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In the late 1920s, Reverend A. W. Nix (1880-1949), an African-American Baptist minister born in Texas, made fifty-four commercial recordings of his sermons on phonographs in Chicago. On these recordings, Nix presented vocal traditions and styles long associated with the southern, rural black church as he preached about self-help, racial uplift, thrift, and Christian values. As southerners like Nix fled into cities in the North to escape the rampant racism in the South, they encountered intra-cultural disputes about whether or not African-American vocal styles of singing and preaching that had emerged during the slavery era were appropriate for uplifting the race. Specific vocal characteristics, like those on Nix’s recordings, were linked to the image of the “Old Negro” by many African-American leaders who favored adopting Europeanized vocal characteristics and musical repertoires into African American churches in order to uplift the modern “New Negro” citizen.

Through interviews with family members, musical analyses of the sounds on Nix’s recordings, and examination of historical documents and relevant scholarship, this dissertation illuminates conflicting interpretations of black vocal heritage in the 1920s. I argue that the development of the phonograph in the 1920s afforded preachers like Nix the opportunity to present traditional black vocal styles of the southern black church as modern black voices. As a
minister, Nix utilized the new medium of phonograph recordings to present sermons with messages of racial uplift that instructed his listeners to avoid the worldly lures of a sinful city life. He chose to present these messages on recordings that incorporated the rich and distinctive vocal traditions of preaching and singing that had been closely associated with African Americans in the rural South since the days of slavery. Nix’s recorded sermons highlight the diverse and contested nature of the ideas ascribed to black vocalities as African Americans asserted cultural autonomy and engaged with modernity. The success of Nix’s recorded sermons on phonographs demonstrates the enduring values African Americans placed on traditional vocal practices.
Reverend Andrew William (A. W.) Nix was an African-American Baptist minister who recorded fifty-four sermons on the Vocalion label in Chicago between 1927-1931. His history is significant because it illuminates issues important to so many who migrated from the rural South to urban cities in the North in the early part of the twentieth century. Born in a farming community in Texas and schooled in Kentucky, Nix eventually migrated north to New York, Chicago, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh before finally settling in Philadelphia. Nix’s recorded sermons offer primary-source evidence of the expressive traditions of southern black Baptists—black folk¹ whose vocal traditions were frequently dismissed by many educated African Americans who viewed these traditions not only as a reminder of the slave past, but also as an example of uncontrolled emotionality, backwardness, and ignorance. If these vocal traditions were so offensive to some, why were commercial recordings of these traditions made and why were they so popular? Recorded sermons by Nix and others highlighted the traditional vocal techniques of the black folk and presented them in new modern contexts that became symbols for advancement and cultural autonomy.

An examination of Nix’s forty-seven surviving recorded sermons reveals the values held important to him and presumably to those who purchased his records. If the black minister was the “voice of the people,” what can the preacher’s use of voice tell us about culturally agreed-upon values and traditions? How does his use of voice address not only the concerns for African-American migrants in the 1920s, but also highlight the importance of the voice and vocal aesthetics as a contested arena? In the divisive racial environment of the 1920s, one in which

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¹ I invoke the term “black folk” in reference to W. E. B. Du Bois’ landmark book, The Souls of Black Folk, in which he conceptualized a division in the black community between the educated elite (the Talented Tenth) and the rest of the community (the black folk).
members of African American communities were constantly pulled in one direction or another to “uplift the race,” how did vocal traditions on phonograph recordings act as new symbols of modernity and advancement in an era that was fraught with both inter- and intra-cultural racism?

As anthropologist Amanda Weidman has argued, the voice operates both viscerally, as a physical sound linked to the body, and metaphorically, as a cultural construct of empowerment and agency. “In much anthropological and feminist scholarship,” Weidman explains, “the voice, although not always explicitly thematized, has been identified as a vehicle of empowerment, self-representation, self-expression, authentic knowledge, and agency.” The voice, as a physical part of the body with sonic qualities, including timbre and dynamics, for example, can be adjusted to conform to culturally-accepted standards, and also has the capability of expressing opinion, “giving voice” or agency. Nix, as I will show, adjusted his voice to conform to these standards.

This dissertation analyzes the sonic properties of the voices heard in Nix’s sermons and suggests that these not only served to remind African Americans of the past, they also provided an alternative avenue for advancement, cultural autonomy, empowerment, and agency. Vocal sounds have often functioned as an index of one’s status, education, upbringing, and level of sophistication. A primary concern of this study is to show how the sounds associated with black voices served as indices of race, class, and the geographical origins of the vocalist (i.e. northern/southern). What do vocal sounds express about those who make these sounds? How do “sonic judgements” assess more than just physical voices, but also the total body, mind, and spirit?

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This study centers on ethnographic interviews with two of Andrew Nix’s surviving adult children, Genester Nix and Elwood Nix, musical analyses of Nix’s recorded sermons, and a close reading of historical and contemporary literature that focuses on the vocal elements of African-American musical genres in general, and specifically those of black churches, including preaching by African-American ministers. A complete analysis of the rich traditions of African-American preaching is not within the purview of this paper; however, I focus on defining the vocal features common across these expressions. The terms I will use to describe African Americans and their vocal processes are those currently preferred by members of the community: “African American” and “black,” rather than the outdated and derogatory terms of “Negro” and “colored.”

I chose this subject because I was interested in the voices I heard on these records—not only Nix’s gravelly shouts, but also background singers singing spiritual melodies and interjecting commentary. I became interested in how these sounds may have intersected with racial uplift themes and with notions of modernity. Phonograph recordings of sermons by Nix circulated the voices of tradition utilizing modern technology. The popularity of these recordings countered old myths about the degeneracy of the sounds of the past.

My analysis demonstrates that Nix employed vocal traditions that had been present in African-American communities since the era of slavery, and that those traditions continued to be performed and valued by twentieth-century African-American audiences. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many African Americans intellectuals suggested that assimilation to white vocal aesthetic values was one avenue to achieve equality. While I agree that African Americans who excelled in Euro-American classical repertoire and the creation of “sophisticated” versions of the old Negro spirituals represent profound moments of encounter

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3 Citations of historical material will employ the terms as used in the original.
with modernity in the late 1800s, I suggest that recorded sermons of the 1920s provided an alternative entry point into modernity for many African Americans. These recordings allowed black mass audiences a sense of connection to and identification with traditional vocal practices of the African-American past, presented in a modern technological context.

The purchase of these recordings by African-American consumers demonstrated the cultural value attached to these traditions, despite the pressure to assimilate to mainstream, dominant traditions. Recordings also superseded the written form, such as notated works, granting power to the oral transmission of black voices, creating new ideas of modernity.

The popularity of recorded sermons that feature vocal aesthetics of the black folk suggests that possibly these sounds were more widely accepted within African-American communities than previously understood. The dissemination of recorded sermons, and with them traditional black vocalities, allowed many people to experience these sounds that were linked simultaneously to the rural traditions of the South and to the modernizing North. Nix was essentially a culture broker between the North and South, and between the middle class and working class, choosing to propel tradition from the South into the modern, urban settings of the North. Recorded sermons thus blurred the demarcation lines between real and imagined spaces that separated African-American communities.

This dissertation also contests the binaries that have often existed in scholarly studies on African-American music, which have consistently framed discussions into blackness vs. whiteness, but have often avoided intra-cultural diversity. In other words, I am interested in understanding differences within African-American communities. How did African Americans sometimes base values on classist associations, often condemning others who chose vocal sounds of the past, which some relegated as “backwards” and “low class”?
Recorded sermons offer valuable insight into the lives of African Americans in the 1920s during a period of rapid change in American society. The texts of the sermons speak of the cultural values, daily concerns, and the role of the minister as spiritual counselor and leader. The singing and preaching on recorded sermons feature oral expressions common among African Americans who migrated to northern cities.

Only a scant amount of scholarship exists that discusses the use of vocal timbres and inflections (henceforth described as voices or sounds), that serve as an expression of African-American racialized identity and pride. In the 1920s, African Americans were confronted with numerous race leaders, musicians, record label owners, and so forth, who encouraged assimilation to white vocal aesthetic values, which they thought was one possible avenue to achieve race equality. It must be clear that without racism in the first place assimilation to dominant vocal styles would not have been necessary. Therefore, paths to assimilation targeted the larger issues of racism in the United States and was just one means thought to achieve equality. The use of particular vocal timbres and inflections represented choices that some African Americans used to project racial identity in the midst of these pressures.

Nix was aware of the larger issues of racism and the issues that faced both his community and his congregants. Both his hometown of Longview, Texas, and Chicago where he recorded, experienced racial violence and unrest; his neighborhood in Chicago was segregated; and African Americans, regardless of class, were subjected to oppression and discrimination. Despite the appearance that Nix admonished his congregants to uplift themselves and behave “properly,” could he have been merely concerned with their basic survival in the midst of these problems?

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As historian Kevin K. Gaines states, racial uplift was a survival strategy due to racism from dominant society.\(^5\) Class struggles in which the elite and middle classes castigate the lower class for their public behavior, including their vocal sounds, may have been their attempt to separate themselves from not only traditions of the past and its association with slavery, but also the people who continued these traditions. As the upper classes sought to identify with the protocols of the dominant culture, they also sought to survive by infiltrating themselves into a society that was unequal and unjust.

I focus on vocal traditions that have been identified as stylistic markers associated with African-American heritage and tradition, have emanated from the rural South, were transferred and learned orally and aurally, were familiar to and accepted by members of the community, and have been associated with African-American cultural identity. These are sometimes described as “indigenous practice”\(^6\) and music of the black folk.\(^7\) The idea of a slave tradition mattered for African Americans in the 1920s, and was discussed by luminaries such as W. E. B. Du Bois,\(^8\) Booker T. Washington,\(^9\) James Weldon Johnson, and J. Rosamond Johnson,\(^10\) and others. Thomas Brothers suggests that vocal traditions may use sign vehicles, such as speech-song, a feature that predominates in the chanted sermons of Nix, which are themselves associated with

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African-American identity. “Vocal style,” as Brothers suggests, functions “as a deeply rooted marker of cultural identity,” often developing autonomously as a sign of cultural independence in response to Euro-American appropriation of African-American art forms. Nix’s adherence to stylistic markers associated with African-American identity, such as speech-song, may have been his conscious or unconscious attempt at cultural autonomy.

Thomas Turino defines culture as “the habits of thought and practice that are shared among individuals,” and identity as “the partial selection of habits and attributes used to represent oneself to oneself and to others” (italics in original). Therefore, members of cultural formations can choose which vocal timbres and expressions best represent (or conceal) their identity. Preferred vocal timbres and inflections can be learned from other members of one’s culture, passed down from generation to generation by means of oral traditions. While no single sound ideal in African-American vocal expressions exists, culturally agreed-upon values and meaning is placed on sounds and associate with specific cultural traditions. And because there is not a single, unified sound ideal, despite past assumptions of a homogenous vocal sound of blackness idealized as “the black voice,” I will be discussing black voices, in the plural.

The multivalent expressions of African Americans have often been misrepresented and essentialized, as if every black person inherently sings and talks the same way because of African heritage. Despite the different locales from which enslaved blacks originated, historical discourses that documented singing by enslaved Africans and African Americans in the colonial and antebellum eras typically focused on a homogenous sound ideal. White travelers described these black voices as loud, harsh, or nasal, accompanied by shrieks, wails, and moans, hence


creating essentialized and racialized constructions. We may distinguish between common features as a means of categorization, but we must also be aware of stylistic heterogeneity within a culture.

Early writings from travelers and missionaries who heard the voices of enslaved individuals focused on their difference to white voices. The vocal sounds of black voices were unfamiliar to white interlopers who favored their own cultural traditions over those of black outsiders, enabling some to create categories and hierarchies between groups of living individuals. Sometimes difference was realized as awe-struck commentary that noted the uniqueness of black voices; other times difference was used as a tool to keep blacks subjugated and “in their place.” But as musicologist Ronald Radano has suggested, the voices of enslaved African Americans also provided them an empowering physical presence and a degree of agency in an environment that typically silenced and disempowered these individuals. If the voice granted agency to the enslaved, then could it continue to empower those who faced discrimination and oppression in the early twentieth century as well? How were musical markers identified with African-American vocal traditions utilized to construct notions of difference in the 1920s among members of black communities? How did stylistic features and vocal timbre on Nix’s recorded sermons represent notions of class hierarchy, “proper” upbringing, and Northern urban/Southern rural dichotomies? I seek to answer these questions in this study.

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14 Epstein, *Spiritual Tunes and Spirituals*, Epstein cites numerous examples of white travelers and early Americans who discuss black voices as “screaming,” “whooping,” “shrill,” “wailing,” and so on.

Another focus of this study is the attention to intra-cultural diversity and divisions within black communities. The framework for studies on the voices of African Americans has typically been situated in themes of inter-racial, i.e. black/white studies. Blacks have typically been cast into roles as assimilationists to European-American cultural values, as victims of appropriation by white culture, as musical “geniuses” with natural musical abilities, or as reactionaries who used art to confront white racism. In addition, the scholarship tends to ignore the production of music by African Americans, especially that of the black folk, as expressions of “cultural autonomy,” which Brothers explains reflect the “core values of their own tradition in gestures of cultural independence.” Many studies focus on the dichotomies and binary nature of African-American musical expressions, i.e. highbrow vs. lowbrow; North vs. South; middle class vs. lower class; sacred vs. secular; public vs. private; and so forth. My research reveals Nix’s position as a “middle man” who bridged many of these dualities, blurring the strict demarcation lines between African Americans of varying class status, and revealing the complexities and heterogeneous, hybrid nature of black vocal expressions in the public arena. Nix uplifted his congregants through practical solutions while simultaneously adhering to the aesthetic values of long-standing black vocal traditions, reflecting his “core values” of cultural independence and autonomy.

Cultural studies scholar Paul Gilroy discusses the hybridity of music in the black diaspora, and claims that music is a “changing rather than unchanging same,” that is influenced

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16 For example, Nelson George critiques the “death” of rhythm and blues as African-American artists used white values as role models to cross over and gain success in the popular market. Nelson George, The Death of Rhythm & Blues (New York: Penguin Books, 1988).

17 Brothers, “Ideology and Aurality,” 178.

by cultural traditions that have evolved as a result of the destabilizing forces of migration and the post-contemporary world, creating new traditions and new conceptions of modernity.\textsuperscript{19} Although Gilroy focuses on transnational diasporic migrations, his insights can also apply to early twentieth-century migration within the United States as well as global migrations. He claims music is not a fixed essence but a source of a “racial self” within the context of racialized struggles and experiences. He calls the real power struggles experienced by blacks in the diaspora “anti-anti-essentialism.”\textsuperscript{20} Nix experienced real, lived racism and his vocalizations on phonographs also created new traditions and new conceptions of modernity.

Middle-class ministers, such as Nix, deserve attention for their dissemination of vocal traditions on recorded sermons and their influence on subsequent musical styles.\textsuperscript{21} Understanding the class and racial dynamics that existed for African Americans in the 1920s is crucial to understanding how black voices have been identified as expressions of class. Sociologists and historians have discussed the black condition and the distinct class divisions between African Americans in the 1920s, which included their church affiliations and practices.\textsuperscript{22} While economic

\begin{itemize}
  \item[21] The influence of the vocalities of African-American ministers on American music will be the subject of future research.
\end{itemize}
and moralistic standards assigned people to certain classes, overlap between the classes in matters of cultural practice resulted in intra-cultural and intra-class diversity among African Americans.

**Historical Background**

The 1920s, an era ripe with dichotomies, saw a shift in the representation of black voices. On the one hand, technological advances provided opportunities for the sound of the black folk to be transported into the modern era through the development of the phonograph and sound films, and the marketing of records of African-American performers to African-American consumers on “race records.” On the other hand, political, racial, and economic advances for African Americans made during the Reconstruction era that had been stripped away caused racial setbacks and injustices that instigated race riots throughout the U. S., from small, rural communities of former slave states in the South to large, urban metropolises in the North. Reverend Nix’s hometown of Longview, Texas, and Chicago, where he recorded his sermons, both experienced race riots in 1919 due to the eruption of racial tensions. To thoroughly understand the racial environment that influenced Nix and others, historical events prior to the 1920s must be addressed.

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23 Brackette F. Williams and Drexel G. Woodson, introduction to Powdermaker, *After Freedom*.; xxi-xxii, xxvii-xxviii. Powdermaker explains that class was based not only on economic standing but also on patterns of behavior and conduct.

24 See Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 673, Drake and Cayton explain that black churches in Chicago in the 1920s included “mixed” churches that adhered to both formal, ritualistic patterns and traditional patterns of emotional demonstrativeness.


At the end of the Civil War, as northern teachers and missionaries traveled to the South to educate the freedmen, writings of the music and singing of former slaves became widespread.\textsuperscript{27} Whites, such as William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison who wrote \textit{Slave Songs of the United States} in 1867, expressed their fascination with African-American vocalizations, noting timbral differences and other vocal characteristics unfamiliar to white observers. Such writings often included musical transcriptions that attempted to notate the singing of the freedmen, but were often inadequately transcribed due to the “difficulty” of transcribing the expressive elements in the voices of African-American singers.\textsuperscript{28}

Beginning in the 1870s, as newly-formed African-American university groups set out to sing the songs of their forefathers, books of newly written arrangements were published and sold for the acquisition of revenue for their schools.\textsuperscript{29} These editions, while usually marketed as “authentic” transcriptions of slave songs, were also edited to suit the aesthetic tastes of the white transcribers. In addition, the vocalizations by these jubilee groups, as they were called, were altered from the vocalizations of the field slave, to reflect a more suitable, Europeanized vocal style, including set written arrangements, the addition of a homophonic four-part texture, and classically-influenced, trained vocal aesthetics with somewhat smoothed-out timbres, the inclusion of vibrato, and the use of dynamics. For example, George White, the Fisks’ first


\textsuperscript{28}Allen, Ware, and Garrison, \textit{Slave Songs of the United States}, vi.

\textsuperscript{29}Theodore F. Seward and George L. White, \textit{Jubilee Songs: As Sung by the Jubilee Singers} (New York: Biglow & Main, 1884).
director, used pedagogical “devices and methods to teach them the proper tone production,” which included smooth vocal timbres rather than the rough timbres associated with the folk voice. John W. Work claims, “The smoothing down of their voices was an accomplishment which came after long and hard labor.” While no mention was made in the songbook of specifically incorporating European vocal aesthetics, White and co-author Theodore Seward discuss the appeal of the Fisks to the “cultivated ear” and “cultivated listener,” i.e. white, elite audiences. This move toward European aesthetic values was part of the drive for African Americans to adopt the “sophisticated” and “cultured” vocal aesthetics of the dominant class, while simultaneously separating themselves from the vocalizations of the slave past. As historian Kevin K. Gaines explains, “black elites hoped that their support for the spread of civilization . . . would topple racial barriers and bolster their claims to humanity, citizenship, and respectability.” Du Bois and other African-American leaders considered the “cultured” voices of the Fisks and the written, notated versions of the arranged spiritual as signs of African-American advancement, modernity, and self-consciousness.

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32 Work, *Folk Song of the American Negro*, 104.

33 Theodore F. Seward, preface to *Jubilee Songs: As Sung by the Jubilee Singers*, by Theodore F. Seward and George L. White (New York, Biglow & Main, 1884), 3.


35 Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 74.

The struggle for equality in the last decades of the nineteen and early decades of the twentieth century created rifts and intra-cultural tensions between members of the emerging black middle class, the elite class, and the black folk. Members of the black elite, such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington, disagreed, often publicly, on which methods best suited the advancement of the race. As Gaines explains, most believed, despite these contradictions, that a strategy of self-help, idealized as racial uplift, based upon the improvement of African Americans’ behaviors, lifestyles, and material conditions, would help to diminish white racism. Gaines notes that, despite their best intentions to create a positive black identity, black elites instead created a racial hierarchy that privileged bourgeois standards of respectability intended as a sign of their humanity.

As one aspect of racial uplift, elite blacks encouraged “cultured” vocalizations as demonstrations of the artistic value of African Americans for the prospect of equality within white society. In other words, elites such as William Trotter believed that assimilation to white, European cultural aesthetics, including the performance of Western classical music, could measure one’s intelligence, cultural sophistication, and social status. Trotter sought to bring attention to black classical musicians, believing that by demonstrating African-Americans’ superior accomplishments in European classical music as equal or surpassing those of their white contemporaries, blacks could “prove their worth” and achieve racial equality.

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Despite evolutionary implications, musical assimilation to these standards provided black elites what they believed to be viable proof of a “better class” of African Americans, used to contest racist views of them as biologically inferior and uncivilized.\footnote{Lawrence Schenbeck, \textit{Racial Uplift and American Music: 1878-1943} (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 7.} Conversely, for centuries, the voices of marginalized blacks were insulted and ridiculed by whites, and criticized and shamed by African-American elites.\footnote{See the numerous examples in Dena Epstein, \textit{Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War.} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003). Also, Daniel Alexander Payne, \textit{Recollections of Seventy Years}, (Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the A. M. E. Sunday School Union, 1888), 254-255.} The white majority contended that the folk voice of the black masses demonstrated the uncultured and uneducated status of African Americans; black elites and the black middle-class associated the voices of the folk with the slave past and as a source of embarrassment and shame. As a result, black folk voices were often dismissed or ignored altogether, until the commercial production of race records in the 1920s promulgated the sounds of the folk into the national marketplace.\footnote{Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “Rethinking Vernacular Culture: Black Religion and Race Records in the 1920s and 1930s,” in \textit{The House that Race Built}, ed. Wahneema Lubiano (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), 164.}

Prior to the 1920s, African-American artists such as George W. Johnson sang “coon” songs and minstrel songs with such titles as “The Whistling Coon” and “The Laughing Coon,” in 1891 and 1898 respectively, exemplifying the self-mimicry to which black artists often had to subject themselves. Johnson was also a member of the minstrel group, Spencer, Williams and Quinn’s Imperial Minstrels, that recorded in 1894. The iconography (Figure 1-1) of a postcard featuring the Imperial Minstrels displays the demeaning racial stereotypes that depicted African American performers.
Although African Americans were recorded, the typical attitude of the white-run record companies was that blacks were not good enough, would not support records from their own race, and would not be of interest to the white majority except as novelty acts.

In the first two decades of the 1900s, recordings by African Americans typically featured Negro spirituals, minstrel songs, vaudeville songs, comedy, spoken word, and even mock sermons that parodied black preachers, such as those by Bert Williams, a.k.a. Elder Eatmore. Other early recordings by black performers featured jubilee quartets, such as the Tuskegee Institute Singers, The Apollo Jubilee Quartet, The Fisk University Jubilee Quartet, and the Dinwiddie Colored Quartet. In the mid-1910s, recordings included “hot” jazz bands featuring ragtime and black orchestras by prominent bandleaders, such as James Reese Europe. By the late


1910s, black concert artists of classical music started their recording careers, including those by Roland Hayes, Harry T. Burleigh, and Nathaniel Dett.49

As early as 1913, an article in *Talking Machine World* addressed the potential for the widespread marketing of recordings by African Americans. In the article, a record executive is addressed by a black jobber who states, “the black man is greatly misunderstood. He is not nearly so ignorant and unappreciative as the world in general would have us believe,” convincing the white executive that because “the colored man is exceedingly fond of music,” a salesman could successfully sell music to black patrons.50 In August 1920, Mamie Smith recorded two sides on the Okeh label, becoming the first female African-American vocalist to record a popular record.51 Smith’s “Crazy Blues” (Okeh 4169), was such a huge hit—selling 75,000 copies in one month in 1920—that other labels began following suit, recording jazz and blues by black artists on what the industry labelled as “race records.”52

Despite racial conflicts that prevailed between whites and blacks in the early twentieth century, record companies produced recordings from a broad range of ethnic groups and their musical genres, including jazz, blues, hillbilly, and the music from immigrant communities, which were sometimes recorded on field expeditions to various locations around the United States.53 Ross Laird explains that as phonograph recordings became more popular, recording industry companies expanded past the boundaries of New York, spreading to Chicago and other

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49 Brooks, liner notes to *Lost Sounds*, CD-ROM, 7.


large cities, as well as to remote locations to discover and record new talent where onsite field recordings were made by mobile recording units, or field units. The Brunswick-Balke-Collender Co. recorded many of these field recordings and became a major label in the 1920s, competing with the more-established companies of Victor and Columbia, becoming the third most-successful record manufacturer in the United States by 1923.

Between 1920-1942, record labels released approximately 5,500 blues and 1,250 gospel recordings from approximately 1,200 artists. On November 29, 1924, Brunswick acquired the Vocalion label, and in 1926 formed its race records division, which included artists such as King Oliver’s Dixie Syncopators, Jelly Roll Morton, Alberta Hunter, Duke Ellington, and Reverend J. M. Gates. Race records promulgated the sounds of popular music, jazz and blues, gospel, and recorded sermons, allowing for the widespread dissemination of the music and voice of the black folk, separate from Euro-centric art music. While record companies had previously marketed exclusively to middle-class whites, the advent of race records allowed black consumers to purchase and listen to voices that historically had been ignored or dismissed, including the voices of African-American ministers.

African-American consumers, through their purchasing of recorded sermons, emphasized the values they placed on black oral traditions. Recordings by black ministers, such as Nix, even out-sold the popular blues artists of the day, demonstrating the impact of these recorded

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54 Laird, *Brunswick Records*, xiii.
55 Ibid.
sermons and the sacred vocal traditions they presented. Recorded sermons offered urban black communities a down-home alternative to the arranged spirituals and other European-influenced musical repertoires favored in some churches, with the vocal sounds of tradition functioning as important qualifiers of cultural autonomy.

Prior to Emancipation, the black minister had been an important figure in the lives of enslaved African Americans, with his voice as a notable symbol of cultural traditions passed down orally through generations.\textsuperscript{59} Beginning in the 1700s, black preachers and exhorters began preaching to both black and white congregants.\textsuperscript{60} Black ministers were often illiterate themselves, and used the power of their voices to evoke emotional responses from their congregations.\textsuperscript{61} The use of the voice was one of the only freedoms available to enslaved African Americans, as Ronald Radano has discussed, and was thus a powerful medium and expression of the black body.\textsuperscript{62}

As migrants from the South moved into urban metropolises in the North during the first wave of the Great Migration from approximately 1916-1930, the rural, southern roots of the black church moved along with them. The sounds that had typically been associated with the church of the rural South and that evoked “home” for displaced northerners entered into urban church enclaves via the African-American minister, such as Reverend A. W. Nix, also a southern émigré. The recorded sermon by black ministers such as Nix brought black vocal traditions into public awareness and spaces, alongside the popular expressions of the secular music of the blues


\textsuperscript{60} Pipes, \textit{Say Amen, Brother!} 64.


and jazz. The new mediums of the phonograph and sound film, and the voices they carried, created a bridge between the old and the new as the sound of tradition was propelled forward into the modern age.\textsuperscript{63}

Sacred vocal expressions were often associated with working-class black churches, such as Holiness and Sanctified churches, (also known as the folk church),\textsuperscript{64} that set up in storefront locations in the marginalized poor black neighborhoods of large, northern metropolises.\textsuperscript{65} These vocal expressions were also demonized in the larger, black middle-class Baptist and Methodist churches for their tendency of loud, demonstrative exhibitions of spiritual ecstasy, which included shouting, hand-clapping, foot-stomping, and congregational responses. However, I propose that the traditional expressions of the folk church were not limited to working-class congregations and their ministers, but instead were also valued by African Americans of varying class statuses. In other words, despite outward declarations that blacks should reform their traditional expressions, the popularity of recorded sermons that feature vocal aesthetics of the folk suggests that these sounds were more widely accepted than previously understood. Reverend Nix, who had travelled the country and lived in both the North and the South, demonstrates this point by choosing to put vocal sounds that were linked to the rural traditions of the South on his recordings.

