessed by thousands of American citizens in Chicago, St. Louis and Detroit, contributed much to inter-racial morale on the home front and – through shortwave broadcasts – to the unity of our fighting forces abroad.”¹⁹⁸

The festival’s attempts to foster better race relations was not only recognized locally, but was such a force that it gained national attention and the approval of the president. Not surprisingly, the *Defender* made sure to report on this.

In addition to bringing white and black spectators together, this festival eventually integrated the performances as well. As early as 1944, whites became involved in the show. In that year Pat O’Brien, a white actor, made an appearance “representing Hollywood.” The next year Paul Muni, another actor known for his interest in improving race relations, was a star guest at the festival.¹⁹⁹ In addition to organizing appearances by famous white actors, musical performances were also eventually integrated. While the massive chorus directed by Wesley and Dorsey started out as an entirely African American group, by 1945 the choir was interracial.²⁰⁰ Blacks and whites were not only singing together, but their songs were African American religious music. There were also all white groups that eventually performed at the festival. For example, the Four Footlight Favorites, a “non-Negro quartet of Metropolitan Opera stars,” performed in 1947.²⁰¹ At the American Negro Music Festival whites and blacks were not only coming together to listen to African American religious music, but they eventually came together to perform it as well. Regardless of the participants’ race and background, most shared a Protestant and an American identity, which was front and center at this event, and this allowed a diverse population to be involved in this festival. It seems, then, that the goal of fostering inter-racial good will through music found success in the American Negro Music Festival.

¹⁹⁸ “Music Fest Endorsed by Late President Roosevelt,” *Chicago Defender*, April 28, 1945, 14.

Because the festival was so successful in Chicago, it expanded and similar festival occurred St. Louis and Detroit in 1944. (“Music Festival to be Run in Several Cities in 1944,” *Chicago Defender*, April 22, 1944, 8.)

¹⁹⁹ “Paul Muni to Star at Music Festival,” *Chicago Defender*, July 21, 1945, 2.

²⁰⁰ “Music Festival of Negroes to be on Friday.”

²⁰¹ “Daddy of Blues Here for Negro Music Festival.”

Other Music Festivals. In addition to the large-scale festivals produced by Chicago newspapers, there were also a number of smaller events that focused on religious music and worked to mold Chicago culture in the twentieth century. One such event was the Billiken's Easter Music Festival, which celebrated African American Protestant Christianity, as well as African American religious music. As the name implies, this festival was held on Easter, and Robert Abbott, the founder of the *Chicago Defender*, started it in 1930. It was called the "Billiken's" festival after Bud Billiken, a fictional character created by Abbott in 1923 in an attempt to reach out to African American youth in Chicago.²⁰² The Easter festival was in keeping with Billiken's character and focused on children. Hundreds of kids attended the Easter Music Festivals and played musical instruments, sang, and recited poetry about the resurrection of Christ. In 1946 there were a reported 600 children "of all races and denominations" participating in the festival, and by 1949 that number grew to 1,000.²⁰³ Although the Bud Billiken's Easter Music Festival did not have nearly the turnout of the larger Chicago music festivals, it nonetheless provides another instance in which people of different races gathered around their common faith and appreciated African American religious music.

In addition to the Easter Music Festival, the Billiken Club also sponsored a yearly picnic and parade to celebrate the anniversary of the club's founding, and this picnic often included gospel singing as entertainment. There was a "Battle of Gospel Singers," which was the highlight of the 1949 picnic, where men and women competed for the title of "Best Gospel Singer in Chicago."²⁰⁴ A 1951 article also emphasized the spectacular music that would be performed at that year's picnic, saying songs would be sung by some of the "most outstanding gospel songsters in the country."²⁰⁵ Although this event was not explicitly religious, it nonetheless emphasized a Protestant worldview by including gospel music, which had become so much a part of African American culture and identity that it was included in otherwise non-religious activities.