\textbf{Methodology}

Ethnomusicological scholarship typically centers around contemporary ethnographic fieldwork with living, music-making participants. Historical ethnomusicology, on the other hand, uses a variety of different tools to bring the past into the present. Ethnomusicologist Philip Kenney, \textit{Recorded Music in American Life}, xvii-xviii.


\textsuperscript{65} Drake and Cayton, \textit{Black Metropolis}, 636-646.
Bohlman addresses the challenges for the fieldworker in historical ethnomusicology, acknowledging that “the boundaries between the past and present become themselves the ‘field,’ a space allowing one to experience and represent musical practices that are not simply inscriptions of the historical past or aural events of the immediate present.” As Bohlman proposes, examinations of the historical events of the past are necessary prerequisites for the understanding of musical rituals, which are in themselves historical constructs and rich with musical meanings. Alternative forms of fieldwork are necessary for historical ethnomusicologists, including those that incorporate the social and cultural history of music, musicians—and for this paper, ministers—in addition to interviews, genealogical and archival research, and analysis of primary source media.

Interviews with living informants, especially the surviving two adult children of Reverend Nix—Genester and Elwood—and one other family member, allowed me to gather firsthand personal information about the lives of members of the Nix family. I also consulted genealogical records, including census material, marriage and death certificates, and land ownership records, which I found online, in public libraries, and in the county clerk’s offices in Longview, Texas and Henderson, Texas. Archival research at Columbia University’s Union Theological Seminary in New York City granted me access to the 1921 National Baptist Convention minutes, which revealed significant information concerning Andrew Nix, William Nix, Sutton E. Griggs, and Thomas A. Dorsey. In New York, I visited Harlem for a first-hand view of Nix’s former church, Mt. Moriah Baptist Church. I also conducted archival research at St. George’s United Methodist Church in Philadelphia, and at the University of Louisville where the archives for State University (now Simmons College) are housed. In addition, I visited

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Georgetown, Kentucky where Nix first preached. Because of the race riots in Chicago in 1919 and numerous racial inequalities directed towards African Americans prevalent in the 1920s and 1930s, multiple studies were conducted by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, and The Illinois Writers’ Project (IWP) to study these inequalities. Later works, including Allan H. Spear’s *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto* (1967) and E. Franklin Frazier’s *Black Bourgeois* (1957) helped me to understand the racial tensions in Chicago in the 1920s.

Sermons and sound films released in the 1920s are particularly relevant to my study, as these are primary sources that have allowed me to access the actual vocal sounds of preaching and singing of Nix, his “services” as recorded on phonographs, and the black voices represented on audio sources and in film. One film in particular, *Hallelujah*, released in 1929, features one of Reverend Nix’s sermons as well as an “authentic” representation of a folk church service. The recordings of Nix’s sermons, available on reissues through Document Records, gave me access to Nix’s voice, his choice of repertoire for musical selections, his sermon texts, and gave me the ability to notate and analyze his sermons. Numerous newspapers articles helped me to piece together missing information about Nix’s life and newspaper advertisements of Nix’s sermons also helped to determine their relevancy and popularity at the time.

For my analysis of vocal timbre and other qualities, I used the software program, Sonic Visualizer. This program allowed me to view and analyze images of the spectrogram, including harmonics, frequency and amplitude graphs, dynamics, time points, and to play back audio at various increments of tempo for transcription purposes.

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Preaching and Singing Voices

This study investigates how the voices of African Americans in singing and preaching from the 1920s have been conceptualized and linked to issues of race, class, tradition, and modernity. Specifically, how were the ideologies of racial uplift represented by black voices? How were these voices a result of intra-cultural hierarchies amongst African Americans? How did Nix’s voice on his sermons create new, hybrid, modern voices that fused black cultural traditions with modernity? My research shows that encounters with modernity created a shift in conceptions about black traditional voices.

Although this study focuses primarily on Chicago in the 1920s, the era in which Reverend Nix recorded his sermons, other decades and locations will be discussed for analysis of the formation and transformation of vocal aesthetic values. I include biographical data for the entirety of Nix’s life as he moved from location to location to create a more complete picture of who he was for the historical record.

I am most interested in how black voices from the 1920s, particularly those of the African-American minister, represented new, modern voices that presented and valued the autonomous folk voices of tradition. These voices were physical voices with sonic properties, expressive voices that voiced opinion, and voices that linked traditions with modernity. The idea of modernism that initially had been linked to the hybrid, written arrangements of the spiritual and the classical, assimilationist voices of the “New Negro,” evolved into modern expressions that celebrated vernacular voices of the African-American past.69 Nix’s refusal to adopt assimilationist practices speaks of his resistance to cultural pressures of the day, which were themselves steeped in racist beliefs. Nix was well aware of racism and the pressures associated

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with racism, yet he consciously resisted these pressures by projecting his voice and the voices of tradition via modern technology, competing with the voices of other black leaders, some of whom tried to suppress traditional aesthetic values. The popularity of Nix’s recorded sermons is evidence that thousands of others in African-American communities identified with his voice and what it represented.

In the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, attention to classical performers was well-documented in sources with the spread of Victorian-era vocal principles that used music to maintain class boundaries and uphold class distinctions. As elite and middle-class African Americans rejected traditional folk vocalizations in favor of Europeanized aesthetics, class hierarchies widened the gap between the classes, under the rubric of racial uplift, evolving into the creation of the “New Negro” and “high art” during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. The creation of class hierarchies based on racial uplift strategies, which included musical and vocal preferences, created intra-cultural racism disguised as race progress. Ultimately, as Gaines asserts, racial uplift attempted to alleviate racial inequalities between blacks and whites, inevitably creating class hierarchies between upper- and lower-class African Americans. The voice often served as the determining factor of one’s status. While Gaines and Schenbeck have focused attention on black elites and intellectuals as the progenitors of racial uplift, Evelyn

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73 Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, xv.
Brooks Higginbotham and Jonathan L. Walton assert the primacy of working-class ministers and their recorded sermons.74

Scott A. Carter’s study of vocal pedagogy in the Victorian era, known as “voice culture,” stressed techniques that not only emphasized vocal aesthetics and classical art-song repertoire preferred by the white, middle class, but also encouraged vocal training that attempted to remove vocal qualities associated with both non-white ethnicity and lower-class status. Carter’s study highlights vocal practitioners’ pedagogical techniques in achieving a cultivated vocal sound and how the voice became a signifier of difference in both racial and classist hierarchies.75 Grant Olwage’s study76 of the voice as “unconscious resistance” to hegemonic forces is crucial to understanding the agency of the racialized voice, a specific topic addressed by Nina Sun Eidsheim.77

Not until the 1920s when race records started to be distributed nationwide, did African-American secular music and sacred sermons start to come to the attention of the general population of black consumers.78 I am interested in how the voices on recorded sermons by the African-American minister and his congregation entered the public consciousness and presented modern versions of folk oralities. Lerone A. Martin’s study of black entertainment, including

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77 Nina Sun Eidsheim, “Voice as a Technology of Selfhood: Towards an Analysis of Racialized Timbre and Vocal Performance” (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2008).

newly available phonograph recordings by black ministers, exposes the dichotomies between the sacred and secular as African Americans started to spend their earnings on entertainment, including recorded sermons.\textsuperscript{79}

Michael W. Harris’ \textit{The Rise of Gospel Blues: The Music of Thomas Andrew Dorsey in the Urban Church} has provided valuable information about the Chicago church environment in the 1920s and the similarities between the blues and gospel styles. However, Harris inaccurately identifies the voice of A. W. Nix as an influence on Thomas A. Dorsey. Harris also analyzes several of Nix’s recorded sermons, believing that they were recorded by Nix’s brother, William (W. M.) Nix.\textsuperscript{80} Part of this research is aimed at correcting these misconceptions.

The importance of religion and the folk preacher to black congregants, from the antebellum era (1820-1860) to the 1920s has been well documented.\textsuperscript{81} While Higginbotham and Walton have claimed that the African-American minister was an agent of the working class, I propose that he represented not only the working class, but also the ideologies associated with the elite and middle classes of black society. Nix did not waiver in the midst of racism and demoralizing attitudes from whites, pressure from black elite leaders, or condescension from the middle class to uplift the race by assimilating to white vocal aesthetic standards. Instead, he


\textsuperscript{80} Harris, \textit{The Rise of Gospel Blues}, 156.

carried forth vocal traditions into the modern era via phonograph recorded sermons, allowing for a continuation of traditions that were still considered a symbol of the uneducated, lower-class masses.

The sound of black oralities, in which sound is racialized and marginalized, defined by Jennifer Stoever-Ackerman as the “sonic colour-line,”

82 allowed the white bourgeoisie during the slavery era to demonize the “aural behavior” of enslaved blacks that was considered undesirable, including volume levels, dialect, non-verbal sounds (such as groans and screams), and vocal timbre, for example.

Vocal descriptives are sometimes based on the sound of vocal timbre, which is closely linked to the human body, or on vocal inflections, such as melismas, moans, and shouts, understood as vocal “tropes” closely linked to the historical experience of slavery.

“Signifyin(g),” is a term designated by Henry Louis Gates as the “black rhetorical ‘trope of tropes.’”

83 David Brackett defines it as “a term which subsumes the many varieties of black rhetorical strategies – that is, African-American Linguistic difference as it manifests itself in speech, and in oral and written narratives.”

84 Brackett explains that Signifyin(g) is a process in which common features are constructed and identified as “black” and emphasize difference from white standards. For example, vocal traditions in African-American music and sermons are often

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84 Brackett, “James Brown’s ‘Superbad’,” 311.
under the rubric of “black,” such as “the black voice,” the “black sound,” and “sounding black.”

Black rhetorical strategies allow for “a celebration of black difference, as a refusal to be defined by white culture,” or in Nix’s case, as a refusal to be defined by the black middle-class’ emulation of white culture. These strategies are revealed, for example, in the differences between Black English (BE) and Standard English (SE). BE emphasizes the sound of the words over the content, and is a pre-planned and stylized performance in an evolving process. Reverend Nix employed many of the strategies of BE through his use of moans and shouts, which give importance to vocal sounds. Speech-song in his chanted sermons is a highly-stylized use of gestures that moves the sermon from the simple delivery of words into the zone of performance, in which his congregants vocally participate, thus creating a participatory performance. Nix’s vocal delivery, with his use of harsh vocal timbres, shouts, moans, congregational responses, and singing profoundly affect the sermon content, without which the listener would only be left with words. Speech, or in Nix’s case, speech-song and singing, replicates as performance through the pre-planned stylization of sounds and words. Nix’s recording-as-performance include not only Nix’s voice, but also those of several female congregants who interject, shout, and sing throughout Nix’s performance, which simulated a live performance in the black church to connect listeners to the experience.


86 Brackett, “James Brown’s ‘Superbad’,” 312.


88 Black English is also called African-American Vernacular English (AAVE), African-American English (AAE), and Ebonics. I am using BE for consistency with Brackett’s use in his article.

David Brackett explains that, also under the umbrella of Signifyin(g), are the processes of repetition and intertextuality, or how texts “speak” to one another. Brackett’s study of James Brown’s vocal utterances reveal Brown’s use of repetitive screams, syllables or short phrases, which create “commentary” on African-American culture through their emphasis and through his harsh vocal timbre, similar to Nix’s moans and shouts. In addition, Brown’s use of intertextuality creates commentary within a text or between texts through repetition of words and phrases, and references data outside of the text. Similarly, Nix’s use of a particular spiritual melody becomes a centralizing theme throughout his oeuvre, referencing the Southern, rural church settings in which spirituals were originally sung.

Although issues associated with vocal timbre are frequently linked to racialized understandings, as Nina Eidsheim has recognized, timbre is not a biological feature of race or ethnicity, but instead is a cultural construct.\(^{90}\) In other words, individuals, such as Nix, can choose which sounds, including vocal timbre and expressions, have meaning and express group identity. Outsiders can also assign identity to individuals based on their interpretation of vocal sounds, and in response, insiders may alter their vocal sound to be perceived one way or another.

I contend that Signifyin(g) practices are differentiated not only between black/white rhetorical examples, but between black/black examples as well. The differing class structures in the 1920s afforded a multi-level dynamic within the African-American community.\(^ {91}\) Although Nix employed Signifyin(g) practices, such as intertextuality, I argue that his vocal utterances and texts exemplified the differences between the upper and lower classes in black Chicago, not in the typical dual framework of black/white so often discussed in African-American scholarship.

\(^ {90}\) Eidsheim, “Voice as a Technology of Selfhood,” 42, 64, 69, 116.

The black/white duality that African Americans often face and have faced has been defined by W. E. B. Du Bois as “double consciousness” or as being “born with a veil,” through which African Americans define themselves through the eyes of outsiders, in this case, dominant white society. Doubleness may also refer to the difference in the subtle nuances in voices (or musical expressions), often referred to as the “double-voiced utterance,” through the use of vocal inflections that celebrate black cultural individualization in the midst of white society.

The black experience and its association with the years of oppression experienced by the enslavement of people of African descent have been integral to the positioning of the sound of the voices of African Americans. As Talib Rasul Hakim states, “Music reflect[s] the multi-dimensional aspects of the black experience with the black diaspora . . . A concept functioning as a viable social-political vehicle. . . . Part and parcel of a social-political awareness of a people or a culture.” Even contemporary vocalizations by black Americans are closely intertwined with concepts of oppression and the ensuing emotionalism that developed as a cathartic release to pain. Definitions of “black music” often refer to the experience of African Americans as a foundational aspect of the sound. This vocal sound has been appropriated by generations of non-black singers, rappers, and speakers, who assert that the sound is a learned technique, often ignoring the cultural residue of the historical past. While the vocal sound of African Americans does have a historical background and has served as cathartic release, essentialized notions based

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95 Based on interviews I conducted with University of Florida Gospel Choir singers in 2014.
on skin color and ethnicity continue today, often equating African-American vocalities with a fixed, homogenous vocal sound. However, as musicologist Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr. contests, the uniqueness of African-derived traditions may contribute to “powerful displays of human agency, intention, and culture building.”97 While African-American artistic expressions are gradually becoming accepted as a “changing same,”98 with some common features that link these expressions to genres and styles originated by African Americans, heterogeneous differentiations continue to develop, creating a myriad of vocal sounds that defy a static constant. However, the purpose of this study is to delve into the hybrid nature of Nix’s voice as a syncretic mixture of what has been considered as part of African-American vocal traditions—those traditions of the past that link various musical genres with common features—and modern voices that were conceptions of advancement, uplift, resistance, and progress.

Outline

This study is divided into nine chapters. This first chapter has provided an overview of the historical environment in which A. W. Nix and other African Americans lived in the 1920s. I address historical, racial, and sociological issues in relation to Nix’s voice and sermons as this study progresses.

Chapter 2 is a biographical study on the life of Reverend A. W. Nix. I wanted to give a complete picture of Nix’s life since so little was known about him. As part of the biographical study, I present new archival information that clarifies the discrepancies between Andrew and his brother William, and their contributions to the “Father of Gospel Music,” Thomas A. Dorsey, as well as Nix’s post-1920s life.


Chapter 3 discusses the notions of vocal traditions, stylistic markers, and musical codes associated with African-American vocal practices. I examine historical documents from white observers that describe the singing of enslaved Africans and African Americans during the colonial and antebellum eras. I also examine literature on the history of black preaching and homiletics in the United States.

Chapter 4 specifies the vocal traditions associated with African-American voices, including preaching and singing. Part of my research involves the transcription of these sounds, such as moans, shouts, and chanting. While these sounds have been mentioned in the scholarship for many years, few transcriptions exist that delineate their specific qualities. Also included in this chapter are the forms, techniques, and vocal characteristics of the chanted sermon.

Chapter 5 discusses 1920s-era technology, including the new phonograph industry and sound films. Technology developed in the 1920s aided in the development of new, modern black voices. A study of the impact of the commercialization of recorded sermons reveals the value placed on African-American vocal traditions. I also discuss Victorian-era vocal pedagogy and its association to the development of “voice culture.” Modern voices and their association to class and uplift ideologies are examined as contrasting to the traditional sounds of the “Old Negro.” An in-depth study of the voices and sermon in the film Hallelujah is also relevant to this study.

Chapter 6 addresses the sermons themselves, and includes analysis of specific sermons. Vocal and musical analysis of the sermons demonstrates Nix’s unique vocal characteristics and how they compare with traditional vocals of the folk spirituals and other early vocal practices, and serve as markers of traditional African-American vocal aesthetics.

Chapter 7 analyzes the specific repertoire sung by Nix and his congregants on his recordings and their alignment with tradition. I also discuss other African-American practices, such as lyrical tropes, riffs, and repetition as integral components of the chanted sermon.
In Chapter 8, I address the texts of the sermons and how these reflected Reverend Nix’s ideals and aspirations for his congregants, and how the texts allow listeners to put themselves into the 1920s and its conflicts, including the Great Depression and Nix’s uplift strategies. Insight into Nix’s particular point of view becomes apparent through his texts.

The conclusion in Chapter 9 will address further research, and stress the importance and influence of the sermon and voice of the black minister. Appendix A provides the texts of all forty-seven sermons, many of which are unpublished elsewhere. Appendix B includes several of the advertisements from the Chicago Defender for Nix’s sermons. Appendix C charts the specific details of each sermon, including matrix numbers and running time of the sermons. Appendix D includes information about the recorded sermons of Reverend Sutton E. Griggs.
CHAPTER 2
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A review of the life of Reverend A. W. Nix provides not only genealogical and census data on his family’s history, but also illuminates Nix’s involvement with and knowledge of contemporary ideas about racial uplift or “advancement of the race,” as it was sometimes called. As the son of a former slave and farmer from Texas, A. W. Nix eventually settled in northern metropolises and in many ways parallels the experience of the thousands of African Americans who ventured north in search of more favorable conditions and opportunities. However, as an educated man and college graduate, he broke the mold of the stereotypical southern, rural preacher. His life became a contradiction of sorts, in that he continued the vocal traditions of the rural South while simultaneously adopting practical solutions for his congregants to overcome racial and self-imposed barriers and advocated standards identified with racial uplift philosophies. He can be described as a “middle man” in that he never abandoned his traditional southern roots, but sought to uplift his fellow man through his practical sermons, which he recorded on modern, cutting-edge technologies of the 1920s. A brief discussion on the principles of racial uplift is necessary to understand the values that informed Nix’s life.

Racial Uplift

Racial uplift during the late nineteenth century was originally understood as a way to transcend worldly oppression and misery, with education as its primary means to achieve these goals. A shift in racial uplift’s objectives occurred after Reconstruction’s promises were reversed, forcing black leaders to establish new means for dealing with persistent racist practices in the United States. As Gaines explains, in the post-Reconstruction era, for many black elites, uplift came to mean an emphasis on self-help, racial solidarity, temperance, thrift, chastity, social purity, patriarchal authority, and the accumulation of wealth. . . . Amidst legal and extralegal repression, many black elites sought status, moral authority, and recognition of their humanity by distinguishing themselves, as bourgeois agents of civilization, from the presumably
undeveloped black majority; hence the phrase, so purposeful and earnest, yet so often of ambiguous significance, ‘uplifting the race.’ . . . uplift, among its other connotations, also represented the struggle for a positive black identity in a deeply racist society, turning the pejorative designation of race into a source of dignity and self-affirmation through an ideology of class differentiation, self-help, and interdependence.¹

On the one hand, some black leaders fought for integration through legal attacks on segregation, laws for civil rights legislation, and open discontent to and protests for the abandonment of equal rights for blacks.² Elites argued against segregation, except in certain cases such as the separate black church, which had been established with its own traditions since the pre-Civil War era.³ Those African-American leaders who fought for integration, such as W. E. B. Du Bois (1868-1963), were members of the cultural elite and had leanings toward assimilation. Some supported Du Bois and his Niagara movement, which sometimes evoked militant responses from its members. Du Bois and his followers also supported a classical liberal arts education, which he had himself acquired from his New England teachers who espoused a middle-class, Victorian sense of morality, temperance, chastity, thrift, and piety. He insisted that students educated in these standards would be the ones to lead the drive for economic independence of all members of the race. He dubbed this group the “Talented Tenth,” establishing an elite vanguard of the most educated members of the community that would be responsible for uplifting the masses.

On the other hand, some southern African-American leaders followed the tenets of Booker T. Washington (1856-1915), who encouraged segregation, the building of strong black

¹ Gaines, Uplifting the Race, 2-3.


³ Spear, Black Chicago, 53. The black church as an independent entity has long been the subject of scholarly debates. For clarity and consistency I have chosen to identify with Southern, Raboteau, Frazier, and others who recognize the church in this framework.
communities, property ownership, and industrial education rather than a traditional liberal arts education, which he considered unproductive, favoring instead education funded by the manual labor of the students. Washington also encouraged the black masses to learn from the white man: “Practically all the real moral uplift the black people have got from the whites – and this has been great indeed – has come from this observation of the white man’s conduct.”

According to historian Allan H. Spear, “Negro leaders now showed a willingness to work within the framework of a biracial institutional structure and encourage the semiautonomous development of the Negro community. They emphasized self-reliance and racial cooperation rather than protests against mounting injustices.” Washington’s supporters believed that in order to achieve their own goals, they must work within the framework of the dominant white society and accommodate to its demands. There were also those who stood on the middle ground between the old-line assimilationists and the new-line segregationists choosing certain tenets from one group but not from others.

The vocal and musical practices of the African-American church in Chicago in the 1920s also included three separate practices based largely on class standing. Some churches adopted white performance practices; others continued the distinct performance practices that had emerged in black churches during earlier periods, essentially choosing the continued segregation of the black and white churches; and some churches employed practices that mixed elements from the other two.

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5 Spear, Black Chicago, 54.

6 The various vocal and musical practices will be discussed in more detail Chapter 3.
Racial uplift was itself rooted in paternalistic class-based ideas in that elite blacks assumed that it was their responsibility to “uplift” the lower-class black masses. “Believing that the improvement of African Americans’ material and moral condition through self-help would diminish white racism,” as Gaines explains, “they sought to rehabilitate the race’s image by embodying respectability, enacted through an ethos of service to the masses.”

Despite the best intentions of black elites to aid the race in gaining independence from white authority, many black elites were themselves dependent on white political and business professionals, often requiring accommodation to the demands of the dominant society. Although black elites believed that their ideologies could result in equal rights, they also believed they were replacing the racist notion of fixed biological racial differences with an evolutionary view of cultural assimilation, measured primarily by the status of the family and civilization. Cultural differences, then, rather than biological notions of racial inferiority, were said to be more salient in explaining the lower social status of African Americans.

However, there was much dissention among black elites on how best to achieve uplift in actuality and exactly what its goals entailed. In addition, class and gender inequalities resulted in what Gaines calls “unconscious internalized racism,” a hierarchal system with black elite men at the top of the pecking order and women and the lower classes beneath.

The black elite were not the only voices of racial uplift; racial uplift ideologies were disseminated through a variety of institutions, including the church, academic conferences held at black colleges such as Hampton Institute, meetings of black clubwomen, books, and black newspapers and periodicals. Black newspapers in the North and the South frequently published

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7 Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, xiv.
8 Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 3-4.
10 Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 3.
articles on racial issues, including racial uplift, which was a prevalent topic. One article by the Associated Negro Press claimed, “to-day [sic], the average home receives not only one race periodical, but usually two or more, and the exceptional home, office, store, the schools and churches and libraries, receive from six to more than a score. This is PROGRESS; this is SUCCESS.” An article from 1919 described the prevalence of publications that discussed the racial issues:

To these numbers must be added the publications of churches, societies, and schools. For example, Mississippi has eleven religious weeklies, eight school periodicals, and two lodge papers, making a total, with the nineteen newspapers, of forty periodicals. And all classes of these contain articles on racial strife, outcries against wrongs and persecutions. You cannot take up even a missionary review or a Sunday school quarterly without being confronted by such an outcry.

Newspapers, such as *The Memphis Times*, claimed to speak out for progress, reform and the highest development of the race on all lines; speaks out against injustice and corruption; it uses its influence for equal rights to all. ‘All men up and no man down.’ It is a factor for social uplift, mental, moral and spiritual development, as well as commercial and financial.

The Associated Negro Press on January 1, 1920, also listed “Agencies for Uplift,” including churches, schools, The National Urban League, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, to name a few. Apparently, racial uplift was a visible topic for African Americans of varying class status, not restricted only to black intellectuals or the college-educated.

Suggestions for how to uplift the race also included the elimination of self-depreciating behavior in the arts, such as the practice of “blackening up” for minstrel performances, and the “burlesquing of the Negro,” which was “doing almost as much to keep down high ideals among

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the rising generations as the most radical Negro-hating white journal.” Instead, some suggested that attention be directed towards artistic representations, “with Negro characters as heroes,” rather than as “clowns, servants, and petty criminals.”

In summary, uplift ideologies emphasized “self-help, racial solidarity, temperance, thrift, chastity, social purity, patriarchal authority, and the accumulation of wealth,” as well as “status, moral authority, . . . recognition . . . as bourgeois agents of civilization . . . and positive black identity . . . [as] a source of dignity and self-affirmation.” As mentioned, two (or more) sides emerged in the struggle for equality and uplift, the first concerned with the issue of economic development. The first led by W. E. B. Du Bois, the second practicing the politics of accommodation, led by Booker T. Washington. Both sides strongly supported education but with differing opinions as to which type of education could best further the needs of blacks. As we progress through Andrew Nix’s family history, his attention to these points will aid in understanding his unique perspective as a southern, rural preacher living in the Black Metropolis.

**Nix Family History**

Reverend Andrew William (A. W.) Nix was born on November 30, 1880 in Harmony Hill, Texas, in Rusk County, later moving with his family to Longview, Texas in Gregg County. His father William (1853-?), was a farmer and a preacher, and married his wife, Ida

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16 U.S. Bureau of Census, Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Rusk County, Texas, Enumeration District No. 75, Sheet 89. Note: The Rusk County census does not specify if William Nix owned land.

17 U. S. Bureau of the Census, Twelve Population Census, 1900, Gregg County, Texas, sheet 3. The 1900 Gregg County census specifies that William Nix was a land owner in Justice Precinct No. 2, Supervisor’s District 7, Enumeration District 33. The 1910 Gregg County, Texas, Population Census, 1910, sheet 10, reports William and Ida as residing on The Airline Road in Justice Precinct No. 2, Enumeration District 4.