Clearly African American religious songs, whether they would now be considered spirituals or gospel, were an integral part of Chicago culture by the middle of the twentieth century. Not only were these songs performed at a variety of festivals that were hosted by a

²⁰² Best, "Bud Billiken Day Parade."

²⁰³ "600 Billikens in Easter Song-Fest.;" "1,000 Children Giving Music Festival Today," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 17, 1949, 20.

²⁰⁴ "To Pick Best Gospel Group."

²⁰⁵ "Gospel Songs to Thrill You," *Chicago Defender*, July 21, 1951, 10.

number of groups, but they were often the highlight of these gatherings and the crowd's favorite. Although these songs were originally intended for use in black churches, they became a part of the public sphere and came to represent Chicago culture. The genre's religious underpinnings created a point of contact between white and black Chicagoans, allowing whites to appreciate African American religious music as a Protestant, rather than a strictly black, style. Throngs of Chicagoans packed music festivals in order to hear J. Wesley Jones and Thomas A. Dorsey direct huge choruses and African American musicians were regularly honored by white organizations for their musical talent. By 1945 white Chicagoans were no longer simply listening to African American religious music, but were also active in the performance of it. Whites sang alongside African Americans in Jones's choir, and white and black children sang together at the Billiken's Easter festival. Though gospel songs and spirituals were still strongly associated with the African American community, because they were Protestant, they were able to become part of the larger Chicago culture.

Gospel Performances as Ritual

By the middle of the twentieth century, the performance of African American religious music was not simply part of black culture, but was part of Chicago's culture. This shift may seem fairly unimportant, but in fact, it was quite significant, and if we see the performance of gospel music and spirituals as ritual action, we can appreciate how the increased popularity of gospel music among both whites and African Americans resulted in a more interracial culture. Considering gospel performance as ritual action also allows us to better understand the formation of group unity among many migrants, old settlers, and white liberals during this time, who, although living dramatically different lives, were united by their Protestant worldviews.

According to Catherine Bell, "intrinsic to ritualization are strategies for differentiating itself – to various degrees and in various ways – from other ways of acting within any particular culture."²⁰⁶ That is to say, what makes something ritual is that it is set apart as distinct from everyday activity. Although music may have been a part of everyday life for many Chicagoans, performances of gospel songs were distinct from other types of music because they took place in African American churches and at summer music festivals. These performances occurred at very specific times and places and in front of an audience. In addition to the communal nature of these musical performances, the songs themselves also differed from other musical forms. As we have

²⁰⁶ Bell, 90.

determined, gospel lyrics expressed a Protestant worldview, and the music appealed to emotion. The emotional nature of the songs, their Protestant themes, and the nature of their performances set gospel music apart from other forms of music, making their presentation ritual.

Once we read gospel performance as a ritual action, we are able to see how it was used to negotiate cultural influence and control. Changes in ritual allow for changes in social dynamics and influence. This is possible because all groups involved in a ritual action necessarily wield some control. Although it may seem as if one group is dominating the other, it is not that simple, and the seemingly oppressed group actually has a measure of control if only because their presence is required for the ritual to take place.²⁰⁷ After the Great Migration we can see how migrants, Northern African Americans, and liberal whites all had influence over the formation of Chicago's changing culture. Furthermore, by understanding gospel performances as ritual action we can see how in the process of asserting their influence, the above-mentioned groups first differentiated themselves from other factions and then united with them.

Gospel in African American Churches. We can see how, when migrants became a significant portion of Chicago's population, the ritual performance of religious music eased tensions between migrants and old settlers by providing both groups with a sense of control and influence over the emerging religious culture. Many migrants wanted to maintain aspects of their southern folk culture by keeping more emotional Southern religious music, while many old settlers wanted to continue using classical music and traditional Protestant hymns.²⁰⁸ By refusing to perform certain types of music both of these groups were influencing the culture. Old settlers were asserting their control over the northern African American religious culture when they resisted the use of emotional songs in their churches, and many migrants asserted their control when they chose to join storefront churches, which catered to their musical preferences.