18 William Nix, Sr. died between 1920-1929 according to legal documents: In the 1920 census, he was listed as a farmer of 63 years old, and Ida Nix’s death certificate in 1929 states that she was widowed by this time.
Peterson (1854-1929) in Rusk County, Texas on April 28, 1876. William and Ida had three children together: William Jr. (1878-1941), Andrew (1880-1949), and Emma (1883-?). William Sr. was born in Georgia and his mother was from Georgia; however, census reports from 1880-1920 provide conflicting information about the birthplace of William Sr.’s father: South Carolina (1880), Georgia (1900), Virginia (1910), and Georgia (1920). William Nix Jr.’s 1920 census lists the parents as both being born in South Carolina, creating more confusion as to the birthplace of the parents. It is possible that William Sr.’s parents were Albert Nix (b. 1820) and Charlotte Nix (b. 1830), who with their children including William, were born into slavery in South Carolina.  

**William Nix, Sr.**

After abolition, William Nix, Sr. moved to Rusk County, Texas, later moving to the adjacent Gregg County. In 1878, he purchased ninety-nine-and-a-half acres of land for $477.50 in Gregg County, which was an enclave for “freedmen’s settlements.” These settlements, also called “freedom colonies,” provided newly freed slaves with not only land, but also autonomy away from the grips of racist white society in Texas. According to Thad Sitton, “Land ownership rates among African-American farmers in Texas rose rapidly from 1.8 percent in 1870 to 26 percent in 1890 to the all-time high of 31 percent soon after 1900.” Sitton adds that many former slaves acquired cheap or neglected land, mostly between 1870-1890, the time that William Nix probably settled in the area called “The Ridge.” The Ridge was also known as “Freedman’s Ridge,” and was located at the intersections of farm roads 449 and 2751. Farm

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19 U. S. Bureau of Census, 1870, Barnwell County, South Carolina, sheet 7.  
20 Gregg County Record of Deeds, Book Q, 125-127. William Nix, Sr. purchased ninety-five acres of land in Gregg County on December 17, 1898 for $477.50.  
Road 2751 (also named Airline Road) was the exact location of William Nix’s address in 1910.\textsuperscript{22} Thus, the evidence suggests that Nix probably did choose to settle in The Ridge as a freedman. The county seat of Gregg County is Longview, Texas, established in 1871, in which both cotton and railroads were thriving businesses. The Texas and Pacific (later named the Southern Pacific) railroad’s terminus was in Longview, destined to extend to Dallas; the International and Great Northern Railroad reached the adjacent community of Longview Junction.\textsuperscript{23} \textsuperscript{24}

![Street Scene, Longview, Texas, (c. 1904).](image)

Figure 2-1. Street Scene, Longview, Texas, (c. 1904). Used by permission, Van Craddock.


\textsuperscript{24} Craddock, Longview, 9.
Figure 2-2. Texas and Pacific Depot, Longview Texas, (c.1908). Used by permission, Van Craddock.

According to the Longview Chamber of Commerce, passengers could “board the Sunshine Special at Longview at 6:40 p.m. and be in St. Louis at 10:30 the next day, in Chicago at 7:25 and in New York the following day at noon, with only a few stops in between at the larger places.” William likely chose to settle in Longview for its Freedmen Settlements, inexpensive land, and for its accessibility to railroad lines. The rail system gave the booming cotton industry access to nearby markets that were previously difficult and time-consuming for farmers, such as William, to access via wagons. Because William Sr. was a farmer and had migrated as an enslaved individual from South Carolina, he possibly farmed cotton.

William Nix was also a minister in addition to being a farmer, but little is known as to which denomination he belonged or in what capacity he practiced his ministry. He is listed in the “1890 Marriages in Rusk County” report as officiating a marriage, with his denomination


recorded as “N. R.” for “no record.” The Pleasant Hill Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, founded in 1870, was the main cultural artery for African Americans living in Gregg County and may have been the church in which William Nix attended and/or preached.

**Ida Nix**

The first inhabitants of the area that would become Gregg County were American Indians from the Caddo and Cherokee tribes. According to Andrew Nix’s daughter, Genester Nix, Ida Nix was Native American, which could explain Ida’s relatively light complexion. William probably met Ida in Rusk County and married her there. The Rusk County census of 1880 lists William Sr. and Ida along with their children William Jr. and Andrew as “mulatto” probably due to Ida’s light complexion. This same census lists both William Sr. and Ida as not being able to write; however, by the 1900 census both were listed as being able to read and write. It is possible that upon William Sr.’s arrival to Texas and acquiring his freedom, he seized the opportunity to become educated and encouraged his wife to do the same. The Nix children most likely attended the local school for African-American children on East Marshall Avenue in Gregg County, which had been constructed in 1888. They may be included in a photograph (Figure 2-3) from the same year. Andrew Nix would have been eight years old at the time of the photograph.

![School Building, 1888](image)

Figure 2-3. School Building, 1888. Used by permission, Gregg County Historical Museum.
Education was a prevalent goal in A. W. Nix’s life for himself, his children, and his congregation, which may have been instilled in him early on by his parents.

A family photo from c. 1898 (Figure 2-4) shows the entire Nix family all dressed in fine clothing: William Nix, Sr. is sporting a gold chain; Ida Nix is wearing an elegant gown. Although William Nix was a farmer, the family has the appearance of wealth. In the 1900 census, a young boy of fourteen named Tim Taylor is listed as a “servant” in the Nix home. If Tim Taylor were indeed a servant, this could suggest that the Nix farm was a successful one and required the help of additional farm workers and/or a servant. In addition, both of Nix’s sons attended college, which would have required substantial financial resources from their parents.

Emma Nix

Daughter Emma Nix, at the young age of sixteen, chose married life over college (if she even had that choice), and married Colonel Baker (his real name), in Gregg County, Texas, on January 5, 1899. The 1900 census lists Emma and Colonel with one son, Oddie, living in the same precinct in which Colonel was born. Colonel is listed as a farmer who rented his land, thus implying that he was probably a tenant farmer. Little is known of Emma Nix, except that she was reported to have been a singer. Emma likely sang in the local church but did not have a professional career as a singer.

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28 Genester Nix, interview by author, Philadelphia, May 24, 2017. No newspaper articles were found that mentioned Emma’s name, so it is possible that she only sang in local churches.
William Nix, Jr.

William Nix, Jr. (1878-1941) was a singer and minister who was born in Harmony Hill, (Rusk County) Texas (Figure 2-5).29

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Figure 2-5. William Nix, Jr.

Between 1915-1919 he lived in Chicago and travelled to different cities to sing or deliver sermons. He is mentioned in *The New York Age* in 1917 for presenting a sermon in Florence, South Carolina, and in the same paper in 1919 he is named as “an Evangelist gospel singer.” The 1920 Census lists him living at 719 42nd Street in Chicago, in the heart of the black community nicknamed “Bronzeville.” He was married to Emma Nix and had two children, William Jr. and Emma, named after their parents. In 1921, he sang at the National Baptist Convention where he “thrilled” both the convention attendees and future gospel-composer, Thomas A. Dorsey, with his rendering of “I Do, Don’t You?” as a promotion for the newly published *Gospel Pearls* (This performance will be discussed in more detail at the end of this

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30 *The New York Age*, September 27, 1919.
32 There were three Emma Nix in the Nix family: the daughter of William, Sr. and Ida; the wife of William, Jr.; and the daughter of William Jr.
chapter). By 1930, he was living in Dallas at 1719 Boll Street, and the census lists him as a “minister” in the business of “gospel,” remarried to a woman named Pauline, at least eleven years his junior.\textsuperscript{33} They lived in Dallas as boarders with six other people in the same house. Boarding was common for African Americans in the early twentieth century, often a necessary means for both accommodations and affordability. An article from January 28, 1931 in \textit{The Guntersville Advertiser and Democrat}, published in Alabama, notes that “W.M. Nix [is] confined to his room. He has been ill for some time.”\textsuperscript{34} Whether this is William Nix, Jr., the evangelist singer, is not confirmed. By 1936, William and Pauline were living in Los Angeles, California. As reported in \textit{The California Eagle} on June 5, 1936, William sang at the Second Baptist Church on Griffith Ave, a prominent black church with a long legacy of black empowerment. The 1940 census lists William and Pauline as living alone in a rented house on 924 E. 25\textsuperscript{th} Street in Los Angeles; however, William was not employed, while Pauline worked as a seamstress but claimed zero income. It is likely that William was ill and possibly bed-ridden, because he died the following year on September 1, 1941 in Los Angeles. His illustrious contributions at the 1921 National Baptist Convention and as a committee member of the Sunday School Publishing Board, which published \textit{Gospel Pearls} and \textit{The Baptist Standard Hymnal}, may have been his great successes. After 1921, his lack of prominence in the gospel music industry, the infrequent newspapers articles about him, his itinerant lifestyle, and lack of employment in the last stages of his life, signal that he may have had financial and health problems before he passed.

\textsuperscript{33} The 1930 census lists William at 48, Pauline at 37 years old; the 1940 census lists William at 62 and Pauline at 43 years old. Thus, she was either eleven or nineteen years his junior.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{The Guntersville Advertiser and Democrat}, January 28, 1931.
Andrew (A. W.) Nix

Andrew (A. W.) Nix, also born in Harmony Hill (Rusk County) Texas, was converted and baptized at Friendship Baptist Church in Longview, Texas, at the age of twelve,\(^{35}\) where both he and his siblings sang in the church choir. No details of his life as a youth exist; however, we can assume that he most likely worked on his parents’ farm. It is likely that the Nix family endured hardships as a result of the boll weevil infestation that overtook parts of Mexico and Texas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which may have inspired A. W. to invest his talents in opportunities other than farming.\(^{36}\) In 1906, at twenty-six years old, Andrew was licensed as a minister, beginning at Shiloh Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas, under the direction of Rev. C. G. Fishback.\(^{37}\) An article from the *Topeka Plaindealer* published on March 13, 1908, reports that “Rev. A W [sic] Nix preached an able sermon Sunday night. Rev Nix is doing a grand work in Horton [in Northeast Kansas]. He is lifting as he climbs.” “Lifting as we climb” was a well-known slogan for the National Association of Colored Women\(^{38}\) who believed it was the job of the black middle class to promote values that would benefit the race as a whole. Thus, it is evident that as a young minister, A. W. preached uplift goals and/or participated with organizations that supported the uplift of the race (Figure 2-6).

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\(^{35}\) Genester Nix, personal biography booklet.

\(^{36}\) Lawrence W. Levine *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 240.


Although Nix left Kansas in 1908, his mentor, Rev. Fishback, was involved in standing up for the rights of local African Americans. According to Thomas C. Cox,

Black Topekans long had organized to exchange ideas about the present and future course of race progress. To Julia D. Roundtree, an elementary school teacher, and to the Reverend C. G. Fishback, pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, along with Negro representatives from other Kansas cities, the crisis in race relations in 1914 required ‘uniting the blacks into a body to fight Jim Crow laws, and . . . building up the race individually and collectively.’

Nix’s previous apprenticeship with Fishback could have resulted in the exchange of ideas about racial uplift between the two men. An article from the Topeka Plaindealer from 1909 confirms Nix’s impression of racial injustices:

Rev. and Mrs. A. W. Nix\(^4^1\) returned from Longview, Texas last Monday morning. They tell of a joyful trip and lovely visit with relatives and friends. They think that the jim crow [sic] car law is a disgrace to the better class of the race and that if the white people will enforce such a law they should give the colored people some nice, respectable cars and they hope that the state of Kansas and executive heads will maintain the right spirit and not emulate the example of Oklahoma and Texas.

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\(^4^1\) No information has been located about Rev. Nix’s first wife.
Rev. Nix will start soon to Louisville, Ky., to finish his theological course in the state university.\textsuperscript{42}

At this early point in his career, Nix was conscious of not only racial segregation and the injustices directed towards African Americans, but also of his status as a member of the “better class of the race.” Although only a young man still in his twenties and studying in college, the fact that he was interviewed by the Topeka newspaper for simply returning from a family visit implies that Nix was well respected and well known in the community. His experience riding in the Jim Crow car through Texas and Oklahoma must have made a profound impression on him.

Racism touched Nix’s life in other ways as well, and in a story told by his son, Elwood, Reverend Nix did not let racist words get the best of him. Elwood states that his father in a visit down South, ventured into a restaurant where he was refused service based on his skin color:

He went into this restaurant and this is when he first got on the [police] force in New York and he said, “can I have some ham and eggs and some home fries,” and the guy told him, he said, “we don’t serve niggers.” And my father said, “I won’t eat ‘em either. Can I have some eggs, bacon, and home fries?” He got served.\textsuperscript{43}

Even when faced with racism such as this, he instructed his children, “anything you do, do your best . . . [and] always do the right thing.”\textsuperscript{44} The philosophy that he instilled upon his children was to treat everyone with respect.

**General Association of Colored Baptists in Kentucky**

Andrew was ordained in 1908 at the age of twenty-eight\textsuperscript{45} and began his studies at Western Baptist College in Macon, Missouri.\textsuperscript{46} For unknown reasons, Andrew transferred to

\textsuperscript{42}Topeka Plaindealer, (Sept. 10, 1909).

\textsuperscript{43}Elwood Nix, interview by author, Philadelphia, May 24, 2017.

\textsuperscript{44}Elwood Nix and Genester Nix, interview by author, Philadelphia, May 24, 2017.

\textsuperscript{45}Tabernacle Baptist Church, anniversary book, 1936.

State University in Louisville, Kentucky in 1909. The students of State University were primarily from low-income homes or farm homes and had to be of “good moral character.” The General Association of Colored Baptists (henceforth named as the “Association”), formed in 1865 by “messengers of regular Missionary Baptist Churches in the State of Kentucky,” founded State University in 1879 “for the purpose of training and preparing young men and women for service, especially teachers, pastors and preachers.” The 1914 Association’s meeting minutes report that Nix served on committees, said prayers at meetings, and was introduced to the Association at large as a “Corresponding Messenger” of the “Consolidated Association” thus allowing him to serve in the greater forum of black Baptists. At the time of the meeting in 1914, Nix would have been thirty-four years, older than most other State University students, and was already pastoring at First Baptist Church in Georgetown, Kentucky. His older age and status as a pastor probably gained him respect and admission to the Association and its meetings.

In the address of the 1911 Association’s meeting, the moderator, Rev. R. Mitchell, D.D., apparently was well aware the philosophies of racial and moral uplift and supported several of these doctrines, recognizing the demand for “consecrated manhood and womanhood,” the importance of voting as a “weapon” to safeguard the rights of citizenship, and the need for

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temperance. “Manhood” could be achieved through the attendance of men in church and was recognized as an act that had great impact on the lives of boys: “When men to go church the boy question is solved, for he loves to be where men are, do what men do.”\textsuperscript{51} Therefore, men were encouraged to set examples for their sons by attending church.

Citizenship, according to Mitchell, was “the only weapon at our command with which we may be able to protect our liberties.” However, voting rights were compromised by the practice of buying and selling votes among blacks. Ministers were encouraged to use their power to influence the masses of the “evil” of this practice. Although Mitchell understood that “the Negro . . . is on trial and will be for the next fifty years,” he also exhibited a naïve hope that through the daily newspapers’ pleads for equality and just treatment, and through “the efforts and endeavors of our friends North and South,” “we [can expect] a great change in our favor.”\textsuperscript{52}

As stated in the minutes of the Association’s forty-third session, temperance, although strongly supported by the Association, was an “opportunity of our people to line up with the sober Christian element of the white race. We should always seek to be in line with the white people who strive to live the teachings of the Bible, for our safety in this country depends upon the Christian people of the country.”\textsuperscript{53} Perhaps Mitchell referenced whites as the example for temperance because of the strong Victorian moral reforms established in the late nineteenth century in which the emerging middle class in England during the Victorian era emphasized “competition, thrift, prudence, self-reliance and personal achievement.”\textsuperscript{54} The obvious similarities between the uplift goals of elite African Americans and the Victorian-era goals of

\textsuperscript{51} Minutes of the \textit{Forty-Sixth Annual Session of the General Association of Colored Baptists in Kentucky}, 54.

\textsuperscript{52} Minutes of the \textit{Forty-Third Annual Session of the General Association of Colored Baptists in Kentucky}, 11-12.

\textsuperscript{53} Minutes of the \textit{Forty-Third Annual Session of the General Association of Colored Baptists in Kentucky}, 12.

middle-class English and white Americans create larger discussions outside of the purview of this paper. Presumably, the adoption of some of the values held by Euro-American culture offered a shield of support by white Christians from the dangers that faced blacks in the early part of the century, especially those from the South. In addition, the Association had pleaded with the General Associations of White Baptists for the allotment of funds to be used for struggling black Baptist churches. Although the Association’s board was “embarrassed” by having to make the request, whites were among those who supported the Association and State University. The adoption of and dependence upon white culture and society reveal the accommodationist stance as characteristic of some black elites who aspired toward uplift.

Moral codes for black Baptists included the sanctity of marriage as “the foundation of the home.” The Association was concerned with themes of “amusement” and “revelry,” including dancing. According to the Association’s 1914 meeting minutes, “the dance has invaded the church . . . [and] has killed the prayer meeting in many places and is sapping the Spirituality out of the church.”\(^5^5\) It is not known if “dancing” was referring to male-female dancing as an extra amusement activity, or to the physical responses, such as hand-clapping, foot-stomping, and ecstatic behavior, common in the services of post-Emancipation black churches.\(^5^6\) Because of the reference to dancing as an impediment to the church and spirituality, it appears that the reference is to in-church dancing rather than for mere amusement.

Daniel A. Payne, (1811-1893), senior bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), had also expressed his disdain at the physicalized expressions of black worshipers. At a church service at Old Bethel Church in Philadelphia in 1878, which he describes as a “bush

\(^5^5\) Minutes of the *Forty-Sixth Annual Session of the General Association of Colored Baptists in Kentucky*, 54.

“meeting,” he describes how practitioners formed a ring, “clapped their hands and stamped their feet in a most ridiculous and heathenish way. . . . I told him [the pastor] also that it was a heathenish way to worship and disgraceful to themselves, the race, and the Christian name.”

Apparently, dancing and physical movement in the church setting had been associated with “heathenish” behavior long before the Kentucky Baptists expressed their disapproval of it.

**Reverend Sutton E. Griggs**

Reverend Sutton E. Griggs (1872-1933), present at the 1911 Association meeting, was the son of a former slave, a college-educated Baptist minister, and an author who wrote over thirty books and pamphlets during his life (Figure 2-7). I have included information on Griggs in the context of Andrew Nix’s history for the simple reason that their professional lives intersected at various stages: first, Griggs was present at the 1911 meeting of the General Association of Colored Baptists in Kentucky, and Nix, as a student of the Association’s foster school, State University, possibly could have been present at the meeting or read the minutes at a later date; second, both Nix and Griggs were present at the 1921 National Baptist Convention in Chicago; third, Nix served on a committee at said convention that supported and distributed Griggs’ book, *Guide to Racial Greatness or The Science of Collective Efficiency*; and fourth, both Nix and Griggs recorded sermons on race records in the late 1920s. It is therefore possible that Nix supported Griggs’ writings and aspirations for uplift. While Nix’s vocal practices were drawn largely from the black folk traditions associated with the Old Negro, Griggs’ voice and writings represent the cultured voice associated with the New Negro. Thus, although both Griggs and Nix wanted to uplift the race, Griggs serves as a contradiction to Nix, not only in voice, but

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58 Part of the chapter on Griggs taken from my paper at the 2015 Society for Ethnomusicology conference.

also in approach. A brief history of Griggs will partially explain his ideologies as presented in his writings, and his role as an elite minister who worked to further the gains of racial uplift.

Griggs pastored the Tabernacle Baptist Church in both Memphis and Nashville, Tennessee and because of his contact with his congregation, he developed an empathy for the plight of the working poor and sought to assist them through his own philosophy of racial uplift. In his most popular book, *Imperium in Imperio* (1899), Griggs introduced a “new Negro, self-respecting, fearless, and determined in the assertion of his rights.”

Griggs, at the 1915 Southern Baptist Convention, spoke of his appreciation for his white supporters:

> The white people of the South have helped the negroes [sic] far beyond their calculations. They have given the negro new unity and new conceptions. They are helping him to self uplift [sic] and helping him to come to himself. There is a new

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relationship between the two races, and the work of the white people is affecting
the negro not externally, but in the real emancipation of his race.  

Around 1920, Rev. Sutton Griggs planned to convert the Memphis Tabernacle Baptist Church
into an “institutional church [that] would teach domestic science to make better cooks for white
Memphis homes…and provide the white community with well-trained black labor.” Because of
his conservative strategies, some whites supported Griggs, declaiming him as “a thrifty,
intelligent, self-respecting Negro,” and endorsed his work through speaking engagements and
financial contributions to the building of the church. Because of the labor shortage caused by the
Great Migration, some white Memphis business owners and industrialists tried to keep blacks
from emigrating to the North and used Griggs as a spokesperson against emigration. As a result,
some members of black communities believed he was inhibiting the advancement of the black
race and labeled Griggs an “Uncle Tom” and accommodationist. Griggs was, by this time, a
well-known black nationalist and, according to Wilson J. Moses, was the first black author who
spoke directly to the black masses through an Afrocentric philosophy of literature. Du Bois
acknowledged Griggs’ “racial novels,” which “spoke primarily to the Negro race.” Griggs was
also one of the first to coin the term “New Negro” in his book, *Imperium in Imperio* (1899),
although Alain Locke is often credited with the term.

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1975): 79.
Qtr., 1979): 204.
Social Science* 49, The Negro’s Progress in Fifty Years (Sep., 1913): 236.
At the 1921 National Baptist Convention in Chicago, Reverend Nix was appointed to the committee that was formed to distribute Griggs’ book, *Collective Efficiency*. Therefore, not only did Nix have access to Griggs’ report on inter-racial relations and probably heard it delivered in-person at the convention, he also supported Griggs’ publications and other endeavors. This suggests that Nix may have supported or was at least minimally involved in the era’s racial politics of “advancing the Race.”

By 1928, Griggs had written several novels in which he promoted black pride, black separatism, and black independence and self-reliance. When Griggs’ novels failed to generate sufficient sales from within black communities, he abandoned his strategy to direct his literature towards the race, and instead turned to support from white financial backers. This garnered him titles of “accommodationist,” “marginal man,” a “confused mulatto,”67 and the “Negro Apostle to the White Race.”68 Griggs also recorded six sermons in 1928 on the Victor label,69 and preached in a calm, reserved manner, atypical of the emotionalism characteristic of southern Baptist ministers.70 His limited recording history suggests that Griggs’ vocal style apparently did not resonate with the black masses to whom he preached and did not encourage future recordings.71

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70 Oliver, *Songsters & Saints*, 146.

71 Griggs recordings will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.
State University

In 1909, Andrew Nix transferred to State University (Figure 2-8)\textsuperscript{72} in Louisville, Kentucky, graduating with a Normal school degree in 1913 and a Bachelor of Divinity (B.D.) in 1915.\textsuperscript{73}

Figure 2-8. State University Campus, 1913.

The 1909 university catalogue describes State University as “An Institution for the Training of Colored Young Men and Women.”\textsuperscript{74} Normal schools had originally been established in the late nineteenth century by the American Missionary Association (AMA) and other philanthropists and educators. In this regard, the educated were responsible for uplifting the uneducated, assuming a position of evolutionary racial hierarchies.

Most of the students attended State University for the attainment of teaching, ministry, or domestic science degrees. The fees for students were moderate: for the 1914-1915 school year, tuition registration cost four dollars; tuition plus room and board cost ten dollars per month; and the graduation fee plus diploma was five dollars for the Normal School, seven dollars for the


\textsuperscript{73} State University, founded in 1879, was originally named the Kentucky Normal and Theological Institute in Louisville. Its current name is Simmons College of Kentucky.

\textsuperscript{74} Catalogue to State University, (1908-1909), 1.
Theological Course. A Normal school degree would have given Andrew the ability to become a school teacher; however, he had already been ordained to preach and obviously wanted to pursue this career path. Several of the officers and trustees of State University were also life members and served on boards of the 1921 National Baptist Convention (which was attended by Andrew Nix, William Nix, Jr., Sutton Griggs, and Thomas A. Dorsey); thus, it appears that the officers of the university were well-established ministers within not only Kentucky but also the larger convention system. For example, W. H. Steward, Rev. W. H. Craigshead, and Rev. H. W. Jones all represented Kentucky at the national convention in 1921: Jones served on the Board of Trustees, while Steward served as Chairman, and Craigshead as Secretary of the Board at State University in 1915, the year Andrew graduated. Andrew would likely have received the mentorship of these senior ministers, and they possibly could have been influential to his admission to various boards within the national convention system.

The college also offered a degree in instrumental music, which focused on European classical music masterworks, and included the study of Mozart, Czerny, Mendelssohn, Haydn, Clementi, Chopin, Liszt, Schumann, Beethoven, and others. The preference for classical music studies with a focus on the great masters demonstrates adherence to European cultural traditions.

The Domestic Science School offered courses in Household Economics, including cooking, sewing, dressmaking, millinery (hat making), household values, applied housekeeping, and home furnishing and decoration. These courses were intended for the female students only. The pragmatic tenets associated with Domestic Science were similar to Booker T. Washington’s philosophy of industrial education in which he encouraged blacks to

Cast down your bucket where you are [including] in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions. . . . keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labor, and put brains and skills into the common occupations of life. . . . No race can prosper
till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top.  

Washington in 1895, supported the economic development of the working class in a segregated society. His Tuskegee Institute was supported by white philanthropists, leading him to be labeled as an accommodationist and the “Benedict Arnold of the Negro race” by William Monroe Trotter, who himself promoted the black musical elite.

Membership in the Literary Society of State University and attendance at its meetings were required for all members. The importance of the Literary Society was detailed in State University’s 1908-1909 catalogue: “It secures an admirable training in self-restraint and self-command, in parliamentary procedure, and in aptness of studied and impromptu speech.” The Prentice Research Club, a literary organization, studied African-American authors and purchased books by black authors for the school library.

Normal schools were the training facilities for teachers, with a four-year curriculum that was divided into three terms and included a rigorous program of classes. In the 1910-1911 catalogue, the years in which Rev. Nix was in his second year in the Normal School, the courses included Latin, German, French, Cicero, Virgil, Iliad, De Senectute, Physics, Botany, Anabasis, Rhetoric, Orations, and Bible studies by books, periods, and doctrines, and Greek

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77 Catalogue to State University, (1908-1909), 23.

78 Genester Nix suggests that the students were most likely reading “Booker T. [Washington], Harriet Tubman, George Washington Carver and the early leaders of the slave revolts.” Genester Nix, email message to author, October 25, 2017.

79 Catalogue to State University, (1908-1909), 35.
Testament. Nix graduated with a Normal school degree in 1913, and continued into the theological program the following year. The Theological Department was a two-year program and included courses on Hebrew, New Testament Greek, Ecclesiastical Latin, Homiletics, Biblical Geography, Missions, Church History, Systematic Theology, and Bible studies, among other courses. Nix is the only student listed as a Senior in the Regular Theological program in the 1914-1915 catalogue among a total of twenty-eight ministerial students at the school. Thus, it is quite likely that he would have had one-on-one instruction and attention from the senior ministers.

The university stressed certain aspects identified with racial uplift theories and Victorian modes of behavior, such as those associated with loudness, cleanliness, moral virtue, and hygiene. For example, “Boisterousness will not be tolerated on the grounds,” “Keep beds CLEAN,” “Loud talking and laughing at meals or any other disorder will result in dismission from dining room,” “Avoid all conversation from windows. Do not communicate therefrom,” “The association of the sexes is not allowed, and there must be no communication without permission,” and as stated in the catalogue: “The Sanitary Committee pays special attention to students’ teeth, all students are requested to see their dentist before entering State University.” Cleanliness and loudness were two of the complaints that the old settlers (African Americans who had settled in Chicago prior to World War I), had about the new migrants that arrived in the early decades of the twentieth century.

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80 Catalogue to State University, (1914-1915), 29-30.
81 Catalogue to State University, (1913-1914), 25.
82 Catalogue to State University, (1908-1909), 23.
83 Loudness and other vocal traits will be discussed fully in Chapter 4.
Unfortunately, State University suffered serious financial crises and, by 1914, was not able to pay their instructors. Attempting to raise funds, the university was eventually unable to pay their instructors and closed in 1930. The Association’s minutes of the 1914 meeting claim that they had assurance from an organized movement from their white friends that they would raise an amount sufficient to pay the indebtedness on the University if our brethren would raise $5,000 for our work. This was more than fulfilled on our part and when the demand was made for the redemption of this pledge, we were surprised to learn the details for the campaign had not been arranged and they were not prepared to make this pledge good. . . . The most embarrassment at present grows out of the fact that we are unable to pay the salaries due the teachers.

Nix, as a soon-to-be graduating student from State University in 1915 (Figure 2-9), and as a member serving on the Association’s committee, would surely have been aware of the university’s financial difficulties and the promises made, but not kept, by its white benefactors.

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Figure 2-9. Rev. A. W. Nix graduation photo.

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84 Minutes of General Association of Colored Baptists of Kentucky, 1914, 42.
85 Minutes of General Association of Colored Baptists of Kentucky, 1914, 44.
86 Rev. C. H. Parrish, ed., Golden Jubilee of the General Association of Colored Baptists in Kentucky: The Story of 50 Years’ Work From 1865-1915, (Louisville: Mayes Printing Company, 1915), 102. This photo attributes Nix with a D.D. degree (Doctor of Divinity); however, in actuality he graduated with a Bachelor of Divinity degree, (B.D.) and no evidence has been found of an honorary Doctorate of Divinity degree.
In short, State University replicated many of Booker T. Washington’s philosophies regarding industrial education as well as his adherence to black elites’ accommodation to white philanthropists, depending on them for their very survival. The university encouraged strict Victorian moral rules, a preference for European classical music, and even stressed cleanliness and good hygiene. Andrew Nix would have been fully aware of the school’s underlying ideologies.

Nix’s Career

Between 1914-1918, Nix was a pastor at the First Baptist Church in Georgetown, Kentucky, where he “built a strong Sunday School in 1914.”87 In 1912, prior to Nix’s takeover of the church, the church did not have a pastor but still had a membership of 506.88 He acquired the church in 1914 with a membership of 550 and property valued at $10,000.89 Also in 1914, Nix attended the Association’s annual meeting in Winchester, Kentucky, serving on a committee of six ministers and providing prayers for some of the sessions.

In 1915, Nix was a recipient of the Golden Jubilee Certificate from the Association.90 The Golden Jubilee was a celebration of the anniversary of fifty years of the Kentucky Baptists’ work from 1865-1915, and included a book published in 1915 with the same title. The book provided an opportunity for the Association to not only bestow recognition on its members, but to also promote its ideologies, achievements, desires, and suggestions. Nix’s acceptance of a distinguished certificate from the Association testifies to his involvement in its ideologies, which included racial uplift. Racial uplift stressed self-help as exemplified in the Jubilee’s suggestions

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88 Minutes of 44th Annual Session: General Association Colored Baptists in Kentucky, 1912, 71.
89 Parrish, Golden Jubilee, 218.
90 Parrish, Golden Jubilee, 50, 52.
of “some things we must do for ourselves,” which included practical religion, honesty, personal hygiene, care and cleanliness for the home, moral behavior, and interracial encouragement. The Association’s alignment with racial uplift ideologies is evident in their recommendation to “be loyal and helpful to our race, by encouraging all worthy efforts put forth for its uplift.” The Association’s quote of an article from the *Continent* from January 15, 1915 made clear what they desired to accomplish for the race, in which blacks would be judged by their progress, not their skin tones:

> Summed up in a word, what the black people do want is that with them, just as with the white people, every man shall be rated in estimation of his neighbors on his own individual merits, character, efficiency, and mental caliber – with no discount taken off for the color of his skin. . . . He knows the average of his race is low, but when an individual climbs above the average, he ought to be credited for it with an honest measure of respect.  

In addition, the Association recommended to its members “We must behave ourselves better on the streets and in public carriers and stop talking so much and so loud.” Loudness was associated with low-class behavior, thought to impair African Americans from being respected by the dominant society. Andrew Nix, a student at State University in Louisville, Kentucky in 1915 when the book was published, would most likely have been exposed to these documents and philosophies of racial uplift. The Association’s recommendation from 1915 is similar to the *Chicago Defender’s* 1917 admonition to southern migrants whose loud talking was deemed as a sign of “low breeding” in the northern cities. According to the *Defender*,

> There is entirely too much loud talking on the street cars among our new comers. . . . Such actions show low breeding. People of Chicago do not engage in such. Preachers should take up a few minutes of Sundays and instruct these new comers [sic] on how to act in public places and should take off a day and visit the plants,

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yards, and mills and tell them how to act. . . . Cut this out, dear reader, and whenever you see one talking loudly hand it to him.94

The link middle-class northerners made between vocal loudness and low-class behavior by migrants is evident. The Defender’s recommendation for preachers to visit “plants, yards, and mills” speaks directly to the locations of work done by southern migrants, who capitalized upon unskilled jobs in Chicago that became available with the onset of the United States’ entry into World War I. The Chicago Defender, a well-known and popular black newspaper, took it upon itself to “educate” new migrants to Chicago about northern etiquette and the “right” way to behave. The Defender provided “instructions” in the form of a list of twenty-seven points to those who were deemed “undesirable” by “certain classes of citizens.” The accusers based their conflagrations on the modes of conduct by the new southern migrants, who were causing “humiliation of all respectable classes of our citizens,” granting license to white Chicagoans to commit “unlawful acts” against the new migrants.95 Thus, in the minds of the old settlers it was imperative that southern migrants improve their standards as a matter of safety from white retaliation. Racial uplift espoused “sophisticated” values as a means to achieve equality and the very act of controlling the volume of one’s voice was interpreted as accommodating to white aesthetic standards. Nix, as a migrant from Texas and Kentucky who moved to northern metropilises, was in many ways the epitome of the stereotype disparaged by the old settlers of cities in the North: he was raised in a southern, rural community, his parents worked as farmers, his father was a former slave, and he preached in the southern style familiar to other migrants to the big cities.

Many factors led to the mass influx of southerners into northern cities, especially in the World War I years between 1916-1919. Despite the abolition of slavery after the Civil War, southern states continued with de facto slavery in the form of sharecropping, in which African-America farmers were often bound to the land that they had previously worked on as slaves. Southern states were also notorious for their continued practice of lynching, mob violence, and racial intimidation. However, as outlined by historian Allan H. Spear, general dissatisfaction with the South was also brought on by environmental factors, such as the infestation of crops by the boll weevil and massive flooding. By 1915, both types of natural disaster had caused major destruction for southern farmers. In addition, during the pre-World War I era, companies manufacturing war supplies demanded more labor than was available and Chicago became a major destination for southern migrants because of numerous employment opportunities in industry. Advertisements in the *Chicago Defender* encouraged Southerners to head north to escape the racist environment in the South, despite the rumors of the cold climate in Chicago causing death by freezing:

If YOU CAN FREEZE TO DEATH in the north and be free, why FREEZE to death in the south and be a slave, where your mother, sister and daughter are raped and burned at the stake, where your father, brother and son are treated with contempt and hung to a pole, riddled with bullets at the least mention that he does not like the way he has been treated.

Come north then, all of you folks, both good and bad. If you don’t behave yourselves up here, the jails will certainly make you wish you had. For the hard

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96 Spear, *Black Chicago*, 139.


99 Spear, *Black Chicago*, 140.
working man there is plenty of work - if you really want it. The Defender says come.  

Southerners envisioned the North as free from Jim Crow segregation and as able to provide their children with better schools and other facilities. 

Enticed by the lure of a better life in the North, many southerners—including Andrew Nix—ventured to resettle in northern cities, such as New York and Chicago.

After graduating from State University in 1915, Reverend Nix began his career as a college-educated minister. In this sense he represents a contradiction to the stereotypical black Southern migrant of the day in that he was college-educated with two degrees. His life goal, as described by his daughter, Genester, was to move from church to church and build up the church membership while simultaneously improving the physical structures of the churches themselves and reducing their debts. Between 1914-1940, the Nix family lived in Georgetown, Kentucky; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; New York, New York (Harlem); Maywood, Illinois; Chicago, Illinois; Cleveland, Ohio; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (he was recalled to the same Pittsburgh church); and finally Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

In January 1919, Nix accepted the position of pastor at the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, serving only one year in this position until 1920. However, in this short period, Nix reduced the church mortgage from $27,000 to $17,000 due to an increase in the church membership under his leadership. In 1920, he resigned to accept a position as pastor at


103 1240 Buena Vista Street, N.S., Pittsburgh, PA.
Mt. Moriah Baptist Church at 2050 5th Ave., New York City (Harlem) (Figure 2-10),\textsuperscript{104} where he met his future wife, Ida Anita Burcher (1902-2001) (Figure 2-11),\textsuperscript{105} an immigrant from Bermuda, twenty-one years his junior.\textsuperscript{106} Nix served as pastor of Mt. Moriah until 1923 while simultaneously serving as a policeman in New York City. Nix moved to Chicago in 1923 amidst torrential racial strife.

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure2-10}
\caption{Mount Moriah Baptist Church (Harlem).}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{104} Mt. Moriah Baptist Church, Photograph by Terri Brinegar.
\textsuperscript{105} Ida Anita Burcher, ca. 1917-1920.
\textsuperscript{106} Andrew’s mother and wife were both named Ida.
Figure 2-11. Ida Anita Burcher (c. 1920).

Chicago

Race Riots

The summer of 1919 brought an explosion of racial tensions in the United States. One such riot took place in Longview, Texas, the city in which Andrew’s parents resided and where Andrew lived as a youth. Longview, in 1919, was a small community in Gregg County, Texas, with 5,700 people, in which thirty-one percent of the city population, and forty-eight percent of the county population was black. The riots began in response to the alleged advances of a black man, Lemmel Walters, towards a white woman, leading to the abduction and lynching of Walters by white mobs. In response, a local black schoolteacher reported the incident to the Chicago Defender, which issued an article on July 5, 1919, that conflicted with the opinions of white residents. The article states, “Walters was taken to the outskirts of the town and shot to pieces. His nude form was thrown near the roadside. He was buried by people of his Race. White

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people here are angered because our people have been leaving this part of Texas in droves, and since this lynching all the farm hands have left.”\textsuperscript{108} Angry white mobs responded by attacking several African Americans and burning the houses and businesses of several black citizens. The hostility between bloodthirsty gangs of both whites and blacks erupted to the point that martial law had to be instated by the Governor of Texas on July 13, 1919, lasting until July 18, 1919.\textsuperscript{109}

Because Longview, in 1919, was a small community, undoubtedly William Sr. and his wife Ida who still lived in Longview would have been aware of the lynching and ensuing riots by virulent mobs. They probably feared for their own lives as mobs of violent whites paraded through the streets. Possibly they informed their children as to the situation in Longview, bringing concern for their safety due to the racial violence there. Andrew’s awareness of the racial strife in Texas thus could have been one of the motivating factors that inspired his move to the North.

African-American migrants like A. W. Nix were faced with numerous conflicts as they adjusted to their new lives in northern cities. Despite the environment of a new “Promised Land” as was hoped, Chicago assumed many discriminatory and racist practices similar to those experienced in the South. For instance, most businesses in black neighborhoods, such as on State Street, were owned by whites.\textsuperscript{110} Established European immigrant communities, such as those inhabited by the Irish and the Poles, reacted to the sudden competition in the job market, feeling threatened for jobs by new black migrants.\textsuperscript{111} In 1919, manufacturing jobs were on the decline as wartime needs came to an end. Between 1890 and 1915, the population of African Americans in

\textsuperscript{108}“Police Work to Keep Lynching a Secret,” \textit{The Chicago Defender} (July 5, 1919): 2.


\textsuperscript{110}Spear, \textit{Black Chicago}, 184.

\textsuperscript{111}Spear, \textit{Black Chicago}, 201.
Chicago rose from 15,000 to over 50,000,\textsuperscript{112} and many were forced to live in the all-black neighborhoods on the South Side, called the “Black Belt,” paying higher rents than whites for similar accommodations. The Black Belt was a district thirty-one blocks long and four blocks wide in which ninety percent of the black population lived, with State Street as the main thoroughfare.\textsuperscript{113} In 1917, as migrants flooded into the city, “in a single day there were 664 Negro applicants for houses, and only fifty houses available. . . . At the same time rents increased from 5 to 30 and sometimes as much as 50 per cent. . . . [and] Forty-one of . . . seventy-five families were each living in one room.”\textsuperscript{114} As overcrowding in black enclaves caused by the migration pushed blacks into white neighborhoods, whites responded with violence, bombing realtors who sold homes to blacks and the homes of black residents.\textsuperscript{115} Violence erupted on July 27, 1919 at the Twenty-ninth Street beach after a seventeen-year-old black boy, Eugene Williams, drowned after being stoned as he unknowingly crossed an unmarked barrier into “white” waters. Police did not make any arrests, which set off a barrage of violent clashes between black and white Chicagoans, first at the beach, then later into the city, lasting a total of six days, killing twenty-three blacks and fifteen whites, and injuring 342 blacks and 178 whites. Despite efforts by the Chicago Commission on Race Relations to understand the reasons that inspired the riot,\textsuperscript{116} racism and discrimination continued in Chicago, with many claiming that segregation was the only means acceptable to quell racial tensions. As whites reacted to job losses, the movements of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{112} Spear, \textit{Black Chicago}, 11.


\textsuperscript{114} The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, \textit{The Negro in Chicago}, 93.

\textsuperscript{115} Spear, \textit{Black Chicago}, 211.

\textsuperscript{116} The resulting investigation was published in The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, \textit{The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot}, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922).
\end{footnotesize}
blacks into white, immigrant areas, and the rise of blacks in politics, between July 1, 1917 and March 1, 1921, fifty-eight residential buildings inhabited by blacks were bombed.\textsuperscript{117} African-American leaders, including those in the church, encouraged self-help through the initiation of black-owned businesses to lessen the dependence on those owned by whites.\textsuperscript{118} By the 1920s, the black-belt regions became almost exclusively African American as those within its areas intentionally separated themselves from white Chicago, creating a self-sufficient “Black Metropolis.”\textsuperscript{119}

\textbf{The 1921 National Baptist Convention}

In 1921, both Andrew and his brother William Nix, Jr. attended the National Baptist Convention in Chicago, which was held that year from September 7-12. The program from the proceedings note that Andrew was pastoring at Mt. Moriah, and that William was a pastor in Chicago. It is at this convention that the famous gospel-music composer, Thomas A. Dorsey, expressed his enthusiasm for the singing of William (W. M.) Nix’s “I Do, Don’t You?” (More will be discussed about Andrew’s and William’s influences on Thomas Dorsey later in this chapter). Andrew Nix is listed in the convention minutes as serving on the Foreign Mission Board, the B.Y.P.U. (Black Young People’s Union) Board, and the board that formed to distribute Rev. Sutton Griggs’ book, \textit{Guide to Racial Greatness or The Science of Collective Efficiency}. Andrew was one of only nineteen on the committee that was formed to aid in the distribution of Griggs’ book.\textsuperscript{120}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[117] Sutherland, “An Analysis of Negro Churches in Chicago,” 16.
\item[118] Spear, \textit{Black Chicago}, 221-222.
\item[119] Spear, \textit{Black Chicago}, 222.
\end{footnotes}
Chicago in the 1920s: The Bronzeville Neighborhood

Andrew and Ida Nix moved to Chicago in 1923. The Great Migration that began during World War I brought thousands of black families to northern cities, such as New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia to seek employment opportunities and escape racism in the South. The Nix family was one of these. Whether Nix moved his family to Chicago to better their opportunities or to accept a position as pastor is not known. The Nix family lived at 2075 Avenue in the 18th ward, sharing a house with another family of eight, (most likely in a separate apartment), approximately five miles from Bronzeville, an important hub in the black arts movement in the South Side of Chicago. Andrew’s brother, William, lived at 719 42nd street in the heart of Bronzeville. A Chicago Defender article from 1910 describes the activities of the main thoroughfare of Bronzeville known as the Stroll:

> With the coming of real summer weather “The Great Light Way” [State street] has blossomed forth in all its glory. From 26th street south it has become the popular promenade for the masses and classes. . . . From the merry-go-round in an open lot to the pretentious summer garden at 53rd street it is one continuous round of fun. It is the poor man’s paradise.

Despite Bronzeville being “the second largest Negro city in the world,” it was subjected to segregation similar to that in cities of the South. Bronzeville, as an all-black community

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121 I concluded that Nix remained in New York at Mt. Moriah until 1923 based on evidence from newspaper articles. In an article in The New York Age from December 2, 1922, Rev. A. W. Nix was named as “state evangelist,” which confirms that he was living in the New York area at this time. By June of 1923, his first child was born in Chicago. Thus, he and Ida probably moved from New York to Chicago between December 1922 and June 1923.


123 U. S. Bureau of Census, Fifteenth Census, 1930, Cook County, Illinois, 13th Precinct, Enumeration District 16-901, Supervisor’s District 6, Sheet 9A. The Nix family rented their portion of the house for $30 per month.


contained within a racial boundary, was a small universe within itself, consisting of diverse class structures of “acceptables” and “shadies.” With the lower class in the majority, it became known as a center of prostitution, gambling, and illegal “hustling.”\textsuperscript{127} Although Andrew and Ida were both conservative in their values, demonizing alcohol consumption, jazz, and the blues, the lively atmosphere of Bronzeville must have greatly impacted their understanding of city life. The \textit{Chicago Defender} regularly advertised the activities on the Stroll in a column titled, “On the Stroll by Ace,” which described the “worldly” atmosphere that Andrew and Ida tried desperately to avoid. Ace described the

Things I see . . . [including] a girl, whose color is rich chocolate and whose bright red hat gives her a saucy air, swings smartly along on high-heeled shoes. . . .

Ace continues,

Buster had been doing a little bootlegging and he was pretty smart about his comings and going. But finally police got on to him and chased him as he emerged from a flat with a gallon of alleged ‘corn’ under his arm.\textsuperscript{128}

The people and activities on the Stroll, besides “saucy” girls and bootlegging, included jazz and theater, with over 1,000 professional entertainers – more than “the combined states of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee, where the blues and jazz were said to have originated.”\textsuperscript{129} Thomas A. Dorsey played piano at the clubs on State Street at the same time Andrew and Ida were likely avoiding such establishments. Notable jazz and blues artists, such as King Oliver, Jelly Roll Morton, Bessie Smith, and Louis Armstrong set up shop in Chicago, as did record companies that advertised in the \textit{Chicago Defender}.\textsuperscript{130}


\textsuperscript{129} Gregory, \textit{The Southern Diaspora}, 137-138.

\textsuperscript{130} Gregory, \textit{The Southern Diaspora}, 138.
Andrew and Ida were married on August 9, 1923 in Chicago and it is there that they had four of their five children: Andrew Jr. (1923-2011), Theophilus (1925-2008), Genester (b.1928), Elwood (b. 1930). While in the Chicago area, Nix pastored two churches: Second Baptist Church at 436 S. 13th Avenue in Maywood, Illinois (Figure 2-12), and Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Chicago.132

Figure 2-12. Parsonage in Maywood, IL.

While at Second Baptist Church in Maywood, Nix conducted revivals, increased the church membership, and “built a $7000 brick parsonage and almost paid for it before he left.”133 He also initiated the remodeling of the interior and exterior of the church building. During his tenure,

131 Parsonage in Maywood, Illinois where Genester Nix was born.

132 I have not been able to locate information about Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Chicago.

more than eighty new members were added. At Mt. Olive Baptist Church, Nix reportedly “saved the church property and secured the deed for the church building.” Newspaper articles list Nix as a “national evangelist,” even before he started recording sermons. Thus, he apparently was building a name for himself as a singing-preacher, which may have been one reason Vocalion chose him to record on their label.

Between 1927-1931 while in Chicago, Reverend Nix recorded fifty-four sermons for the Vocalion Label. Recordings would allow for opportunities of mass exposure to the public via the medium of the new phonograph recordings and their accompanying advertisements, and the potential for increased additional income. Despite the increased income Nix may have accrued through his recordings, Genester remembers her father mentioning his losses in the investments that he had secured. The Great Depression swept away most acquired income for thousands of people during this time, so it is likely that Nix could have lost the earnings that he had secured because of the stock market collapse. The recording industry was also seriously affected by the Great Depression, which could have been an impetus for the Nix family to leave Chicago. Therefore, it is unremarkable that Nix had stopped recording his sermons in 1931. The Depression forced many record labels out of business and recordings were no longer as profitable as they once had been. Nix, presumably aware of the Depression’s wide-spread devastation, probably would have gone where work and income was secure.

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134 Tabernacle Baptist Church, “A Brief History of the Life of Our Pastor, Rev. A. W. Nix.”

135 Chicago Defender (May 24, 1924): 14.


137 The negative economic effects of the Great Depression are obvious when one considers the reduction in price of Vocalion records from the initial price of seventy-five cents in 1925 to thirty-five cents by 1934. This lower price was maintained until the end of the 1930s. See Steven Lasker, “What Price Records? The U.S. Record Industry and the Retail Price of Popular Records, 1925-1950, accessed June 2, 2017, http://www.vjm.biz/new_page_11.htm; In 1934, Brunswick Radio Corporation sold its three offices and factories in New York and Chicago to the Decca label, “as is,” for $60,000. See Laird, Brunswick Records, vol. 1, 13; The sale of Vocalion to Warner Brothers and then
Nix’s Post-1931 Life

Although this study focuses primarily on Nix’s life in Chicago in the 1920s when he recorded his sermons, his two surviving adult children, Genester and Elwood, were not born until the late 1920s and have only faint memory of their father’s early life. They discussed with me their lives in the 1930s and 1940s, and I felt it necessary to add their memories of their father shared in the interview process. This section continues A. W. Nix’s life for the historical record.

In 1931, the Nix family moved to Cleveland, Ohio, where Rev. Nix pastored the New Light Baptist Church. Their fifth child, daughter Verolga (1933-2014), was born in Cleveland. At New Light, the church membership increased from forty members to one-hundred fifty.\textsuperscript{138} The family returned to Pittsburgh when Nix was recalled to the ministry at Tabernacle Baptist Church, serving from 1935-1936 to “finish his work there.”\textsuperscript{139} While under the leadership of Nix, Tabernacle’s membership doubled and the church building was remodeled. By 1938, the church building could accommodate more than 3,000 people; however, the new building caught fire and burned to the ground, leaving the congregants without a church home. Because of the devastation of this event, Nix, overcome with emotion, moved his family to New Jersey to live with his wife’s father and stepmother for a brief respite. He took a break from pastoring and instead worked in a factory. However, in the fall of 1939, Reverend Nix’s preaching and singing caught the attention of the congregation of Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Philadelphia on Erdrick Street, leading to his acceptance of the pastorate there in March 1940.


\footnotetext[139]{Anniversary Book, Tabernacle Baptist Church.}
Philadelphia is where the Nix children grew up. They were all very close, and were raised in a strict, conservative environment. As preacher’s kids, “PK” as they were called, they were forbidden from going to movies, playing cards, dancing, or going to parties.\textsuperscript{140} Of course, alcohol was strictly forbidden and neither Andrew nor Ida partook of it. These activities were “of the world,” that is, “part of the world—what the sinners were doing out there in the world.”\textsuperscript{141} Blues and jazz music were considered “of the world” because these were considered music of the devil, and this music led to dancing, which led to being close to boys, and then ultimately, to sexual relations. Thus, blues and jazz were strictly forbidden and only religious music was allowed to be played on the family phonograph or radio. They listened to jubilee groups, quartet gospel groups, Mahalia Jackson, and the Ward Singers, for example.

The Nix family children were all required (by their mother) to play a musical instrument in school and the three youngest children also sang in church together. Nix’s daughter, Verolga, who was a talented pianist, started The Intermezzo Choir in 1967 that is still in existence today (under new direction after her passing).\textsuperscript{142} Verolga was also an editor for the \textit{Songs of Zion} hymnbook, published in 1981, a significant hymnal on par with Richard Allen’s 1801 hymnal and the \textit{Gospel Pearls} of 1921.\textsuperscript{143}

Although their upbringing was strict, on Saturdays Reverend Nix and the children would play dominos or checkers together. Nix hummed while he played, and was a fierce competitor in board games. Sundays were “church day,” with a total of five services throughout the day:

\begin{footnotes}
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9:00 Sunday school, 11:00 Sunday service, 3:00 afternoon church, 6:00 p.m. Baptist Young People’s Union (BYPU), which was an opportunity for teenagers from twelve to eighteen to socialize, and then night church. The Sunday service could last from two to two and a half hours if “things got spiritual.” The 3:00 service was an opportunity for the intra-church organizations to celebrate anniversaries, such as the pastor’s anniversary, the choirs’ anniversaries, ushers’ anniversaries, and so forth. If Nix’s church did not have an afternoon service, the family would accompany him to other churches where he would preach as a guest minister.

The church provided a safe-haven from the temptations and the sinners that were “out in the world.” It was the source of most of the activities of social life for the African-American community, including the Nix family. The church was the center of the community and often educated its congregants about social issues, including racism, which, as Genester explains, was “because they wanted us to understand what the whites were doing to us. And we learned black history in the church because the schools didn’t teach it.”

In the African-American communities of Philadelphia in the 1940s, education about black leaders, such as Frederick Douglass, came from the church. The young people were particularly interested in black leaders, who were the focus of much discussion.

The Mt. Zion church in situated in an area of Philadelphia called Holmesburg, which at the time, was “out in the country.” Genester remembers that the sidewalks were not paved and that people had to walk in the street, “like you were down-South. It was weird growing up. . . . they acted country-like. They worked in factories and they did not think about furthering their education. High school was their limit.” Class relations in the environment of Holmesburg were not strictly economically oriented. Although much of the congregation at Mt. Zion was not

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poor, “their mindset was not geared toward progress” and they were used to accepting the limitations that came along with racism and second-class citizenship. Genester claims, “there wasn’t much of anything to be, other than factory workers, because out there where we lived, there was nothing to do, nothing to strive for. There wasn’t anything that showed them that they could strive for higher things.”  

She remembers her neighborhood as strictly middle class with no elite or “high falutin’” people living in close proximity.  