In addition to these assertions of influence, we can also see another negotiation that took place. In time, African American mainline Protestants realized that in order to attract migrants into their churches they would have to allow for more emotional music, specifically gospel, to be performed during services.²⁰⁹ They again asserted their influence over the religious culture by allowing migrants into their churches and by regulating the music. That having been said, many migrants also asserted, while simultaneously surrendering, a measure of control over the

²⁰⁷ Bell, 207.

²⁰⁸ Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 94, 102.

²⁰⁹ Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 107.

emerging Northern culture. Some actively chose to join these mainline denominations, but at the same time the music they accepted was not traditional southern music. Although it was more familiar than Protestant hymns, it was nonetheless something new, and they too gave up some of their control and compromised in order to be part of mainline traditions. By the 1920s the musical culture of African American churches in Chicago had changed significantly,²¹⁰ because migrants and old settlers used religious music as a means of asserting their authority, consequently influencing the religious culture of black Chicago. By forfeiting some of their authority over the culture, these groups were able to share responsibility for the culture that emerged.

We can also see how ritual worked to unite disparate groups. Bell maintains that ritual can work to differentiate communities, by stressing and reiterating differences, but that it can also work to integrate communities, by allowing for negotiation.²¹¹ We can see that soon after the Great Migration both of these processes took place within the African American community. The ritual performance of religious music at first worked to differentiate communities by emphasizing the difference between migrants and Northern African Americans. Though ritual worked to distinguish these groups, soon thereafter it worked to bring them together by allowing for the negotiation of cultural authority. Once each group forfeited some of their control, many migrants and Northern blacks were able to accept gospel music in their churches, allowing them to worship together. A similar trajectory can be traced between whites and African Americans participating in Chicago music festivals after the migration.

Gospel Music at Chicago Music Festivals. Prior to the Great Migration white Chicagoans sang traditional Protestant hymns, and since Northern African Americans also tended to use these songs, whites had very little, if any, familiarity with other forms of African American religious music. After the Great Migration, however, there was much more diversity in religious music among the African American population, and, as mentioned above, gospel and other more emotional forms of music made their way into many black churches. Once these forms of music were accepted within the African American community, it was just a matter of time before they became points of conversation and negotiation between white and black Chicagoans as well.

²¹⁰ Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 94.

²¹¹ Bell, 125.

At first, gospel music worked to differentiate African American and white Chicagoans, much like it had for blacks. Many African Americans, both migrants and Northerners, were united by this new musical genre, but it simultaneously distinguished them from white Americans who maintained their traditional Protestant hymns and had very little interaction with African American worship. Just as gospel worked first to separate and then unite African Americans, the same was true between the races, and ritual performances of gospel music were also used by liberal whites and blacks to influence the formation of Chicago culture.

By inviting African Americans to perform gospel music at events such as the Chicagoland Music Festival white Chicagoans were both asserting and forfeiting some of their control over Chicago's culture. By permitting African American performers to take part in the festival, whites were asserting their authority over the event and therefore over the form that Chicago's culture would take. At the same time, however, by allowing African Americans to participate and perform their music, whites were giving some influence to these singers and composers. African American musicians were impacting the larger culture, but were able to do so in this setting because the liberal white community permitted it.

The festival organizers understood the role they were playing in the formation of Chicago's culture, and that their festival would help determine how people within the society would interact. Though white festival administrators were working to integrate aspects of African American culture into the larger society, they were dramatically limiting the impact that African Americans had on the larger culture by permitting them to participate in a very specific and relatively socially acceptable capacity. In the early-twentieth century, there was a widespread understanding that people of African descent were innately musical and therefore more musically talented than people of European descent.²¹² This belief was so widespread that a number of scholars developed scientific experiments to test for innate differences in musical abilities among whites and blacks. The "Seashore Measure of Musical Talent" is an example of a system that was developed to study racial differences in musical ability. It tested pitch, intensity, time, rhythm, and tonal memory.²¹³ These "scientific" studies appeared to reaffirm the idea that there were natural differences between the races, and that when it came to musical ability

²¹² Henry Edward Krehbiel, *Afro-American Folksongs: A Study in Racial and National Music* (New York: G. Shirmer, 1914), 59.

²¹³ Yale S. Nathanson, "The Musical Ability of the Negro," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 140 (November, 1928): 186-7.

African Americans were superior.²¹⁴ Therefore, although the festival organizers were using black religious music to create a social bond between the races, which consequently allowed African Americans to impact the larger culture, organizers were simultaneously reaffirming innate racial differences and racial hierarchies.

In contrast to the control that whites wielded by selectively integrating aspects of African American culture into white society, black Chicagoans were also asserting influence through their performances. By accepting the invitation and taking part in a program organized by whites, African Americans were both asserting their control, by agreeing to participate, and sacrificing some cultural authority by participating in an event that was directed by whites and that limited black participation. Just by organizing and taking part in this festival these groups were influencing society. The widespread approval that the performances of African American religious music received was also a form of compromise. By continuing to perform in front of white crowds and eventually in conjunction with white musicians, African Americans were allowing what was once a part of their unique culture to be absorbed into the larger society. At the same time, by accepting an aspect of African American tradition, white Chicagoans were allowing blacks to participate in and influence Chicago's dominant culture, although in a controlled and limited way. A similar process was occurring during the American Negro Music Festival, the Bud Billiken's Easter Music Festival, and the Bud Billiken's parade and picnic, because all of these events involved groups that sacrificed some control over the culture by accepting the participation of other factions as legitimate, while at the same time each group was asserting its cultural authority by intentionally accepting and encouraging the mixing of races and cultures.

By the middle of the twentieth century, gospel music in Chicago was no longer strictly an African American musical form. Though the genre was still primarily associated with the black community and most composers and performers were African American, people of all races and backgrounds came to appreciate this music and were able to find comfort in gospel lyrics. Gospel's Protestant message resonated with Chicago's downtrodden population, which during

²¹⁴ The idea that African Americans were innately different from and in some ways superior to European Americans continued to persist long after the abolition of slavery and it was maintained not only by whites, but also by a number of African Americans. People of both races also commonly assumed that people of African descent were by nature intensely religious, imaginative, emotional, and affectionate. Though these seem to be positive attributes, they reaffirmed the belief that there were innate differences between the races. (H.T. Kealing, "The Characteristics of the Negro People," in *The Negro Problem, Classics in Black Studies* (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2003), Nathanson, "The Musical Ability of the Negro.")

the first half of the twentieth century was nearly everyone. The music's religious foundation also allowed for a point of contact and was able to create a sense of connectedness among Chicago's interracial, Protestant population. Furthermore, both white and black Chicagoans used the ritual performance of gospel music as a means of negotiating cultural authority and influence, which brought about change in the city's culture. The African American community used gospel in order to sort through tensions caused by the influx of southern migrants, and the larger community used it to negotiate tensions between the races. The performance of gospel music allowed members of various groups to influence and change Chicago's culture, and they were therefore able to cope with tensions in a non-threatening way. Both African American and white Chicagoans were able to feel in control even while surrendering some of their cultural authority, and this allowed for interracial good will to flourish.

Considering the city's population as a whole, rather than focusing on a single group, has allowed us to better understand the circumstances that led to the increase in popularity of gospel music in Chicago. This paper has shown that different segments of the population dramatically impacted each other and that each was involved in the development of the others' cultures. Consequently, migrants, old settlers, and white Chicagoans all influenced the development of gospel and were all essential in propelling the popularity of gospel music in early twentieth century Chicago.

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