Reverend Nix wanted to help the people, and because his travels had exposed him to much of the nation, he knew “what could be, what was out there.” His goal was to “educate and to build them up so that instead of working menial jobs, they would strive for better, to be something better than just factory workers.” As a result of Nix’s desire to bring out his congregants’ potential, A. W. and Ida became active in the church, forming a junior church in which the young people would act as deacons, trustees, and members of the junior choir. He also brought in seminary students from the near-by theological schools, providing them the opportunity to preach before a live congregation. He entrusted the young people with responsibility and involved them “in working in the church and what the church was like and [what] Christianity was like and that it wasn’t just a building where you come hear the grownups take charge and you go back home.”  

Nix’s vision of education included not only the encouragement of higher education for his congregants, but also setting a good example by being college-educated himself and by sending each of his children to college. Although Nix was college-educated, he never distanced  

himself from his working-class congregants but rather welcomed people of all classes to his church, treating all people with importance.

He would call all the men ‘professor.’ He would sit on his porch at times and anyone coming down Erdrick Street he would have a hearty hello for them. He even made the drunks feel like somebody, so much so that whenever they would see him, they would apologize for their condition and he would talk to them about it. This happened to the extent that many of them became saved.\textsuperscript{150}

Many ministers were “down-home,” or “jack-leg” ministers who were self-taught, often learning their preaching skills as visiting ministers in the pulpit itself. Reverend Nix believed in formal education and promoted the values of education to his children and his congregation alike. As discussed, education was a major tenet of racial uplift.

Nix also believed that home ownership was a necessity and encouraged his congregants to purchase their homes. In an interview, Genester boasted, “when we came to Philadelphia and he became pastor of Mt. Zion, everybody rented. Nobody owned a home. My daddy was way ahead of his time. He got the folks together; called the meeting of the members and everything. And he would discuss ownership, home ownership.”\textsuperscript{151} She adds that the Nix family was one of the first Philadelphia black families to own a home and go to college: “He was for education and he was for being a part of the community—leadership, voting.”\textsuperscript{152}

Rev. Nix provided for his family in a way that satisfied their needs and provided a quality of wealth in their lives. When they first moved to Philadelphia, they rented a home until Nix found a house to purchase.\textsuperscript{153} According to the 1940 Philadelphia census, the Nix family rented a

\textsuperscript{150} Genester Nix, personal biography.

\textsuperscript{151} Genester Nix, interview by author, Philadelphia, May 23, 2017.

\textsuperscript{152} Genester Nix, interview by author, Philadelphia, May 23, 2017.

\textsuperscript{153} Genester Nix, email message to author, October 25, 2017.
house at 233 Coulter Street, which was divided into apartments rented by four other families, including several boarders.

Renting rooms or entire floors to boarders was a common occurrence for African Americans in the early twentieth century. For example, after the influx of thousands of migrants from the South to fill job vacancies in the industrial centers of Chicago in the pre-WWI era, housing shortages became a way of life, with the boundaries of the black populated areas becoming denser within the black enclaves of Chicago. Blacks were often forced to stay within the confines of the neighborhoods of the “black belt” as racial tensions flared among whites, who frequently turned to violence in objection to the influx of black migrants in white-designated territories. Renting available space to boarders allowed the principal renter, such as Nix, to earn additional income and was sometimes the only option for new migrants to find available living quarters.155

The 1940 census lists Nix as only having worked for half of the preceding year, earning a meager $300 for twenty-six weeks of work.156 However, the Nix portion of the rent was $32 per month, equaling $384 per year. He probably earned substantial (unreported) income from travelling to other churches around the country to conduct revival meetings or rented rooms to boarders for additional income. The incomes of the other residents on Coulter Street and the adjacent W. Earlham Terrace earned between $240 per year (houseman) to $2900 (executive director), with the average yearly salary totaling $910.157 Most of those on the census were

154 Spear, Black Chicago, 140.
155 Spear, Black Chicago, 142-150.
156 Genester stated that her father earned $40 per week ($2080 per year) when she was in college in the 1940s.
157 Sutherland reports that the average two-income family earned approximately $150 per month ($1800 per year). See Sutherland, “An Analysis of Negro Churches in Chicago,” 104.
working-class African Americans, and are listed as having employment as waiters, housemen or servants in private homes, porters, chauffeurs, domestics, truck drivers, or school teachers.\textsuperscript{158} However, Genester remembers that they “were middle class” and “didn’t know anything about being poor.” So regardless of the family income and their class status, Reverend Nix had the mentality of success and accomplishment, which he imparted to his family and congregation. All the Nix children attended college on his pastor’s salary; several earned graduate degrees, and many went on to accomplish major feats in their fields, including owning their own businesses, becoming lawyers, or working in higher education.

Nix’s philosophy of self-help also aided in the reduction of the mortgage of Mt. Zion to $6,000 through his keen negotiations with the Fidelity Mortgage Company. Genester remembers that Rev. Nix learned Hebrew while in college and negotiated in Hebrew with the Jewish broker, influencing the reduction of the mortgage. The remaining $6,000 debt was raised by church members through a combination of fund-raisers, such as plays, dinners, and other programs. In addition, Rev. Nix persuaded the local tavern owner to contribute hundreds of dollars that congregant members had spent on alcohol at the establishment to the church fund.\textsuperscript{159} While at Mt. Zion, Nix’s leadership led to improvements of the church, including a remodel of the interior and the installation of a two-manual organ as well as the liquidation of the $19,000 debt.\textsuperscript{160} Furthermore, Nix created opportunities for ministerial students from Lincoln University to preach before the congregation at Mt. Zion.\textsuperscript{161}

\textsuperscript{158} Most new migrants to Chicago accepted employment in the manufacturing sector as laborers, earning on average $25 per week, or $1,300 per year. See Spear, \textit{Black Chicago}, 157.

\textsuperscript{159} Genester Nix, personal biography.

\textsuperscript{160} \textit{The Christian Review} 35, no. 23 (January 13, 1949): 1.

\textsuperscript{161} Genester Nix claims that Lincoln University intended to grant Rev. Nix an honorary doctorate; however, he died before this took place.
Music was an essential part of Mt. Zion, with multiple choirs participating in the music offerings. Hymns were the standard repertoire for the congregation, usually those from *Gospel Pearls* and the *Baptist Hymnal*. Sheet music of gospel songs, including those by Thomas A. Dorsey, was occasionally purchased from the local Theodore Presser music store for use in the church. The congregation of Mt. Zion participated in the traditional aspects of black church music, such as shouting, verbal interjections, hand-clapping, singing, and swaying back-and-forth. The only musical accompaniment was provided by piano or organ and sometimes tambourine. Genester described the church as being an “emotional” church in which none of the music was “straight,” but was “jazzed up.” Reverend Nix was the inspiration for the congregants through the emotional delivery of his sermons. He “got you all riled up and you had to stand and clap and ‘hallelujah’ and all that.”

Nix’s Death. Genester describes her father as a heavy-set man who “loved to eat,” often in the company of church members whose dinners he frequented. He died on January 10, 1949 from an internal hemorrhage of the small intestine and is buried in Fairview Cemetery in Philadelphia (Figure 2-13). His death came as a shock to the church community.

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163 Photo taken by Terri Brinegar.


The confusion between brothers Andrew (A. W.) Nix and William (W. M.) Nix has been ubiquitous in the scholarship, with practically every mention of each brother clouded in erroneous information. Scholars have often misidentified which brother sang at the 1921 National Baptist Convention, an event ultimately leading to Thomas Dorsey’s initial conversion and his first gospel compositions. Some have even confused William and Andrew as being the same person. Even Thomas Dorsey confused the two brothers and who sang at the convention,

remarking that it was either “A. W. Nix, or if it wasn’t him it was his brother. There was two Nix. One was a great singer and then one was a preacher.”

One key source of the confusion between the two Nix brothers and which of them actually influenced Dorsey at the 1921 convention lies in Michael W. Harris’ book, *The Rise of Gospel Blues: The Music of Thomas Andrew Dorsey in the Urban Church*. Harris correctly credits William Nix as being the singer that inspired Thomas A. Dorsey to write gospel music; however, Harris states that it was “the sudden notoriety of the sermon records of the Reverend W. M. Nix (listed as “A. W. Nix” on recordings), the singing evangelist who inspired Dorsey at the 1921 National Baptist Convention,” which led Dorsey to seek like-voiced singers to represent his songs after his second conversion experience. Harris proceeds with an in-depth analysis of Andrew Nix’s recorded sermons, confusing the two brothers as being the same person, believing that the sermons are actually by William Nix, rather than Andrew Nix. Another key source that has led to years of misrepresentation of Andrew Nix is in Paul Oliver’s *Songsters and Saints: Vocal Traditions on Race Records*. Oliver claims that A. W. was from Birmingham, Alabama, was a miner and piano player, who sang “I Do, Don’t You?” at the 1921 convention, recorded in New York, and was a man “with considerable wisdom, if little formal education,” when in fact, Andrew was from minister from Texas who did not play piano, recorded in Chicago, and had a college education with two degrees. These two main sources have led to numerous other sources providing incorrect information. One of the purposes of this section of the present chapter is to rectify these misconceptions.

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167 Harris, *Gospel Blues*, 156.

168 Oliver, *Songsters and Saints*, 150-151.
It matters who influenced Dorsey at the convention for the simple reason of setting the record straight for future researchers by distinguishing between the two brothers and giving proper credit to where it is due. Combining archival research with an analysis of the two brothers’ vocal styles helps in correcting these misconceptions. While William’s voice did contribute to Dorsey’s first conversion and initial gospel-music compositions, Andrew’s voice likely stood as the exemplar of African-American vocal traditions after Dorsey’s second conversion and subsequent success as the progenitor of the new gospel-blues composition style. The traditional, “down-home” qualities of the voice of A. W. Nix, as heard on his recorded sermons, demonstrate the sonic qualities of the southern black minister-singer, which Dorsey sought to represent his songs.

**Thomas A. Dorsey**

Thomas A. Dorsey originally was a blues pianist who went by the name of “Georgia Tom” and “Barrelhouse Tom,” and recorded songs with a guitarist named Tampa Red. The duo of Georgia Tom and Tampa Red had several big hits in the 1920s with their style of “hokum” blues, which were blues songs with sexually suggestive themes. One song, “It’s Tight Like That,” was such a huge hit that several versions of the song were recorded. The iconography in the advertisement suggests the connection between “loose” women and the blues (Figure 2-14).

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The song catapulted Dorsey to fame and fortune, bringing his name into the national spotlight. Dorsey, as Georgia Tom, made a living playing in Chicago, eventually performing and recording with some of the greats in the blues, such as Gertrude “Ma” Rainey. Blues recordings were very popular in the 1920s and were released on what was termed “race records,” which were records by African-American performers marketed to African-American consumers and included blues, jazz, sermons, comedy, and spoken word, for example. Although the term “race” records might be considered derogatory today, in the 1920s race records were a source of pride for African-Americans, because the records allowed for music and spoken word to be recorded and distributed specifically to black consumers. Dorsey’s blues background played a pivotal role in his development of his gospel-blues style and compositions, which was initially inspired by William Nix’s singing at the 1921 National Baptist Convention.
William (W. M.) Nix and Andrew (A. W.) Nix

William Nix was born only one and a half years earlier than Andrew and was also a preacher and singer; hence, the confusion between the two brothers is understandable. Even Andrew’s daughter, Genester, claims that it was her father who inspired Dorsey due to Andrew’s constant singing around the house. In a personal interview, Genester emphasized to me the distinction between the two brothers by describing her father, Andrew, as a preacher who sang, and her uncle, William, as a singer who preached.171 William had already established a reputation as a singer by 1920, as is evident in an article from the Chicago Defender advertising an upcoming concert, in which he is described as “one of the most powerful gospel singers in the country today. . . this man is rated among the best evangelistic singers, and there is no doubt but that he will come up to all press reports, and will give the full house the thing they will be expecting.”172

Despite the confusion, the minutes of the 1921 National Baptist Convention clearly distinguish between Andrew and William, their titles, and the roles they served at the convention. William was addressed as “Professor Nix,” or as a “national evangelistic singer,” while Andrew Nix was titled as “Rev. A. W. Nix, D.D.” The 1921 National Baptist Convention minutes list both brothers as pastors: William in Chicago (without a specific church, probably because he sang more than he preached), and Andrew in New York at Mt. Moriah Baptist Church. While Andrew served on several boards of the convention, William conducted devotionals and sang. William and Andrew are clearly distinguished in the minutes as holding separate duties and responsibilities at the convention.

171 Interview Genester Nix, April 30, 2017. Genester claims that it was the song, “I Know a Great Savior,” sung by her father at the National Baptist Convention, that inspired Dorsey to write gospel music.

The 1921 convention is significant because it is the year the music committee of the Sunday School Publishing Board of the National Baptist Convention, of which William was a board member, published its first songbook, *Gospel Pearls* (Figure 2-15).  

![Gospel Pearls image](image)

Figure 2-15. *Gospel Pearls.*

This hymnal is considered of great historical importance and of the same level of excellence as Richard Allen’s 1801 hymnal, *A Collection of Spiritual Songs and Hymns Selected from Various

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Authors. The “Spirituals” section of *Gospel Pearls* contains multiple songs arranged by brothers John Wesley and Frederick J. Work, who were notable contributors to the field of black music: John Work led the Fisk Jubilee Singers, and in 1915 published a collection of Negro folksongs, *Folk Songs of the American Negro*, and the Work brothers together published *New Jubilee Songs as Sung by the Fisk Jubilee Singers*. They both served, alongside William Nix, on the music committee of the Sunday School Publishing Board, which published *Gospel Pearls*. William’s name, listed as Prof. W. M. Nix, is clearly written after the two names of the Work brothers on the title page (Figure 2-16).

![PROF. J. W. WORK  PROF. F. J. WORK  PROF. W. M. NIX](http://example.com)

Figure 2-16. Excerpt from title page of *Gospel Pearls*.

Every song that William sang at the convention was from *Gospel Pearls*; hence, he was obviously promoting the new hymnal and performed the songs as a marketing device to bring attention to the musical material. The convention minutes list “Prof. Wm. Nix, the popular evangelist,” as singing “I Am Going Through, [Jesus],” “I Do, Don’t You?” “Throw Out the Life Line,” and “Take Your Burden to the Lord and Leave it There.” According to the minutes, William’s singing of “I Am Going Through” “thrilled the convention.” The preface to *Gospel Pearls* uses William’s name to market the songbook as “a boon to Gospel singers, for it contains the songs that have been sung most effectively by . . . Prof. Nix . . . and other prominent

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177 National Baptist Convention, 136, 211, 217, 332.

178 National Baptist Convention, 136.
singers.” Gospel Pearls thus establishes William Nix as a “prominent singer,” making it apparent that he was already well known in 1921 for his singing abilities, not his preaching skills.

Thomas A. Dorsey also attended the National Baptist Convention in Chicago in 1921. It was here that Dorsey heard William Nix’s performance of “I Do, Don’t You?” exclaiming:

My inner-being was thrilled. My soul was a deluge of divine rapture; my emotions were aroused; my heart was inspired to become a great singer and worker in the Kingdom of the Lord – and impress people just as this great singer did that Sunday morning.180

Dorsey was so impressed with William’s performance that it “led virtually to his conversion,”181 inspiring Dorsey to write religious music. Dorsey claims, “The thing that sold the song [“I Do, Don’t You?”] was the personal pronoun, I; Nix made it [the song] popular at the Convention.”182 However, I contend that it was more than the use of the pronoun, I that inspired Dorsey. It was the way William Nix inflected the notes with “turns and trills”—improvisatory embellishments not written into the music. Dorsey claims William’s voice was unique because of his use of

turns and trills, [that] he [Nix] and a few others brought . . . into church music. Hymn singers, they couldn’t put this stuff in it. What he did, I wouldn’t call blues, but it had a touch of the blue note there. Now that’s the turn and the feeling that really made the gospel singers.183

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180 Harris, The Rise of Gospel Blues, 68.


183 Dorsey, quoted in Harris, The Rise of Gospel Blues, 70.
William Nix’s use of embellishments, according to Harris, may have been more than the standard use of improvisation in religious music and was what “thrilled” both Dorsey and the Convention attendees.\(^\text{184}\)

**William Nix’s Voice**

Although William Nix has been credited for influencing Dorsey’s decision to begin composing gospel music after his first conversion, Harris claims that William also influenced Dorsey’s choice for the “perfect” voice to market his new compositions. However, Dorsey was seeking a voice rooted in tradition, not a “modern” voice such as William’s. Dorsey’s commentary on William’s voice not being a blues voice implies that William was using vocalizations, such as melismas and embellishments, not characteristically considered a part of the blues idiom. Dorsey mentions, “All the blues pretty near sound alike unless you got a rare voice and put turns and trills in it.”\(^\text{185}\) William apparently was one of those rare voices. He changes the basic melody of “I Do, Don’t You?” into an improvised version.

No recordings of William’s voice exist, so the only evidence we have of what William’s voice sounded like is through Dorsey’s remembrance of it. The song, “I Do, Don’t You?” that William sang at the convention was clearly embellished and contrasted with the original version of the song. The original version of “I Do, Don’t You,” (Example 2-1), by E. O. Excell, is a simple melody in 6/8 time with a range of an octave, and would be relatively easy for the average church congregation member to follow.

\(^\text{184}\) Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues*, 70. Ironically, Dorsey’s song, “If I Don’t Get There,” was published in *Gospel Pearls* in 1922, to which “Professor” W. M. Nix contributed as a music committee member.  
\(^\text{185}\) O’Neal and O’Neal, “Georgia Tom Dorsey,” 23.

Dorsey’s instrumental version of William’s interpretation of the song, transcribed by Michael Harris, alters the simple, written version of “I Do, Don’t You?” into an improvised version that adds sixteenth-note runs between notes, flatted thirds (“blue” notes), appoggiaturas, and alters the rhythmic values throughout (Example 2-2).
The changes made of “I Do, Don’t You?” by William Nix give evidence of his technical abilities and to his possible voice type. He apparently sang melismas with ease (see measures six and eight in Example 2-2), and most likely was not a “shouter,” as Andrew was. William Nix also added blue notes (measures one and seven), appoggiaturas (measures one, two, and eight), and consistently altered the melody line from the original. William Nix’s use of these vocal techniques identifies him as a “modern” singer, different from the hymn singer of the era.

Andrew’s Voice

Dorsey’s comments about William’s voice and his remembrance of William’s embellished singing style, notated by Harris, contrast with Andrew’s voice as heard on his recorded sermons. Thus, we can discern that the brothers’ voices were indeed very different, again confirming William as the convention singer.

Dorsey mentions that William Nix’s voice was unique for his use of “turns and trills,” laymen’s terms for melismas and other vocal ornaments. Vocal agility is necessary to achieve fast-moving improvisatory additions and usually requires a certain lightness of voice. Vocal pedagogue, Dr. Sandra Cotton, explains that light voices, such as operatic coloraturas, are
considered to possess more agility than other voice types. However, dramatic coloraturas can also sing agile passages but with greater expression and power. That vocal clarity in timbre is necessary for agility, regardless of vocal weight, is a precept supported by numerous vocal pedagogues, regardless of their area of discipline. Peter T. Harrison, an operatic pedagoge and researcher argues, “A voice with its natural agility will not sound fat or cumbersome. On the contrary, agility being an essential constituent of what concentrates the tones at that tiny core, it is responsible for the voice’s clarity and directness.” In other words, according to Harrison, an agile voice has both lightness and vocal clarity. Gospel singing pedagogue Trineice Robinson-Martin explains that while modern gospel singers with heavy voices can sing melismatic passages, “lighter voices tend to have a greater agility than singers with heavier voices. . . . Those with heavier voices . . . often execute their melismas by resorting to a lighter mechanism” through “reducing the amount of breath pressure used and integrating more head voice.” Robinson-Martin claims that agility is often considered a necessity for modern-day gospel singers, who can also employ gravelly timbres for affective devices. However, while vocal heaviness may be a factor in the ability or inability to sing fast-moving runs, timbre is more prevalent in determining if a voice can sing melismatic passages. Therefore, it becomes necessary for singers with heavy voices to lighten the vocal “weight” by utilizing less breath pressure and moving into higher registers of the voice in order to sing with agility. For example,

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189 Robinson-Martin, So You Want to Sing Gospel, 173-174.

a voice that is both heavy and has a vocal timbre considered raspy, throaty, gravelly, or rough, would have more difficulty singing melismas.

William’s voice, according to Dorsey’s description as not what he would “call blues,” was either somewhat light with a clear vocal timbre, or implemented a “lighter mechanism” to manipulate the notes, add embellishments, and sing in a style that we could possibly describe as R&B or contemporary gospel with its fast-moving embellishments and runs. In contrast, Andrew’s voice was heavy, and in all of the recordings in which he sings, he never adds vocal embellishments in this manner, and it is doubtful that he would have been capable of “turns and trills” by the sheer weight and volume that his voice exuded and his consistent use of a gravelly timbre.

An analysis of Andrew’s voice provides evidence of his vocal timbre and vocal characteristics, creating a clear distinction between his voice and William’s voice. Andrew’s voice, as heard in “Hush, Somebody’s Callin’ My Name,” within his recorded sermon, “It is a Strange Thing to Me,” is heavy and without embellishments, “turns,” or “trills,” and has a gravelly timbre (Example 2-3).

Example 2-3. “Hush, Somebody’s Callin’ My Name” in “It is a Strange Thing to Me,” (2:54-3:02), recorded June 29, 1927, on Vocalion, VO-1125, reissued on Document Records, DOCD-5328.

Object 2-1. “Hush, Somebody’s Callin’ My Name” (.mp3 file 112 KB)

In the recording, Andrew does not add melismas, blue notes, or embellishments, and the notation of his singing looks quite different from William’s embellished singing. Additionally, Andrew’s
voice has a consistently gravelly timbre, as we can see from the “snowstorm” effect, or the “muddiness” of the overtones on the spectrogram of the same measures (Figure 2-17).  

Figure 2-17. Spectrogram for excerpt for “I Got My Religion in Time.”

Thus, the differences between William’s and Andrew’s voices are sufficient in themselves to know that it was William, not Andrew, who inspired Dorsey’s first conversion and his initial gospel compositions.

**Second Conversion**

After his first conversion in 1921, Dorsey started writing sacred music, but was enticed by opportunities in the blues world and went back on the road to earn “real” money. However, he experienced a monumental tragedy in his life when both his wife and child died in childbirth. This tragedy impacted him so severely that he experienced his second conversion in which he decided to devote his life entirely to God and gospel-music composing, abandoning his previous

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194 More will be discussed on the analysis of vocal timbres by the spectrogram in Chapter 6.

After writing several sacred songs, he realized that he needed a voice to sing and market his songs to the public. Dorsey realized, through trial and error, that the “right” singer needed to possess a voice that was not “sweet,” or “high-class,” such as the voices he had worked with previously. Dorsey states, “I embellished [gospel], made it beautiful, more noticeable, more susceptible with runs and trills and moans in it.” In other words, Dorsey sought a voice that could produce not only melismas and embellishments similar to William Nix, but “a voice similar to the ones known for singing gospel songs—the itinerant evangelistic singer or the blues artist.” Dorsey chose a Baptist minister, Reverend E. H. Hall, who had the “same quality and impact as Nix’s.”

Northern Church Practices

The voice of the black minister embodied the sounds of the folk church from the rural community of the South. Singing evangelists carried forth the folk traditions that were demonized in northern middle-class black churches, such as those in Chicago, for their association to emotional demonstrativeness and southern black religion. Such northern black churches attempted to separate themselves from the “primitiveness” associated with the slave past in an effort to demonstrate sophistication and “progress.” The music of the past, including the folk spiritual, were sources of embarrassment and shame due to their association to slavery.


197 Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues*, 152-153. Note: it is unclear if this was Dorsey’s model for a singer, or Harris’ interpretation.


The north/south division of the musical and vocal expressions in black churches during the era of the 1920s is one of many divisions in the philosophies of what was believed would elevate the positions of former slaves. However, the 1920s specifically was a time when African Americans still endured massive setbacks to the advancements they received during Reconstruction, including the loss of voting rights, the loss of the ability to serve in political offices, Jim Crow “separate-but-equal” segregation as a result of Supreme Court legislation in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), widespread lynchings, and economic disenfranchisement.\(^{202}\) Reportedly, four blacks were lynched every day between 1889-1929.\(^{203}\) In response to these injustices, black leaders sought racial uplift and self-help, with some suggesting that by promoting blacks’ contributions to society, including their musical skills and talents as an effort to prove their worth in white society, that their noted value would evolve into equality.

Musically, many northern black churches disassociated with the slave past by refusing to perform the folk spiritual, opting instead for the arranged “anthem” spiritual,\(^{204}\) such as those by Nathaniel Dett and Harry T. Burleigh, the performance of classical works, and the adoption of styles associated with white hymn-singing. The reformed music of the old-line, middle-class black churches granted prestige to those churches, thus a conscious effort was made by these churches and their choirs to change the musical performances from African-American vocal traditions to those inspired by the music of white churches. This eliminated traditional cultural expressions such as congregational singing, in an effort to remove the demonstrative expressions


\(^{204}\) According to Sandra Jean Graham, anthems are “more musically complex compositions to be sung in parts by trained voices instead of the congregation.” See Sandra Jean Graham, *Spirituals and the Birth of a Black Entertainment Industry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 25.
of traditional worship. Even the introduction of the spiritual to church choirs, as an effort to preserve some semblance of traditional black music, neglected the traditional folk spiritual in favor of the more “sophisticated” arranged spiritual.205

**Dorsey and Nix**

The traditional workings of the churches of southern black ministers, which had included shouting and congregational responses, were replaced by subdued, non-demonstrative worship styles during services. Despite the pressure to assimilate to white-inspired musical expressions in northern churches, Andrew Nix continued the musical and vocal traditions of southern black churches after moving north. As commented on by many writers,206 these vocal traditions were carried forth from the era of slavery and included shouts, moans, the singing of folk spirituals, the use of dialect, improvisation, call-and-response, use of the pentatonic scale, slides, melismas, use of repetition, bent notes, “blue” notes, loud vocal volume, vocal percussiveness, heterophonic textures, use of the entire gamut of the voice, gravelly, “dirty,” or “throaty” vocal timbre, “shrill, hard, full-throated, strained, raspy, and/or nasal tones, with frequent exploitation of falsetto, growling, and moaning,” and speech-song, also known as chanting or intoning.207

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Michael Harris claims that Dorsey was searching for a voice similar to the “itinerant evangelistic singer or the blues artist.” Dorsey himself claimed that he wanted to “get into the gospel songs, the feeling and the pathos and the moans and the blues.” The implication is that Dorsey sought a voice that could wail, moan, and cry—vocal characteristics associated with not only the blues of the 1920s, but also with the folk spiritual and chanted sermon of the antebellum era. Dorsey may have incorporated blues-type harmonies into his compositions of gospel-blues, but he sought a voice to sing them that carried the traditions associated with the spiritual.

Andrew Nix can be described as a traditionalist who may have “provided Dorsey,” writes Michael Harris, “floundering with his spiritual blues – a salient link between his downhome and gospel blues,” serving as the example of the traditional vocal elements Dorsey needed to find success with his gospel blues. Although Andrew Nix was Baptist, and many of the old-line established Baptist churches in Chicago in the 1920s were affiliated with non-demonstrative or a mixed style of worship that incorporated white hymns, Andrew kept alive the traditions that were usually associated with the Holiness and Sanctified store-front churches of the working class, which included hand-clapping, shouting, and body movement. Even Nix’s son, Elwood, compared his father’s vocal and preaching style to the Pentecostal tradition, exclaiming, “Instead of being Baptist now, I think he would be Pentecostal,” adding, “They [traditional preachers] really hollered and screamed and shouted.”

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208 Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues*, 152-153. Note: it is unclear if this was Dorsey’s model for a singer, or Harris’ interpretation.


Although I have not been able to confirm that Dorsey actually heard Andrew’s voice on recordings of sermons or in church services, it is likely that their paths did cross. Elwood Nix claims that “whenever Thomas Dorsey could go to hear him [Nix] preach, he would.” Elwood also remembers, “Tommy Dorsey said to him [Nix] one time, ‘You almost as famous as I am.’ My father responded to Dorsey with, ‘I’m striving to get there.’” Genester Nix also remembers that “his name [Dorsey’s] had been spoken so much in the house” and that Nix and Dorsey were friends. Other reasons also point to the possibility that Nix and Dorsey knew one another: both Dorsey and Andrew lived in Chicago at the same time, Andrew from 1923-1931, Dorsey from 1916 until his death there in 1993, (Nix lived only three-and-a-half miles from State Street where Dorsey often performed); Dorsey travelled from church to church attempting to market his songs, and possibly ventured into Andrew’s church and heard him preach; Andrew was the only black Baptist minister in Chicago whose recordings were successful, thus again suggesting that Dorsey may have heard A. W.’s recordings, and most importantly, both Dorsey and Nix recorded on the Vocalion/Brunswick label in the Chicago Brunswick studios on November 1, 1930. Because their sessions were back-to-back, they probably encountered each other in the studios. In addition, Andrew recorded three sermons that were titled identically to

214 O’Neal and O’Neal, “Georgia Tom Dorsey,” 19.
216 Rev. D. C. Rice also recorded during this time period; however, Rice was a Sanctified preacher and minister of the Church of the Living God, Pentecostal on the East Side. See Oliver, Songsters and Saints, pg. 180.
217 Georgia Tom (with Kansas City Kitty) and Rev. A. W. Nix both recorded in Chicago in November 1930. The masters are sequential, implying that they could have been recorded on the same date: Rev. A. W. Nix (C6468-6471), Kansas City Kitty & Georgia Tom (C6472-6473). The recordings prior to their recordings are from Oct. 30, 1930; the recordings after are dated Nov. 2, 1930 – thus, the Georgia Tom and Nix recordings probably took place on either October 31, 1930 or November 1, 1930. However, the date is listed as “November, 1930” thus most likely specifying November 1, 1930. See Ross Laird, Brunswick Records: A Discography of Recordings, 1916-1931 Vol. 3: Chicago and Regional Sessions, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 1170.
Dorsey’s songs, all released on Vocalion: Nix’s “The Dirty Dozen, Part 2” based on Dorsey’s “The Dirty Dozen No. 2,” both recorded in June, 1930 (exact dates unknown); Nix’s “Jack the Ripper,” (Mar. 28, 1931) based on Tampa Red and Georgia Tom’s “Jack ‘The Ripper’ Blues,” (Jan. 15, 1931); and Nix’s “It Was Tight Like That,” (c. Feb. 18, 1930), based on Dorsey’s very successful “hokum” blues composition, “It’s Tight Like That,” (Oct. 8, 1928). The lyrics to Dorsey’s version, although tame by today’s standards, were voyeuristic for their day (partial lyrics):

You know it's tight like that, beedle um bum
Boy it's tight like that, beedle um bum
Oh you hear me talking to ya,
I mean it's tight like that

There was a little black rooster met a little brown hen
Made a date at the barn about a half past ten

Chorus

I went to see my gal all across the hall
Found another mule kickin' in my stall

Blues music, and especially blues sung by black female performers, was considered a part of “low” culture, associated with the sexuality of the working class. Angela Davis explains,

As it came to displace sacred music in the everyday lives of black people, it both reflected and helped to construct a new black consciousness. This consciousness interpreted God as the opposite of the Devil, religion as the not-secular, and the secular as largely sexual. With the blues came the designations “God’s music” and “the Devil’s music.”

Although Andrew demonized blues and jazz for their connections to “the world,” (i.e. the world of sin), he still recorded his sermon-version of “It’s Tight Like That,” in 1930, with text that

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219 Oliver argues, “For the devout church member it was probably extremely difficult to bring himself to sing blues or blues-songs” (Oliver, *Songsters and Saints*, 206).
reflected on the hardships caused by the Great Depression, (not sexual themes). Could it be that he was inspired to record a sermon by the same title as Dorsey’s blues song because of a possible friendship with Dorsey? Why else would Nix cross his own demarcation zone and associate with a well-known blues song with sexual implications? Last, Thomas Dorsey, as Georgia Tom, accompanied blues singer Victoria Spivey on several of her recordings. Spivey also recorded on Vocalion and had a leading role in the film, *Hallelujah*, that also featured Reverend Nix’s sermon, “Black Diamond Express to Hell.” Therefore, it is possible that Dorsey, Spivey, and Nix were at least familiar with each other.

Whether or not Dorsey and Andrew Nix were friends, acquaintances, or simply knew of each other is a moot point. What is more significant is Dorsey’s search for a voice that offered vocal traditions familiar to African-American church-goers. Possibly Dorsey was aware of Andrew’s voice and was inspired by it. For Thomas Dorsey, a voice with heavy vocal weight was the key to his success. Dorsey claims that a successful voice must possess the quality of being

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\ldots \text{a heavy voice. If you want to make a good blues singer, the texture of the voice, the heavier the voice, woman or man, the better the blues. If you goin’ to be a good gospel singer, the choice of texture of the voice is heavy. The heavier the voice, the better singer you make.}^{220}
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Dorsey claimed that once he realized the importance of a heavy voice, he found the “right” singer to sing, and ultimately, market his songs. Initially Dorsey had hired Louise Keller, but soon realized that she was not the right choice because she “sang in the ‘hymn style; she was one of them high-class singers – had a lovely voice.”^{221} The significance of the association of the hymn style and vocal “sweetness” with high-class standards and aesthetics demonstrates the

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divisions between what was considered vocally appropriate or suitable for the working class associated with rural Southerners, and the middle class associated with Northern urbanites, who chose to assimilate to vocal aesthetics associated with white churches. Thus, a “sweet” voice, usually associated with classically trained voices in the Western European style, was deemed to be detrimental to the marketing of Dorsey’s songs. Instead, he needed a voice similar to Andrew’s that was heavy and employed the traditional or “down-home” characteristics of black vocalities, which included not only blue notes and improvisation, but also moaning, shouting, and chanting.

Dorsey’s ultimate choice for a singer was Reverend E. H. Hall,²²² who was a singing preacher in the Baptist tradition who was able to captivate the audience with a style and quality that could not only stir the congregants’ emotions, but also inspire them to extemporaneously improvise in response to his lead, as Andrew does on his recorded sermons.²²³ The traditional vocal and performative qualities of Hall, apparently similar to those of Andrew Nix, were able to “authenticate” Dorsey’s gospel songs, which had previously been dismissed as “worldly” for their association with blues and jazz.²²⁴ The voice alone served as the carrier of African-American traditions, which opened the door to Dorsey’s success.

Last, we discussed that Dorsey’s mention of W. M. Nix’s singing at the convention was not what he would “call blues.” Dorsey was an expert and experienced blues musician and knew through experience what blues sounded like. Despite Dorsey’s experienced opinion of William’s voice as not being a blues voice, Harris analyzes the blues qualities of A. W.’s recorded sermons, (believing it was W. M. on the recordings), not realizing the differences in the brothers’ voices.

If William’s voice was not blues, but the recorded sermons had blues qualities, then there is an obvious misinterpretation of whose voice is on the recordings. The performative qualities that Harris mentions, such as the use of improvisation, as well as the elemental qualities of blues vocals that Eileen Southern describes, including “falsetto, shouting, whining, moaning, speaking, or growling,” are apparent in both the blues and the chanted sermon.

Dorsey’s lifelong experience in the musical world afforded him numerous opportunities to hear and work with a multitude of professional singers, including the greats, such as Ma Rainey, granting him familiarity with many styles of black singing. What Dorsey was seeking in the “right” singer was not a unique singer such as William, but a traditionalist in the style of Andrew, whose voice had the qualities that Dorsey deemed appropriate for his gospel-blues—a voice type that was familiar to the people and one that imbued tradition.

This chapter detailed Andrew Nix’s upbringing in Texas, his schooling in Kentucky, his exposure to racial uplift theories, his life in Chicago (and beyond), and his possible connection to and influence on Thomas Dorsey. I have established Andrew’s voice as one that exuded tradition. The next chapter will examine the history of black vocal traditions in America, the chanted sermon, and the classist divisions in black churches in Chicago.

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CHAPTER 3

VOCAL TRADITIONS IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN PREACHING AND SINGING

Dis preacher was a good man, but de congregation was so tough he couldn’t make a convert in a whole year. So he sent and invited another preacher to come and conduct a revival meeting for him. De man he ast to come was a powerful hard preacher wid a good strainin’ voice. He was known to get converts.

—Ellis

Mules and Men¹

The chapter describes the traditions of preaching and singing in the southern, rural, African-American church that have been commonly accepted as part of the cultural traditions that emanated during the era of slavery. These traditions continued into the early twentieth century, bringing along their ritualistic aspects, including

the ecstasy [sic], the spirit possession, the shouts, the chanted sermons, the sacred sense of time and space, the immediacy, the feeling of familiarity with God and the ancient heroes, the communal setting in which songs were created and re-created.²

During the Great Migration, traditions that first emerged in the rural South during the era of slavery were carried to both lower-class and middle-class churches in northern metropolises by southern migrants, such as Reverend A. W. Nix. In a study of black life in Chicago during the 1930s and 1940s, Drake and Cayton discuss the tendency of the lower class in Chicago’s Bronzeville area to adhere to traditions that emanated during the slavery era:

The prevailing attitude of Bronzeville’s lower-class church people is expressed in an old spiritual: ‘Gimme that old-time religion, it’s good enough for me.’ Drawn into the Baptist and Methodist evangelical tradition by white missionaries during and immediately after slavery, Negroes have preserved on a large scale the religious behavior which was prevalent on the American frontier between 1800-1890. Since, however, the Negro church has evolved in isolation from the white church, certain distinctive modifications and colorations have grown up which give

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² Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness, 158.
Negro religious services a flavor all their own. The fountainhead of the old-time religion is the rural South – the Bible Belt.\textsuperscript{3} These “modifications” and “colorations” stemmed from the rural South and entered the urban consciousness through church services of the 1920s and through Nix’s recorded sermons.

I will not be discussing musical practices prior to the nineteenth century because, as Ronald Radano suggests, there is “no documentary evidence of North American slave musical practices from the eighteenth century.”\textsuperscript{4} While there surely were musical practices among African Americans of the era, there are no primary-source documents that allow for an in-depth analysis of these styles as a comparison to Nix’s preaching style. I have examined numerous primary and secondary sources that discuss black vocalities during the nineteenth century to determine those that are the most common and frequently mentioned, therefore implying a standard practice. Many of the writers of these historical documents presented their information through the lens of their racist inclinations with the use of derogatory comments, or essentialized their subjects and their vocal features as immutably black, exemplifying their belief in racial difference. Because no recordings of these voices exist, I cannot analyze them directly as primary sources. However, I can provide the evidence as an attempt to understand the different types of singing or usages of the voice through common terms agreed on by members of the community. Through written notation and qualitative analysis of these documents, I have isolated descriptions of many vocal practices from the nineteenth century associated with the African-American church. These practices show that Reverend Nix made a conscious or unconscious decision to circulate on recorded sermons these traditional vocal expressions.

\textsuperscript{3} Drake and Cayton, \textit{Black Metropolis}, 613.
\textsuperscript{4} Radano, \textit{Lying Up a Nation}, 51.
Tradition

The word, “tradition” is frequently intertwined with the idea of the folk of a given country. As Philip V. Bohlman explains, “folk . . . can be understood as the people sharing the common culture of a nation.”\(^5\) Bohlman further clarifies that

the power of the folk to create folk music [was a response] to the conditions of their own lives. . . . Folk song . . . allowed them to take charge of their own narratives and to weave these into the histories of their own nations [or regions] . . . [resulting in] the invention of tradition and the contrast of folk music with art music, at least in the early nineteenth century.\(^6\)

In the United States, the enslaved population (black folk) created their own music and sermons that reflected their values, their conditions, and their own cultural identity. For this study, I am concerned with the African-American vocal practices that emerged during slavery and became conceptualized as black folk traditions.\(^7\)

In performance practices, tradition in itself is an abstract idea that “exists in [the performer’s] mind and in the mind of his audience. His performance . . . is an attempt to re-experience a thing that already exists in some ideal way in tradition.”\(^8\) In other words, no prescribed sets or “historically generated forms slavishly reproduced” can determine the meaning of tradition. Rather, tradition is contingent upon the many experiences that are shared by cultural groups as expressions of their particular perspective. Davis distinguishes that the formation of an “original” is illogical, but the concept or sense of an original is logical. In other words, there is not an “authentic” practice at the root of any tradition. Rather, the ideas of tradition in folk


\(^6\) Bohlman, Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe, 29.

\(^7\) Throughout this dissertation I refer to these vocal practices as “black oral traditions,” “traditional black vocalities,” “vernacular vocalities,” “black vocalities,” and “black folk traditions.”

performance adhere to shared customs, habits, and shared values. Tradition is therefore a cultural construct, in that people choose which practices have value for them based on their ideas of how these practices represent their lives and their ideas about themselves. By repeatedly choosing certain practices, groups create canons that come to represent who they are and claim ownership of these practices: “These are our traditions.” Eventually, these practices are conceptualized as having existed forever, based on the continual and repetitive choices of the group. Naturally, cultural groups choose those practices that represent what they believe are the most significant practices and integral to group identity.

The adherence to tradition allowed African-American migrants in the North, and specifically Chicago, a sense of familiarity and “home” as reminders of their rural, southern past. Because the new migrants were previously only familiar with rural forms of religion, they encountered “new, difficult, depressing problems they are not prepared to solve,” according to Rev. L. K. Williams, minister of Olivet Baptist Church, who pastored one of the largest black congregations in Chicago with a reported membership of nearly 10,000. In a 1929 Chicago Daily Tribune article, Williams concluded that they were not prepared for these problems due to the unfamiliar urban environment and the cultural standards expected of them. The adherence to tradition allowed the migrants a way to acclimate into their new environment without losing their past.

9 Davis, I Got the Word in Me, 27, 30.
11 Sutherland, “An Analysis of Negro Churches in Chicago,” 47.
12 Williams, “The Urbanization of Negroes,” 12.
William H. Pipes distinguishes the period of “old-time” preaching as spanning from 1732 until 1832. In addition to this period, I will be examining folk traditions associated with the early black church, such as the folk spiritual. The folk spiritual (1800-1860) was orally transmitted, while the arranged spiritual (1860-1890) was a concertized version with homophonic textures that was published in written arrangements such as those by the Fisk Jubilee Singers.

The characteristics of the African-American folk spiritual, according to the editors of *Songs of Zion*, include: 1) Rhythm, typically in 2/4 or 4/4 time, with syncopation as a common feature; 2) melodic variety either through the use of call-and-response, short rhythmic patterns in a fast tempo, or slow, sustained melodic lines; 3) the primary use of major, minor, and pentatonic scales (typically), and incorporating “blue” notes, or flatted thirds and sevenths; 4) clearly defined keys, tonal key centers, with the I, IV, and V chords being the most standard chords utilized, with dissonances often avoided; 5) texture either monophonic, polyphonic, or homophonic, (the folk spiritual typically was monophonic); 6) performances that featured the human voice as the primary instrument; the inclusion of non-articulated utterances of hums, moans, shouts, slides, and chanting; and the accompaniment by body movement in dancing, clapping, stomping, or body swaying; 7) the use of improvisation; and 8) texts taken from the Bible with spiritual stories common. Olly Wilson contends that the African-American spiritual

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15 The African-American folk spiritual is also frequently referred to as the Negro Spiritual.

developed as a vernacular folk expression during slavery among the majority of the black population in the United States, functioning as a connection with God.\textsuperscript{17}

In contrast, the arranged spiritual was a creation of elite blacks that mixed European and African-American aesthetic qualities and were thus more “readily understood and accepted by the broader American society.”\textsuperscript{18} Arranged spirituals included homophonic textures, standard English, smooth vocal timbres, presentational performances, and expressive devices such as those found in European concert music.\textsuperscript{19}

Likewise, the African-American folk church, which reflected the cultural values associated with slavery-era plantation praise houses,\textsuperscript{20} is differentiated from black denominational churches by means of “its service, religious practices, and philosophical concepts and the socioeconomic background of its members.”\textsuperscript{21} The music of the folk church, according to ethnomusicologist Portia Maultsby, was

known as ‘church songs,’ [and] has as its basic repertoire the folk spirituals and modified hymns sung by slaves in plantation praise houses. The new songs that became standards in the folk church were created spontaneously during the service by the preacher and congregation members, and they were performed in the style of folk spirituals.\textsuperscript{22}

The nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Baptist, Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal (AME), and Pentecostal churches, according to musicologist Eileen Southern, were considered

\textsuperscript{18} Wilson, “Black Music as an Art Form,” 11.
\textsuperscript{20} Pearl Williams-Jones in Maultsby, “Africanisms in American Music,” 67.
\textsuperscript{22} Maultsby, “Africanisms in American Music,” 67.
folk churches due to their adherence to these vocal traditions. The performance practices and song repertoire of folk churches, as Southern explains, included:

Protestant hymns by such writers as Isaac Watts, John Newton, and Charles Wesley; spirituals and jubilee songs; and the Sunday school or gospel hymns of such writers and Sankey and Gabriel. But the way these songs were performed in folk churches was highly unorthodox. According to the evidence, the musical practices of the slave “invisible church” were passed on to the post-emancipation folk churches with full vigor: the hand clapping, foot stomping, call-and-response performance, rhythmic complexities, persistent beat, melodic improvisation, heterophonic textures, percussive accompaniments, and ring shouts.23

Despite the significant scholarship that discusses African-American vocal traditions, little has been discussed of the importance of the voice and performance style of the African-American minister. The chanted sermon and the voice of the black minister, in preaching and singing, both embody the elements of the black folk church and are crucial links in the transition from the folk spiritual to blues and modern gospel music.

The Voice as Tradition

Vocal traditions, as Thomas Brothers contends, can serve as “deeply rooted marker[s] of cultural identity,”24 and include verbalized as well as non-verbalized sounds such as moans, cries, and shouts. The importance of oral sound as a marker of tradition, rather than visualized texts, as Levine explains,

is because they came from such societies and were not inducted into the literate world of their white masters that slaves invested their songs, tales, and the spoken word in general with such importance. Their world remained a world of sound in which words were actions. To speak or sing of the heroes and exploits of the Old Testament, to relate orally the events that occurred in dreams or visions, was to give them a substance, a reality, to make them literally come alive.25


25 Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 158.
Thus, the sound of the voiced word became identified with African-American vocal traditions rather than the written word of texts. The voice was important for not only communicative purposes, but also for spiritual experiences.

**Slave Conversions**

The importance of the voice in slave culture provides a window into a world that placed high valued on the religious experience. Spiritual conversions demonstrated one’s death and rebirth and were often instigated by the hearing of the voice of God or some other spiritual entity. As spoken by one enslaved American,

> I kept praying till I heard a voice. A voice told me, ‘I’ve chosen you before the dust of the earth. . . . I heard a voice, ‘If I call you through deep water, it won’t cover you; if I call you through fire, come on.’”

Common conversion experiences included seeing light, travelling through the air as if in flight, or visiting heaven or hell, demons or angels, but most usually conclude with a voice affirming protection against all odds and often encouraging the person to pursue preaching and spread the message of God. “You are born of God. My son delivered your soul from hell, and you must go and help carry the world. You have been chosen out of the world, and hell can’t hold you.” The phrase, “God struck me dead,” was used to describe the conversion experience, in which one felt deep inner feelings of joy and acceptance. The voice itself became the means in which to achieve salvation, not just in death, as had been sung in many of the spirituals and preached by slave preachers. For enslaved African Americans, the voice offered the promise of protection and instilled a new awakening and meaning to life. Although the sounds of specific voices are

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unknown, the power the voice held over those converted provided an intuitive, inner, God-given experience that rejected intellectual effort, or works. The voice allowed for spiritual feeling and connectivity, creating an emphasis on experience rather than on intellectualized facts or ideas. Conversion is a process that depends on experience and continues as a phenomenological process through an emotional, heartfelt connection in which feeling is highly emphasized as not merely an intellectual process.\(^{29}\) The hearing of a voice is one sign that conversion has occurred.

Henry H. Mitchell explains that God uses the voice in singing, praying, and preaching to supply one’s experiential encounter, and that “worship, especially the sermon, is under the control of the Holy Spirit, which is how the gift is given and not earned.”\(^{30}\) Mitchell’s theory is conducive of the practice of antinomianism, in which faith alone is necessary for salvation, not moral laws or works. The intuitive nature of the preacher, who is guided in his sermon, draws upon deep emotional feeling, rather than intellectual words, to appeal to his congregation through his voice. Mitchell contends, “The sermon that fails to reach the emotion fails to reach the very heart of faith. . . . The preacher does not ‘use’ emotion; holy emotion uses the preacher.”\(^{31}\) Thus similar to the conversion experience, the spirit is conceptualized as speaking through the voice of the minister in his sermon.

**The Great Awakening(s)**

During the first Great Awakening, which started in the mid-eighteenth century around 1740, few slaves were converted to Christianity despite attempts from missionaries, for reasons


too numerous to discuss here. However, during the Second Great Awakening (1780-1830), many were converted, particularly to Baptist or Methodist denominations due to their leaning towards “feeling as a sign of conversion” rather than religious instruction that would have denied many illiterate slaves access to learning. Baptist preachers, who lacked the education of their Anglican peers, appealed to the “socially repressed,” who, according to E. Franklin Frazier, included “the poor and the ignorant and the outcast.” For obvious reasons these would have included enslaved blacks.

The conversion process was more important than intellectual learning, with overt emotional expression as a necessary sign of deliverance and transgression. According to Albert J. Raboteau, “The sight of black and white converts weeping, shouting, fainting, and dancing in ecstatic trances became a familiar feature of the camp meeting revivals.” The emotionalism of the revival camp meeting experience appealed to both blacks and whites, and allowed for congregational responses to the preacher’s appeals. As Radano explains, among participants, class similarities often trumped racial differences of emotional expressions in religious settings:

Because the unusual array of behaviorisms present at revivals – seeing visions, hearing voices, dancing to unsung melodies, wailing, shouting, and falling into trance states – had precedents in Europe as well as in Africa, lower-class whites could have engaged in these expressive practices and still considered them “their own.”


37 Radano, *Lying Up a Nation*, 118.
Radano designates ecstatic expressions, both vocally and physically, as a class-based distinction, not necessarily associated with race.

Although attended by both blacks and whites, camp meetings were usually segregated, which allowed enslaved blacks the opportunity to express themselves freely away from the watchful eyes of white owners and to join together in solidarity. Sometimes thousands of black and white Baptist and Methodists practiced their faith in open-air settings, and free blacks and slaves not only participated, but they also served as exhorters and preachers.\(^{38}\) Revivals in Kentucky drew great crowds and were attended by both whites and blacks, possibly explaining the shared tradition of the chanted sermon in the black Baptist and the (white) Kentucky Baptist churches.\(^{39}\) Borrowing between white and black congregants may have led to the adoption of the chanted sermon by whites, and to the adoption of fire-and-brimstone sermon themes by African Americans.\(^{40}\)

For Baptist and Methodist clergy members, the most significant feature, more than training or education, was the possession of a voluble tongue. Converted slaves with a knack for exhorting were allowed to preach to both black and white audiences, with some travelling to plantations to minister to slaves.\(^{41}\) Black Harry (Harry Hosier, Hoosier, or Hoshure), George Liele, and Liele’s student Andrew Bryan, were all known to be excellent preachers in the late 1700s. With the influx of black converts attending Baptist and Methodist churches, separate services were often needed to accommodate the swelling number of congregants. The first

\(^{38}\) Raboteau, *Canaan Land*, 17.


\(^{40}\) Pitts, *Old Ship of Zion*, 64-65.

\(^{41}\) Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 132-133.
separate black church to be formed in the North American colonies that would become the United States was a Baptist church founded between 1773 and 1775 in Silver bluff, South Carolina.\textsuperscript{42} The emergence of both black preachers and black congregations were significant results of the Great Awakening, and according to Pitts, began “the political, social, and economic autonomy of the Afro-Baptist church.”\textsuperscript{43} Baptist churches allowed for more independence than other protestant denominations, offering black members more control over their church and opportunities for conducting business and official church operations, leading to the growth of independent churches after emancipation.\textsuperscript{44} As noted by Charles Colcock Jones in 1842:

\textbf{There are more Negro communicants, and more churches regularly constituted, exclusively of Negroes, with their own regular houses of public worship, and with ordained Negro preachers, attached to this denomination than to any other in the United States. . . . Perhaps in most of the chief towns in the South there are [Baptist] houses of public worship erected for the Negroes alone. . . .}\textsuperscript{45}

The opportunities for self-governance for black preachers and churches during the slavery era were empowering to those who had no opportunities for authority positions in the white world. Baptist and Methodists were more lax than other denominations, allowing black freed and enslaved preachers in the 1770s and 1780s to minister to their own people. As a result, these “African churches,” as they were sometimes called, many without white supervision, led to separate black congregations.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{42} Raboteau, \textit{Slave Religion}, 139.

\textsuperscript{43} Pitts, \textit{Old Ship of Zion}, 45.

\textsuperscript{44} Raboteau, \textit{Slave Religion}, 178.

\textsuperscript{45} Raboteau, \textit{Slave Religion}, 188.

\textsuperscript{46} Raboteau, \textit{Canaan Land}, 19, 21-22.
The African-American Church and Minister

After the Denmark Vesey revolt in 1822,47 which led to legislation against black preaching, black churches were forced underground, becoming a “hidden institution” or “invisible church”48 with services conducted in outdoor secret meetings, called “hush harbors”49 or “brush arbors.”50 These settings allowed for African-American cultural expressions in an environment segregated from white society that not only met the spiritual needs of African-American practitioners, but also provided a sense of unity among the community members.51 The plantation praise houses, which were no more than shacks or shanties erected on plantations for the worship services of the enslaved conducted by white clergy, provided opportunities for respite from the hard labor of the fields, despite the fact that most slavery-era black religious activities were controlled by white slave owners. While slaves originally learned about Christianity in white churches where they were taught submissiveness to whites as part of its doctrine, slave preachers led the meetings of the “invisible institution,” without the usual pro-slavery propaganda emphasized by white ministers, leading to the establishment of black folk religion.52 The acts of practicing religion and preaching can be considered acts of resistance, not only because of the subject matter, but also because it asserted independence in defiance of the

47 Raboteau, Slave Religion, 163.
49 Pitts, Old Ship of Zion, 50-51.
50 Southern, The Music of Black Americans, 179.
subjugated position associated with slavery. Slave preachers thus acquired power and authority through the use of their voices.\textsuperscript{53}

The African-American minister’s voice functioned as “the collective voice of his people, who were once ‘silent’ and absent from the historical realm. Through his speech acts, he provides the vehicle by which the entire community of faith may participate in shaping its own history and in restructuring cultural memory.”\textsuperscript{54} Because most slave preachers were illiterate, they relied on their voices to capture the attention of their congregants. Most used the emotional style featured in the chanted sermon, which begins with a calm declamation and builds up to a climactic eruption featuring rhythmic and melodic elements. The emotional power of the chanted sermon stirred these early congregants’ feelings, inspiring responsorial interjections of “Amen” or “Preach it,” similar to those that would be used in Nix’s sermons in the 1920s.

**Early African-American Preachers**

Because he was often illiterate and had limited leadership opportunities due to the presence of white authority figures, the slave preacher asserted leadership in the early church by embodying charismatic qualities, rather than through Biblical reading. Important preachers included George Liele, who was preaching to both whites and blacks in Georgia in 1773; Andrew Bryan, who was ordained in 1788, also in Georgia; Black Harry, who travelled with Bishop Asbury and from him learned to preach “more forcefully than Asbury himself;” John Jasper, who spoke at funerals, where “his vivid and spectacular eloquence resulted in an uproar of groans, shouts, fainting women, and people who were swept to the ground to lie in a trance-

\textsuperscript{53} Raboteau, *Canaan Land*, 58, 60.

like state sometimes for hours” [italics in original].

Methodist preacher William Colbert described Black Harry as “not a man made [sic] preacher. It is really surprising to hear a man that cannot read, preach like this man.”

Hosier is reported to have memorized large passages of the Bible—knowledge of the Bible was standard for the effectiveness of slave preachers and granted prestige to him among his followers.

“Preaching meant dramatizing the stories of the Bible and the way of God to man. These slave preachers were noted for the imagery of their sermons.”

A second qualification for the effectiveness of slave preachers was the ability to sing. In 1803, Henry Boehm, also an itinerant preacher, described Hosier’s preaching, stating, “His voice was musical, and his tongue as the pen of a ready writer.”

An article in a 1786 edition of the New York Packet also described Hosier’s preaching: “He delivers his discourses with great zeal and pathos, and his language and connection is by no means contemptible. It is the wish of several of our correspondents that this same black man may be so far successful as to rouse the dormant zeal of members of our slothful white people, who seem very little affected about concerns of another world.”

The musical qualities of Black Harry’s voice and his “zeal and pathos” give us descriptions of the early chanted sermon. Old-time religion, such as that taught by these early ministers, was not only a religious experience, but also an opportunity for

55 Pipes, Say Amen, Brother! 64-65.


59 Henry Boehm, Reminiscences, Historical and Biographical, of Sixty-Four Years in the Ministry (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1865), 91.

emotional release that old-time religion allowed through vocalized and physicalized expressions.\textsuperscript{61}

**History of the Chanted Sermon**

The chanted sermon, as a foundational element in black preaching, may have been originally influenced by the emotional renderings in Puritan sermons by white preachers from New England, such as George Whitefield (or Whitfield), (1714-1770), leader of the Calvinist Methodists. “Early descriptions of Methodist and Baptist preaching, black and white, suggest three characteristics: it was plain or simple in language, dramatic in delivery, and—at least for the Baptists—musical, if we can believe the pejorative description applied by their critics: ‘Baptist whine.’”\textsuperscript{62} The sound, also described as the “holy whine,” was a “rather shrill intonation, interpreted as the working of the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{63} As Rosenberg contends, “The Anglicans attacked their more passionate colleagues for their vehement pathos, their histrionics, [and] the ‘tuned voice’ (of Whitefield). . . . [T]he emotionalism, the free expression, and the ‘musical tone’ of the preachers [suggests] that this aspect of the chanted oral sermon may begin in this context.”\textsuperscript{64} Benjamin Franklin noticed the quality of Whitefield’s voice and preaching, commenting that “his delivery . . . was so improved by frequent repetition that every accent, every emphasis, every modulation of the voice, was so perfectly well-turned that without being interested in the subject, one could not help being pleased with the discourse; a pleasure of much the same kind with that received from an excellent piece of music.”\textsuperscript{65} Franklin’s comparison of

\textsuperscript{61} Pipes, *Say Amen, Brother!* 67.

\textsuperscript{62} Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones*, 147.


\textsuperscript{64} Rosenberg, *The Art of the American Folk Preacher*, 14.

\textsuperscript{65} Benjamin Franklin, quoted in Pipes, *Say Amen, Brother!* 61.
Whitefield’s “tuned voice” with “excellent . . . music” acknowledges the musical qualities of Whitefield’s preaching voice. In the 1740s during the beginning of the first Great Awakening, white revivalists, such as Whitefield, took notice of the slaves’ adherence to their preaching, leading to slave converts preaching their own sermons in the 1770s.66

African-American preachers memorized texts and expressed themselves in “vivid imagery and dramatic delivery,” and according to one white traveler, “a habit is obtained of rhapsodizing and exciting furious emotions.”67 Raboteau describes the folk sermon as spoken by slave ministers in the 1880s:

The style of the folk sermon, shared by black and white evangelicals, was built on a formulaic structure based on phrases, verses, and whole passages the preacher knew by heart. Characterized by repetition, parallelisms, dramatic use of voice and gesture, and a whole range of oratorical devices, the sermon began with normal conversational prose, then built to a rhythmic cadence, regularly marked by the exclamations of the congregation, and climaxed in a tonal chant accompanied by shouting, singing, and ecstatic behavior. . . . The dynamic pattern of call and response between preacher and people was vital to the progression of the sermon, and unless the spirit roused the congregation to move and shout, the sermon was essentially unsuccessful.68

The early sermons were in a simple language, yet were dramatic and musical, evocative of the Baptist whine of Whitefield and others.

The chanted sermon was also influenced by African rituals, demonstrating it as a hybrid mixture of both European and African influences. During the religious revival movements, the physicalized expression of the congregants is similar to many African-based religious traditions that include dancing as a means of achieving religious fulfillment through spirit possession. African practices involving spiritual possession may have influenced the chanted sermon through style switching in speech, which “acts as a code signaling that ritual possession by the Spirit is

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about to occur.” Raboteau explains, “the stylistic switch is commonly perceived as a change from order to chaos, from music to noise, or from speech to gibberish. What in fact is really happening is a shift from one type of order to another: from a nonrhythmic to a rhythmic, or rather, increasing rhythmic, performance style.” In the same regard, the African-American minister switches from conversational prose to rhythmical and tonal chanting, signaling the connection with Spirit. In some denominations, such as Pentecostal, speaking in tongues signals the onset of Spirit, taking the form of “divine possession,” also replicating African rituals. In the African-American chanted sermon at the onset of the arrival of Spirit, the minister’s voice becomes hoarse, gravelly, constricted, and tonal, leading congregants to clap, shout, and sway their bodies, mimicking the ritual activity in many African-based religions.

Evidence of the chanted sermon’s early history is presented in an article from 1897, presumably written in the mid-1800s, and describes

. . . a member of the [Hampton Folklore] Society who had in early childhood attended many night meetings in the little log meeting-houses in one of the most thickly-wooded counties of Virginia, was able to reproduce verbatim from his own memory, several of the sermons and prayers of the night-hawks, as the night preachers were called. This report was rendered possible by the fact that the same sermons and prayers are used over and over by the same preacher, and that they are intoned [italics mine] in such a way as to remain in the memory like a song.

Thus, the evidence shows that the chanted sermon may have evolved from the preaching of African-American preachers in the late 1700s, firmly established by the mid-1800s.

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The Chanted Sermon and the Spiritual

In eighteenth-century New England during the period of the Great Awakenings, the chanted sermon may have had its beginning on American soil coinciding with the development of the Negro spiritual. Portia Maultsby explains that the folk spirituals evolved in the praise-houses and in northern independent Black churches, where slaves and freedmen conducted religious meetings. Slave preachers, whose chanted sermons and improvised songs motivated sung responses from the congregation, established the foundation for its style. These preachers, when unsupervised by whites, set the musical standards, structured the services, and interpreted biblical passages from the cultural perspective of their congregations. Practices associated with African rituals fused with those of Christian origin. This fusion led to the development of a style of preaching that emphasized congregational participation. Elements that characterize this style include: (1) vocal inflections, which produce a type of musical tone or chant, and elevate the performance toward a climax; (2) repetition, for highlighting phrases of text; (3) rhythmic devices for stress and pacing; and (4) call-response structures, to elicit congregational reactions.71

Maultsby’s analysis of the spiritual underscores the importance and possible influence of the slave preacher and his preaching style to the development of subsequent musical genres, including the folk spiritual.

Numerous similarities exist between the two genres, including the use of repetition, the pentatonic scale, themes that describe a personal relationship with God, and rhythmic qualities used to stimulate and excite the religious services of the congregants from the potential boredom of a sermon by a minister untrained in formal public speaking.72 Sermons often took their texts directly from the spiritual’s lyrics and themes, intimately linking the two genres.73 Early preachers sang “shout songs”—sacred songs known as spirituals.74 Both the spirituals and the


72 Rosenberg, The Art of the American Folk Preacher, 16-17.

73 Raboteau, Slave Religion, 243.

74 Frazier, The Negro Church in America, 25.
sermons relied heavily on the Bible for Biblical stories and references. The singing of the spirituals was an emotional expression as Harris Barrett of the Hampton Institute in 1912 describes: “I have seen the entire body gradually worked up from one degree of emotion to another until, like a turbulent, angry sea, men and women, to the accompaniment of the singing, and while shouting, moaning, and clapping of hands, surged and swayed to and fro.” The improvisational nature of the spirituals, like the chanted sermon, allowed for adaptation to suit the singer’s personal experience. In addition, “it is most probable that a substantial quantum of spirituals evolved via the preaching event of black worship,” as Jon Michael Spencer explains, developing “from extemporaneous sermonizing which crescendoed poco a poco to intoned utterance” (italics in original).

The evidence suggests that the folk spirituals may have evolved simultaneously from the preaching and chanted sermon by African-American preachers. Although numerous similarities also exist between the chanted sermon and the blues, the chanted sermon developed alongside the folk spiritual during the Second Great Awakening in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, much earlier than the development of the blues in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Because the spiritual and the chanted sermon developed during the era of

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76 Harris Barrett, quoted in Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 244.
slavery, both can be considered as precursors to the blues.\textsuperscript{79} The availability and popularity of both recorded blues and sermons on phonographs coincided in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{80}

**Racial Uplift and the African-American Minister**

By the end of the Civil War, there were one hundred and six black Baptist churches in the United States, mostly in the South.\textsuperscript{81} The church became the center of the black community, serving as not only a place for religious worship, but also as an educational, social, cultural, and political center,\textsuperscript{82} with church leaders also serving as leaders to the community at large.\textsuperscript{83} The church offered opportunities to those who were forced out of political roles, provided a safe-haven for African Americans in a racist environment, and provided structure for black community members.\textsuperscript{84} “Because the black church was the only post-Civil War institution black people could claim as their own,” as explained by Edward L. Wheeler, “it is not surprising that the church spearheaded the drive for uplifting the race. The church was the center of the freedman’s community, and as a result of the church’s prominence, the black minister was in a unique position to be a leading advocate of uplift.”\textsuperscript{85} The church became the literal sanctuary and safe-haven in the midst of white oppression and racism.

\textsuperscript{79} Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 334. Southern claims that other precursors to the blues included “the mournful songs of the stevedores and roustabouts, the field hollers of the slaves, and the sorrow songs among the spirituals.”

\textsuperscript{80} Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues*, 155.

\textsuperscript{81} Pitts, *Old Ship of Zion*, 53.


\textsuperscript{83} Kerlin, *The Voice of the Negro*, 176.

\textsuperscript{84} Oliver, *Songsters and Saints*, 142.

\textsuperscript{85} Wheeler, *Uplifting the Race*, xv.
In the post-Reconstruction years, African-American ministers assumed many roles, not only as leaders in their churches, but also as leaders in the communities. In his landmark book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois describes the multifarious positions held by the black preacher, stating, “The Preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil. A leader, a politician, an orator, a ‘boss,’ an intriguer, an idealist – all this he is, and ever, too, the center of a group of men, now twenty, now a thousand in number.” Du Bois adds, “the bishops who preside over these organizations throughout the land are among the most powerful Negro rulers in the world.”\(^{86}\) The preacher functioned as a spiritual and political leader, and was occasionally a healer to the sick. During the era of slavery and the bleak circumstances that the enslaved endured, the black minister preached “a pie in the sky, by and by” outlook, in which at death one would look forward to salvation in the life thereafter. In the post-slavery years, black ministers shifted their focus to the dilemmas of daily life. The minister aided in not only spiritual education and support, but also moral, physical, and intellectual improvements as well, demonstrating the tenets of racial uplift.\(^{87}\)

African-American ministers believed that by proving their moral behavior as just, they could achieve the same opportunities as whites. As Raboteau contends, “progress for the race and escape from poverty depended upon education, temperance (abstaining from the consumption of alcohol), thrift, and responsibility[—]black ministers emphasized the importance of moral behavior and self-respect.”\(^{88}\) Many ministers believed that home ownership and savings were crucial goals of uplift and encouraged their congregants to lift themselves from poverty. In addition, African-American ministers encouraged their congregants to better not only their

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\(^{87}\) Wheeler, *Uplifting the Race*, xiii.

economic conditions, but also their moral behaviors to disprove common fallacies and prejudices made by whites.

The ministers also promoted uplift through teachings that stressed education, Christian morals, and economic responsibility. Bishop Daniel A. Payne, who was an educator in addition to a clergyman, was determined to promote racial uplift in the church through education, believing in an “educated ministry.” A.M.E. Zion bishop George W. Clinton adds, “the Negro pulpit became the pioneer in the first movements to better the condition of the race by lifting it from the degradation and disorganized state in which it was left by slavery.”89 In addition to education, Christian morality was a primary goal of nineteenth-century black churches and ministers, encouraging marriage as a goal for young people. Ministers believed that African Americans could achieve greatness if they could lift themselves through education and by being given the same opportunities offered to whites. He or she was not lacking in capabilities, only opportunities. After the losses accrued after the dissolution of Reconstruction, ministers realized that politics alone would not uplift the masses. Instead, they addressed social issues, such as temperance, as a means to uplift the race, a way to demonstrate self-responsibility with newly acquired freedom, and a way to acquire favor from powerful (and hostile) whites.90

Although black ministers were keenly aware of the challenges caused by racism and economic disparities, they encouraged their congregations to participate in the community and create a balanced family life. America was still considered the greatest country on earth full of possibilities, and black ministers wanted their congregants to achieve equality and be included in

89 George W. Clinton, “To What Extent is the Negro Pulpil [sic] Uplifting the Race?” Culp, Twentieth Century Negro Literature, 115-6, quoted in Wheeler, Uplifting the Race, 23.

90 Wheeler, Uplifting the Race, 82.
the opportunities that were available for them. Thus, they believed that a balance between “accommodation and possibility” was achievable through uplift.91

With the African-American minister at the helm, the church community listened to his advice and was guided by his instructions. He interacted with his church congregation on a daily or weekly basis, knew of their needs, and heard their prayers. Although much scholarship has been written about Du Bois, Washington, Garvey, and other singular black leaders of the day, the minister interacted with his congregants on a day-to-day basis, functioning not only as a minister, but also as a leader and the center of community activities. The Chicago Defender vowed that “The minister occupies the position of moral, spiritual and, in a sense, the social leadership of the Race. They have the ear of the people even more than a newspaper, for they reach a multitude of people who neither read nor think.”92 However for the many illiterate, newspapers were out of reach, while the minister was close and attainable. Thus, the minister was influential on the minds of his congregants and could encourage them to follow a certain path or philosophy.

Although the African-American preacher was the one member who had the power and ability to influence black community members, he also served as a mediator between the community and white society, with his function sometimes being to “transmit the whites’ wishes to the Negroes and to beg the whites for favours [sic] for his people,”93 thus embodying the role of the “Uncle Tom,” often inciting ridicule from his people. During Reconstruction, ministers were at the top of the African-American social ladder along with other professionals and intellectuals, while sharecroppers and laborers were considered the lower classes. As noted by Langston Hughes, some of ministers of the emerging middle-class were not proud of their

91 Wheeler, Uplifting the Race, 30.
92 Kerlin, The Voice of the Negro, 176.
93 Oliver, Songsters and Saints, 142.
heritage, and sought to “become white,” seeking to attain the virtues of white society, while others fought for racial equality and the end of segregation and discrimination, demonstrating the black minister’s role as both assimilationist and advocate for racial justice.

Even in Chicago in the early twentieth century, the editor of the black newspaper the *Broad Ax* declared that African-American ministers could easily be bought for political favors: “The Negro race is the only race in the world to have their churches turned into political halls for faking preachers and the small-headed base white Republican politicians who contend that they can buy any ‘Darkey preacher and a whole church full of niggers for ten dollars.’” Possibly this is why Reverend Nix never involved himself in politics. Furthermore, black churches often imitated white church services, rejecting their previous expressions of emotionalism, favoring a more restrained service in the hopes of seeming more “civilized.” This shift, according to LeRoi Jones, was a reaction “against two hundred years of slavery,” in an attempt to “abandon almost all their ‘Negro traits.’”

**Early Divisions by Class**

The beginnings of class affiliations in African-American communities are evident through documents that discuss enslaved converts, most often the house servants and artisans, who had close daily contact with their white owners and thus were more likely to attend church. A white Methodist minister, John Dixon Long, in 1857 described the slaves most likely to become church members:

> such as are owned by the less extensive slaveholders and farmers . . . have no overseer, live in the kitchen, mingle with the master’s family, eat the same kind of

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95 Julius C. Taylor, *The Broad Ax* 7, no. 46 (September 13, 1902): 1.

food . . . Their children are raised with their master’s children, play with them, and
nurse them . . . A strong attachment frequently exists between them and their
masters and mistresses. From this class we derive most of our church members. 97

The house slaves, as they came to be called, became a kind of privileged class in opposition to
the field slaves. The house slaves often spoke in the speech manner of their masters, in contrast
to dialect spoken by field slaves. 98 In addition to these distinctions, after Emancipation those of
free and mulatto ancestry were also stratified from the masses by class. 99 The attention to
education, thrift, Christian morality, and temperance stems from the bourgeois ideals of Puritan
white missionaries sent to the South to educate the freedmen. 100 Victorian ideals similarly
emphasized “competition, thrift, prudence, self-reliance and personal achievement as opposed to
privilege and inheritance.” 101 The use of “proper” English and the educated status of the
freedmen thus differentiated them from the black masses. Educated students were taught to speak
softly and courteously and to “never exhibit the spontaneous boisterousness of ordinary
Negroes.” 102

The churches that became the most popular within African-American communities were
African Methodist Episcopal (AME), Baptist, and Methodist denominations. They inspired their
congregations through highly emotional and passionate renderings in their sermons, which
allowed for a release of the anxiety felt by black communities due to racial and economic
injustices. The church was the one institution completely within the control of African

97 John Dixon Long, quoted in Raboteau, Slave Religion, 176.
98 Frazier, Black Bourgeoisie, 12.
99 Frazier, The Negro Church in America, 36-37.
100 Frazier, Black Bourgeoisie, 60.
101 Dr. Donna Loftus, “The Rise of the Victorian Middle Class,” BBC, accessed May 14, 2018,
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/middle_classes_01.shtml.
102 Frazier, Black Bourgeoisie, 77.
Americans, although many parts of its ritual were derived from white church practices; however, these were adapted to conform to the particular needs and expressions of black congregants.\textsuperscript{103} One reason for the attraction of slaves and freedmen to the Baptist denomination was that its churches were autonomous and self-governing, not adjudicated by an overseeing authority, which allowed for more freedom from white jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{104}

However, African-American communities were not homogeneous in the preferences for religious styles of worship. By the post-Emancipation era, some educated African-Americans began to express their disdain for the traditional practices of the folk church. In 1870, Elizabeth Kilham, a white woman who visited a meeting of the Freedmen’s Bureau that convened at “Old Billy’s church” in Richmond, Virginia, writes:

The distinctive features of negro hymnology, are gradually disappearing, and with another generation will probably be obliterated entirely. The cause for this, lies in the education of the younger people. With increasing knowledge, comes growing appreciation of fitness and propriety, in this, as in everything else; and already they have learned to ridicule the extravagant preaching, the meaningless hymns, and the noisy singing of their elders. Not perhaps, as yet, to any great extent in the country; changes come always more slowly there, but in the cities, the young people have, in many cases, taken the matter into their own hands, formed choirs, adopted the hymns and tunes in use in the white churches, and strangers who go with the expectation of something novel and curious, are disappointed at having only ordinary church music.\textsuperscript{105}

Education and knowledge were viewed as the models of “fitness and propriety,” while “extravagant preaching . . . meaningless hymns . . . [and] noisy singing” of the uneducated were in direct opposition. As education became the norm for the freedmen, the association to traditional forms of vocal and physical behavior in preaching and singing declined. Robert Russa

\textsuperscript{103} Hortense Powdemaker, \textit{After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South} (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 223.

\textsuperscript{104} Pitts, \textit{Old Ship of Zion}, 45.

Moton, a black student who attended Hampton from 1872-1875 argued, “I had come to school to learn to do things differently; to sing, to speak, and to use the language, and of course, the music, not of coloured people but of white people.” Moton’s comments reflect the growing tendency of some to dismiss black vocal traditions and to favor instead assimilation to white vocal aesthetics. Harriet Beecher Stowe called the new singing by the assimilationists as “solemn, dull and nasal.” She went on to describe how the singing of spirituals had gone from an emotional expression to a “more dignified style . . . a closer imitation of white, genteel worship.”

In addition, traditional black folk expressions were often demonized for their association with the era of slavery. As mentioned previously, Bishop Daniel A. Payne described the emotionalized practices at a folk church as “ridiculous and heathenish . . [and] disgraceful to themselves, the race, and the Christian name.” Payne, as an educated, elite minister, reprimanded the northern freedmen who continued the traditions of their forefathers. His admonitions suggest that any reference to the practices associated with the slavery era were “heathenish.” Payne most likely attributed the practice of ring-dancing, called the “ringshout,” to African practices, which “mirrored the singing, dancing, and drumming in ceremonies of possession trance that regularly manifested the presence of the divine among followers of many African religions.” Through the comments by Kilham, Moton, and Payne, we can begin to see the gradual decline and rejection of traditional black vocalities by certain segments of the black

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106 Robert Russa Moton, quoted in Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 162.


108 Payne, *Recollections of Seventy Years*, 254-255.

community. However, the traditions of the black folk church that emanated during slavery did continue into the early twentieth century, as Raboteau explains, which included

the praise meeting, the revival, the mourner’s bench, the conversion experience, and the emotionally charged preaching, singing, and shouting of worship services. These traditions helped poor black people to hold onto a sense of value and a degree of hope in a bleak social setting of discrimination, segregation, and racial violence.\(^\text{110}\)

As migrants moved from the South to the North, they brought their traditions with them, including vocalized traditions.

**The Great Migration and Class Affiliations**

By the mid-1920s when thousands of southern migrants had already arrived in northern cities, religion continued as the centerpiece for urban African Americans. A study of Chicago life in the 1930s by the Works Progress Administration revealed, “In the nearly eighty years from the date of the establishment of the first Negro church in Illinois [1847], religion was without rival as the leading force and attraction in the life of the race in the state.”\(^\text{111}\) Booker T. Washington noted the challenges that lay ahead for new southern migrants to Chicago: “When the colored man comes from the South he finds he is face to face with new conditions, as to climate and as to methods of labor. He also finds he is surrounded by increasing temptations. No race under such circumstances, without help and guidance can adjust itself to those new conditions.”\(^\text{112}\) Aid organizations and social welfare programs, such as the Urban League, supplied migrants with meals, educational programs, and other assistance.

The migration also created distinct classes, each with their own religious affiliations. Many of those in the lower-class and lower middle-class affiliated with traditional forms of

\(^\text{110}\) Raboteau, *Canaan Land*, 103.


\(^\text{112}\) Dolinar, ed., 172-173.
worship such as those in which they had participated in their southern Baptist and Methodist churches. Once they migrated to northern metropolises, the rural, black middle class of the South were often relegated to the lowest paying jobs and joined the lower-class churches. The upper-middle class and elite class preferred Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Congregational services, which were “ritualistic and deliberative,” according to Frazier. The focus of the churches also changed from their “other-worldly” preoccupation with salvation in the afterlife to the everyday conditions of the here-and-now. Frazier calls this shift the “secularization” of black churches because of the shift in attention from spiritual topics to the secular.

Class Distinctions

Class divisions do not always conform to economic conditions, but also can express social behaviors. Hortense Powdermaker’s study of southern life in the 1930s reveals that, for rural southerners, class was based on adherence to forms of expected behavior and, where relevant, the associated material symbols that they can afford. . . . The mores and patterns of conduct which are taken to represent proper family form, gender relations, female chastity, and male fidelity according to a model of white middle class culture are those that determine the acceptability of Negro individuals of varying economic statuses into the same class stratum.

Her study reveals that of the three classes that existed in African-American communities in the South—an upper, a middle (with “borderline” divisions into upper and lower), and a lower class—the upper class adopted the largest number of white cultural standards, and the lower class the fewest. Powdermaker included ministers in the middle class, not the elite professional

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class because, unlike Nix, most rural southern preachers did not have formal education and thus did not adhere to elite class standards. Powdermaker adds,

> The main strength of the church is the middle class. Almost everyone in it is a church member. The members of the upper middle class are the ones who really direct church affairs. The others usually belong to a church, but are less active in attendance and administration. From the middle class as a whole come the ‘shouters’ and the loud ‘amens.’

As previously mentioned, while issues of class are associated with church traditions, no singular way of expression existed for all working-class blacks with an opposing way for middle-class blacks. For instance, Nix’s congregants were from the lower, middle, and elite classes, and all responded positively to the oral traditions of the folk that he expressed. Class lines were particularly marked in the churches of Chicago during the 1920s.

**Class Distinctions in Chicago Churches**

Class issues had affected church membership in Chicago as early as the late 1800s, with three main groups: the “respectables,” who were low or median income people who were “unrestrained in their worship;” the “refined,” educated people who looked down on the emotionalism of the respectables; and the “riffraff” and “sinners,” who did not attend church. Prior to the arrival of southern migrants, Chicago had a handful of churches attended by the “old settlers”— African Americans who lived in Chicago prior to the Great Migration. Between 1900 and 1915, the number of churches doubled as thousands of migrants flooded the city, with most joining Baptist or AME denominations. Reportedly, there were one hundred-seventy churches in the black communities of Chicago in the early 1920s, with the number of storefront churches more than twice those of “regular” churches. The black churches of Chicago provided a safe-

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haven, as one woman described, “a place where my people worship and ain’t pestered by the white men.” Even in a northern city such as Chicago, racial violence, segregation, and discrimination were real issues African Americans faced.

In the early twentieth century, the old settlers and the new emerging middle class formed social clubs, which allowed for communication and the exchange of memories among their members. The Chicago Old Settlers’ Club, founded in 1902, was formed for black elites in Chicago, while the Appomattox Club, founded in 1900, was an organization for the new middle class. Social clubs and their members thus perpetuated the class system, in which the upper classes segregated themselves from the lower classes. The old settlers of Chicago believed that the new migrants, with their “uncivilized” behavior, were diminishing the respectability of all African Americans in the eyes of white observers. The migrants were judged unfavorably by many of the black middle class and were thought to be the cause of the loss of jobs for those already established. Name-calling was frequent, in which the established old settlers accused the newcomers of having poor etiquette, being prone to gambling, begging, stealing, and other purported crimes. The Chicago Defender offered help to the migrants with words of advice in the form of twenty-seven points on how to acclimate themselves to their new northern environment, which included:

- Don’t get intoxicated and go out on the street insulting women and children and make a beast of yourself – some one [sic] may act likewise with your wife and children.
- Don’t live in insanitary houses, or sleep in rooms without proper ventilation.
- Don’t use vile language in public places.
- Don’t appear on the street with old dust caps, dirty aprons and ragged clothes.
- Don’t throw garbage in the back yard or alley or keep dirty front yards.

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120 Spear, Black Chicago, 108-109.
Apparently, the established Chicagoans believed that the migrants were uncouth, unclean, and needed to be educated on the ins and outs of “proper” decorum. In this regard, the old settlers of Chicago reflected Du Bois’ Talented Tenth, who believed they, as educated and elite leaders, were responsible for the uplift of the masses.

The musical and vocal preferences in the African-American churches of Chicago in the 1920s also reflected class distinctions. Robert Lee Sutherland studied the African-American churches in the primarily black residential areas of Chicago during the 1920s and found that most fit within five categories:

1. Individual minister: storefront locations, lower-class, crime-ridden areas; small congregations of twenty-five or less; church service with “incessant ‘amens,’ frequent testimonials and prayers, singing of spirituals, and dancing, shouting, and ‘fits.’”

2. Group project: Either a storefront or small church; low rent areas; typically less than five hundred members; group participation similar to the Type 1 church with little use for hymnals due to the singing of well-known spirituals; affiliated with a denomination.

3. Mixed class: a church in which some members “recognize that they are in a changed environment and that their rural religious practices are out of accord with the generally accepted standards. During this transition period when part are [sic] seeking respectability for their organization and when the others are clinging to traditions there is a strange mingling of the old and the new;” usually more than three hundred members; location of a church facility in a median rent area; a mixture of congregational participation with the “old members” evoking shouts, dancing, and “going into fits under the control of the ‘Spirit,’ while younger members use restraint in their vocal and physical responses; hymns preferred over spirituals; choir led by a director.

4. Assimilationist: the church practices “meet the generally accepted white standards;” usually less than five hundred members; located in desirable residential neighborhoods; the church service does not include “amens,” shouting, or the singing of spirituals; the congregation responds only according to ritual; the sermon is “well organized and thoughtful.”

5. Similar to Type 4 but focuses on the daily needs of the congregants and sermons reflect real-life experiences; activities revolve around community service and the social, economic, and cultural needs of the congregants.\(^{122}\)

Another classification of churches was made by Reverend Kingsley, as reported in the WPA’s study of Chicago in the 1930s. Kingsley’s classification is also grouped into five categories:

1. The old line churches: the established Methodist and Baptist churches of the traditional type, all of which have permanent church buildings.

2. The storefront and house-front churches, of which there are 178 out of 278 churches in Chicago. These churches are usually transitory and without deep root in the community, a case of the blind leading the blind.

3. Liturgical churches: the Roman Catholic, the Lutheran, and the Protestant Episcopal.

4. The fringe churches: holiness, spiritualist, and various eastern cults such as the Mohammedan Temple, Moorish cult, and others. Most of this group are thinly camouflaged with religion for exploitation purposes.

5. So-called “intellectual” churches: those which have a rationally expressed application of Christianity, of which the Congregational and Presbyterian are types.\(^{123}\)

According to Sutherland’s divisions, the first two church types were lower-class churches, usually located in storefronts; the mixed-type of church suited both the lower- and middle-class; the assimilationist churches of type four and five appealed to the upper classes. Both Sutherland’s and Kingsley’s categorizations can be simplified into three distinct class-based divisions: storefront and “fringe” churches of the lower class; old-line churches associated with the mixed-type church of the middle class; and liturgical and “intellectual” churches of the upper class. Thus, I will simplify these categorizations into three categories based on class, similar to Drake and Cayton’s class divisions:

1. Lower-class churches: Small churches in storefront locations in the poorer areas, uneducated, individual minister. Examples: Holiness, spiritualist, some small Baptist churches. Music consists of the singing of spirituals, interjections by congregation members, dancing, shouting, emotional demonstrativeness.

2. Middle-class/mixed churches (“old-line” churches): The larger Baptist and Methodist denominations in church buildings. Some demonstrative displays to appeal to the old settlers, but the younger congregants prefer subdued services and hymn-singing over spirituals.

3. Elite class/Assimilationist churches: Members and ministers are educated, located in desirable neighborhoods. They meet “white standards” in that there are not emotional outbursts or interjections by congregants, the music and service is subdued. Singing of “white church” hymns, not spirituals. Examples: Congregational, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Protestant Episcopal.124

I will also include the category of “hybrid” to discuss Nix’s church, which was of a mixed type, but of a different sort than those discussed by Sutherland and Kingsley.

**Lower-Class Churches**

The Chicago Commission on Race Relations confirmed that those migrants who were members of the middle class in the South were “demoted” to jobs usually assigned to the lower classes, such as working in the stock yards, steel mills, or factories once they arrived in the North.125 Drake and Cayton explain that the lower class, or “lowers” as they were called, was divided into two groups, consisting of “church folks and those families (church and non-church) who are trying to ‘advance themselves;’” and “the pimps and prostitutes, the thieves and pick-pockets, the dope addicts and reefer smokers, the professional gamblers, cutthroats, and murderers.”126 James Weldon Johnson spoke of the lower class, with their “unkempt appearance, the shambling, slouching gait and loud talk and laughter . . . [which arose] in me a feeling of almost repulsion. Only one thing about them awoke a feeling of interest; that was their dialect.”127 It is this second group of “shadies” that Nix so often addressed in his sermons. The members who attended church, usually of the Baptist or Methodist denominations, were opposed to gambling, card-playing, dancing, “improper” sexual behavior, and drinking. Genester Nix

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confirmed that her father never allowed these activities in their home. For our purposes here, we will be discussing the church-going lower-class members.

Although Baptist ranked as the denomination with the highest membership, a full 65.9% of Baptist churches were housed in storefronts in the 1920s, and these areas were typically on the poorest and most undesirable streets of the Black Belt.128 Storefront churches, attended by lower-class recent migrants from the South, were predominately Holiness, Spiritualist, Pentecostal, and some smaller Baptist churches, which exhibited “uninhibited worship [in an] informal atmosphere.”129 The storefront churches, most led by uneducated ministers who preached part-time, were prone to shouting and emotional and uninhibited worship.130 “When the Negro migrated North his church came with him,” Sutherland explains, “It came with its old denominational labels and distinctions, with its customary theology and forms of service, and with its feeling of importance as a central institution in the life of its people.”131 Southern migrants were unaccustomed to the decorum of the elite and middle class churches, and instead brought their demonstrative and emotional church practices with them to churches in the North. They also felt more comfortable in churches that were not attended by those higher educated, including the minister, as is demonstrated by one Chicago woman who temporarily had attended a large, mixed church, but “couldn’t understand the pastor and the words he used.” She complained that “I couldn’t sing their way. The songs was proud-like.”132 Her criticism reflects the attitude of education to many in the lower class that educated ministers and their “Book

129 Spear, Black Chicago, 96.
130 Spear, Black Chicago, 96.
131 Sutherland, “An Analysis of Negro Churches in Chicago,” 44.
132 Drake and Cayton, Black Metropolis, 634.
learning, while good, is worldly and got nothing to do with being borned of God.”  

Uneducated slave ministers were known to not prepare their sermons but to “just read the word and pray,” knowing that “God will do the rest.”  

“God prepares a man to preach; he does not have to go to school for that. All he must do is open his mouth and God will fill it. The universities train men away from the Bible.”  

Contrasting with “manuscript” preachers who write out their sermons, “spiritual” preachers speak when inspired by the word or voice of God, needing no advance preparation, demonstrating his ability to improvise.  

Nix, while educated, was a spiritual preacher in that he did not write out his sermon and improvised from bullet points.  

The Holiness and Pentecostal churches and other “sanctified” churches with low-income congregants typically expressed themselves in emotional outbursts, with “shouts, jerks, dances, and speaking with tongues.”  

Within the church these amalgamated sounds first became prominent in the Holiness and Spiritualist sects that developed at the turn of the century. While many churches within the black community sought respectability by turning their backs on the past, banning the shout, discouraging enthusiastic religion, and adopting more sedate hymns and refined, concertized versions of the spirituals, the Holiness churches constituted a revitalization movement with their emphasis upon healing, gifts of prophecy, speaking in tongues, spirit possession, and religious dance.  

Holiness churches were prone to spontaneous singing and exhortations, allowing congregants to take up the singing of spirituals during the service, to cry, shout, or “shriek” and included hand clapping, body swaying, and tambourine playing. The preachers of Sanctified and Holiness  

133 Johnson, *God Struck Me Dead*, 2n.  


137 Sutherland, “An Analysis of Negro Churches in Chicago,” 71.  

churches often “vocalized their sermons to the point of hoarseness, sometimes evoking a near-scream with their enthusiasm.”

Although these traditions were typically associated with Holiness churches, Baptists and Methodists also shared some of these traits and would also express themselves with emotional displays, including shouting and “falling out,” emphasizing the fact that there were not clear demarcation lines between any one denomination or means of expression. Nix’s Baptist church was one of the churches that emphasized ecstatic behavior; however, his church was not in a storefront location but in a permanent, physical building.

The lower-class ministers demonized the upper classes and their ministers just as the upper classes looked down on the lower. A higher-class church member commented, “Religion ceases to be the focus of lower-class life. The vast majority organize their behavior around ‘good-timing,’ fixing their attention on the cheaper forms of commercial recreation.”

In contrast, a member of Elder Lucy Smith’s All Nations Pentecostal Church, a lower-class church, commented, “I don’t like these preachers standing up saying things, and you don’t know what they’re talking about, all hifalutin’. I like the preaching like we had it down in Alabama.”

Regarding the music in her church, Smith reportedly claimed, “The singing has a ‘swing’ to it, because I want people to swing out of themselves all the mis’ry and troubles that is heavy on their hearts.”

Brother Brown, a Baptist minister of a Bronzeville church, also criticized the ministers and their music: “They even have all high-class singing and not the old-time soul-stirring songs that furnish the soul with happiness. . . . The larger churches are too high-toned to

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140 Drake and Cayton, Black Metropolis, 653.

141 Drake and Cayton, Black Metropolis, 652.

serve God.”

In the view of the lower-class congregants, the music associated with black folk tradition was considered the means to happiness and spirituality, while education and “high-toned” status were deterrents to spirituality.

**Itinerant Evangelists.** Among the ministers categorized as lower class were itinerant evangelists, also called “jack-leg preachers,” who recorded on race records in the 1920s. They were those preachers who were typically uneducated, without a regular church home of their own in which to preach, often sang or preached on street corners, and were associated with the lower classes of black society and the Sanctified/Holiness churches. According to Drake and Cayton, only three percent of “high-status” African Americans were in favor of jack-leg preachers, while a full forty-six percent of store-front church members favored them. A minister in a Congregational church noted, that due to the jack-leg preacher’s understanding of the struggles of the lower class, “The ‘jack-leg’ preacher fills a need. He may be ignorant and utterly uninformed in the respects that we think a preacher should be trained, but he has a useful role.”

Gaines posits that the emotional and demonstrative behavior of some uneducated ministers mimicked minstrel performance and was a source of contention. In 1895, African-American Methodist minister, R. R. Downs, wrote of the minister “who turns the house of God into a low class circus or minstrelsy, telling old stale jokes . . . rolling his eyes . . . and to crown it all by having his church christened a theatre by the young people.”

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144 Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 630.
146 Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 90.
Andrew Nix was not an itinerant evangelist or jack-leg preacher due to his educated status and his pastoring of specific Baptist churches with physical buildings. Nix’s church in Maywood, Illinois included a parsonage where he and his family lived. A jack-leg preacher would neither have a church or a parsonage. Elwood Nix explained that jack-leg preachers were self-made preachers, or “deacons one week and ministers the next.”¹⁴⁷ Jack-leg preachers, according to Elwood, were not called to preach as ministers are. Ministers often hear “some kind of voice” or “know it and feel it” as opposed to jack-leg preachers who were “just trying to make a buck” and would often sing and preach on street corners, busking for loose change.

Many itinerant ministers were wanderers, similar to renowned bluesmen of the day, who did not have access to economic opportunities or basic education.¹⁴⁸ Jack-leg preachers, such as Gary Davis, were itinerant preachers who doubled as blues singers and sang “holy blues” in a “somewhat high-pitched and strained voice interspersed with cries and comments.”¹⁴⁹ Because blues music was considered “of the world,” many itinerant preachers concealed their identities on their religious recordings to disassociate with their secular successes. For example, blues musician Blind Lemon Jefferson, who went by the pseudonym of Deacon L. J. Bates, recorded several religious recordings. The most popular of these minister-singers, according to Paul Oliver, included Blind Lemon Jefferson (Deacon L. J. Bates), Washington Phillips, Sam Jones, Sam Collins, Charley Patton (Elder J. J. Hadley), Blind Roosevelt Graves, and Reverend Clayborn, “The Guitar Evangelist.”¹⁵⁰ It is possible that some black itinerant evangelists recorded with white musicians, but that black consumers did not purchase these recordings:

¹⁴⁸ Drake and Cayton, Black Metropolis, 583.
¹⁵⁰ Oliver, Songsters and Saints, 199-228.
On one occasion he [Blind Joe Taggart] was accompanied by an unknown fiddle player and a second guitar, producing, with harmonized nasal singing and swooping syllables, a sound somewhat reminiscent of Ernest Phipp’s white Holiness Quartet. It is just possible that the accompanists were white, but the experimental coupling was not repeated in the Paramount Race series and it seems likely that the white character of the singing and gospel hymns did not appeal to the black record buying public.\footnote{Oliver, \textit{Songsters and Saints}, 210.}

This statement attests to the desire of African-American record buyers to listen to sounds which were identified as being a part of black traditions, including black vocal aesthetics and musical repertoire. However, many guitar-evangelists of the 1920s displayed some “white” features, such as nasal “hillbilly” timbres. Apparently, Taggart’s use of nasal timbres and the accompaniment of the fiddle, associated with rural whiteness, created sonic textures too “white” for most black listeners to enjoy. In addition, sacred and secular genres were often blurred, “as sacred singers might use blues instrumentation and intonation, blues singers just as readily employed the expressive devices of the evangelists.”\footnote{Oliver, \textit{Songsters and Saints}, 204.}

One of the few requirements for becoming a minister of a lower-class congregation or a jack-leg was a good voice.\footnote{Drake and Cayton, \textit{Black Metropolis}, 630.} The vocal abilities of preachers associated with the lower classes were noted as having vocal power with loud dynamics and the ability to carry over distances, emphasized by shouting. A diatribe from a pastor with formal training emphasizes the power of the voice of jack-leg preachers:

A huckster used to sell vegetables; he used to go down the alley shouting his wares. And one day his wife said to him, “You sound just like a preacher.” He got the idea, and decided if he sounded that good to his wife he could preach; so he started a church.\footnote{Drake and Cayton, \textit{Black Metropolis}, 630-631.}
In Chicago during the Great Depression, the city was inundated with jack-leg preachers, trying to become established with their own church or sitting in as visiting ministers. They were familiar with the preaching of established ministers, such as Nix, and may have copied popular sermon themes and vocal characteristics of the more popular ministers in order to establish a name for themselves.

**Middle-Class/Mixed Churches**

The status of the middle-class was determined not only by their accumulation of wealth, but also by their behavior as separate from the lower class. The middle-class’ ambitions included a stable family life, respectability, and economic upward mobility in an effort to “better their condition.” Home ownership was of great significance to those who were descendants of former slaves and sharecroppers, such as Nix. However, this often meant that families had to take on boarders in order to make ends meet. Education continued to be a symbol of class mobility, especially for those in the lower-middle class. Outward manifestations of class were reflected by “keeping up ‘front’” through the “right” clothes, home, and club associations. In Bronzeville, these types were called “strivers” and “strainers.” Although the lower-middle class may not have had the means to do so, they often demonstrated conspicuous consumption—the outward illusion of status and class—while also juggling the long-term goals of education and property ownership. Sometimes, as Nix often preached, middle-class members focused more of their attention on conspicuous consumption rather than on church and family.

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159 Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 668.
Middle-class church members also learned “proper” behavior from the social clubs to which they belonged. Social clubs were an important addition to life for the middle class, offering opportunities to serve on committees and develop respectability. Proper decorum was often a deciding factor into one’s eligibility into a particular club. Nix discussed club membership and lodge meetings often in his sermons, which he believed were deterrents to the stability of the family.

Members of the middle class often looked down on those who attended sanctified churches, associating those members with “low-status.” Conversely, the middle class also condemned those in the upper classes who attended Episcopalian or Congregationalist churches as “dicty,” or as a strainer or striver. The Baptist and Methodist denominations associated with middle-class congregants were also split into separate churches based on class. Some of the Baptist and Methodist churches were considered “high-toned,” while others were lower-class storefront churches. The mixed-class churches often tried to appease the sensibilities of both their lower- and middle-class members by incorporating both traditional musical elements of the folk and “sophisticated” music, typically associated with white churches. Drake and Cayton explain,

When dealing with church rituals [i.e. traditions,] “lower-class” in Bronzeville almost becomes synonymous with “old fashioned” or “southern” and in modern southern communities, or a generation ago everywhere, such prayers were common in colored Baptist or Methodist churches of all status levels. Therefore, an elderly person or an “old-fashioned” person in a Bronzeville middle-class congregation may pray in a manner which is typical of Chicago’s lower-class congregations. A congregation cannot be stratified by any single item such as type of prayers of sermons [italics in original].

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Prior to the Great Migration, all Baptist and Methodist churches in the South, regardless of class affiliation, expressed traditional tendencies. Therefore, the older migrants brought these traditions with them to northern cities. Middle-class Chicago churches, also known as “old-line churches,” attempted to please both their older “shouting” members, and their younger members who aspired towards middle-class, “high-toned” religion. The newer, younger members of the middle class rejected the spirituals and folk sermons, and according to Frazier, were more interested in the accumulation of wealth, believing that a respected business status would earn them equality in the white world. These churches appeased both groups by mixing some elements of traditional emotionalism, appealing to the lower-middle class, with “decorous, dignified” services to appeal to the upper-middle class. “Tradition,” in this sense, linked not only the rural South with the lower-class churches of Chicago, but also to the mixed, middle-class churches. As southern migrants arrived in northern churches, some pastors, such as Nix, continued traditional folk practices associated with the rural South, simultaneously appealing to both the lower- and middle-class congregants. These traditional practices included “group singing, individual prayers, and ‘testifying,’ as well as “Rhythmic moans from the congregation, interjections of Amen, Praise the Lord, and Hallelujah,” “getting happy,” also known as “shouting,” in which congregants would cry, run down the church aisles, or flail their arms wildly. The power of the minister’s voice alone could inspire congregants to start shouting.

The number of Baptist churches in Chicago increased from thirty-six in 1916 to eighty-six in 1920, many starting as storefront churches. Spear adds, that as “Primarily migrant

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churches, they provided a middle ground between the formal, old-line northern congregations and the emotional, uninhibited storefronts.”\textsuperscript{167} It was in these churches that Thomas A. Dorsey marketed his songs “by extending the developments that had taken place within the Holiness churches to the more established Negro denominations. They [gospel composers and singers] helped bring back into black church music the sounds and the structure of the folk spirituals, work songs, and nineteenth-century cries and hollers.”\textsuperscript{168} Nix also brought vocal traditions into his Baptist, middle-class church and has been cited as an influence on Dorsey’s gospel style.\textsuperscript{169}

The largest churches in Chicago in the 1920s—Bethel A.M.E., Quinn Chapel (Methodist), and Olivet Baptist—tried to appeal to both middle-class respectability while maintaining some of the emotionalism of the lower classes to appeal to a broad spectrum of the community. Olivet Baptist’s membership grew to an estimated nine thousand in 1920, and was one of the eighty-six Baptist churches in the city.\textsuperscript{170}

The ministers of the mixed-type churches, who were usually educated men, learned to cater to both classes and their preferred type of service. Although emotional displays were allowed in mixed churches, they were most often restricted to not become over-zealous and thus associate the minister as “uncultured.”\textsuperscript{171} As Drake and Cayton have discussed, there were exceptions to these rules, and some ministers of the larger Baptist middle-class churches allowed their congregants to “get out of hand, with people falling out and running up and down the aisles

\textsuperscript{167} Spear, \textit{Black Chicago}, 178.

\textsuperscript{168} Levine, \textit{Black Culture and Black Consciousness}, 185.

\textsuperscript{169} See Harris, \textit{The Rise of Gospel Blues}, 163.

\textsuperscript{170} Spear, \textit{Black Chicago}, 177.

\textsuperscript{171} Drake and Cayton, \textit{Black Metropolis}, 674.
hysterically.” The larger, mixed churches, such as Olivet Baptist and the A.M.E. churches, whose choirs performed oratorios and anthems with “dignified” services in line with middle-class respectability, also allowed some modicum of emotionalism to appeal to its lower-class members. These churches included music to appeal to both class groups, with spirituals sung to appeal to the lower class, and hymns and anthems to appeal to the upper class.

Michael Harris discusses the tendency of old-line music directors of black Chicago churches to reject the folk spiritual, favoring instead “complex choral works of the western European classical music tradition.” The music directors felt it was their duty to do away with the spiritual because of its association with “backwardness.” Harris adds, “In the presence of the choir’s anthems, the congregation’s hymns, and the minister’s discouragement of shouting, the spiritual had become an anachronism in old-line churches. . . . congregational singing no longer existed by the end of the 1920s. It had been all but obliterated by the imposition of white hymn-singing standards.” Instead, old-line churches, such as Metropolitan, Bethel, and Quinn Chapel, the two latter being the two oldest A.M.E. churches in Chicago, presented “the most lauded Sunday afternoon musicales, and the best-trained and most noted directors of music.” These churches were known to cater to “the more intelligent type” and were often neglected by southern migrants.

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175 Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues*, 113-115. Anthem spirituals are choral arrangements of the spirituals.
177 Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues*, 188.
In addition to traditional music, mixed-church ministers would also relate to their lower-class congregants by using dialect or broken English, known as Black English (BE). Nix also spoke in the black vernacular at times, but did not present musicales as did the old-line churches.

Most notably, ministers of mixed churches would present “intelligent” sermons that included themes addressed to “advancing the Race” and discussed the noble work done by race leaders. Their attention to uplift was a necessary requirement to appeal to the more educated, upper-class members. However, the mixed church minister was also responsible for the “molding” of the lower-class members, changing their behaviors into middle-class behaviors, and for “advancing the Race.” The uplift goals associated with the middle class exemplify Du Bois’ theory of the Talented Tenth and the need of the educated, upper classes to uplift the masses. Nix’s sermons also promoted middle-class behavior through his promotion of family values, education, and proper behavior.

**Elite Class/Assimilationist Churches**

With the emergence of an educated and elite class in the late nineteenth century, some upper-class African Americans chose an assimilationist stance and affiliated with churches historically attended by whites—Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopal, Congregational, and Roman Catholic—that presented “sophisticated” services in contrast to the traditional black folk church service. These services, as espoused by Levine, were “confined to congregational or choral performances of standard hymns of selected spirituals or ‘anthems.'”

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181 Spear, *Black Chicago*, 94. Drake and Cayton claim the upper classes were Congregationalists, Episcopalians, or Presbyterians, *Black Metropolis*, 530.

182 Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 188.
One member of the Catholic Church stated, “No wonder white people laugh at colored people and their peculiar ways of worship. Just look at these storefronts. I don’t believe in shouting and never did. I like a church that is quiet. I just can’t appreciate clowning in a church.” The traditional black churches, which focused on “sin and salvation,” did not appeal to “sophisticated Negroes.” As one high-status person remarked,

I’m not in favor of these store-front churches. I think they give all churches a bad name. From what I know of them, the store-fronts are composed of people who have very little education, and their type of service is the kind that has made our people a laughing-stock for years. I may be too severe, but I think that everything people do ought to be done in an intelligent way.

Some in the upper ranks looked down upon those affiliated with storefront churches, which were usually in the poorer neighborhoods, and made assumptions about their education status. The services in the lower-class churches were criticized as “jumping-jack religion,” due to their physicalized emotional expressions. These assumptions are similar to Daniel Payne’s admonishments to “heathenish” dancing and its associations with “primitive” religion. These upper-class church members associated storefront churches with “primitive” religion as well, and considered their behavior the antithesis of uplift. Genester Nix commented on the elite-class church members in her father’s church, who she called the “Jack ‘n Jills,” as a “stand-offish” group who had their nose up to the lower classes. Elwood Nix claims that his father chose the Baptist faith rather than one of the elite-class churches such as Episcopalian because, “Episcopal is boring. . . they just talk. They quote the Bible, but they just talk, they don’t act. They don’t paint a picture of any sermons, it’s is like reading to you. . . . you just sit there and listen.”

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other words, the elite church sermons did not express the emotionalism associated with the black folk. Although Nix’s congregants were lower-, middle-, and elite-class African Americans, he chose to affiliate with the vocal traditions associated with the lower classes and the rural South. We must remember that Nix was also a southern migrant who was a minister’s son, raised on his parents’ farm in Texas, and schooled in Kentucky. These influences must have been a strong influence on his religious and musical heritage.

1920s Performance Traditions in Chicago’s Black Churches Affiliated by Class

A study by the Chicago Commission of Race Relations after the 1919 riot revealed that the racial environment created an environment in which blacks were isolated and felt ignored by the dominant society. The study determined that this environment created an “increasing sensitiveness to slights, and keeping Negroes forever on the defensive. Extreme expressions, unintelligible to those outside the Negro group, are a natural result of this isolation. The process of thought by which these opinions are reached are, by virtue of this very isolation, concealed from outsiders.” As blacks became more isolated and discarded onto the fringes of society, according to the Chicago Commission on Race Relations, their need to express their bound-up emotions increased. An educator interviewed for the post-riot Chicago study noted the importance of singing as a way to alleviate the pressures associated with living a life of double consciousness:

Many white men of high intellectual ability and keen discernment have mistaken the Negro silence for contentment, his facial expression for satisfaction at prevailing conditions, and his songs and jovial air for happiness. But not always so. These are his methods of bearing his troubles and keeping his soul sweet under seeming wrongs. In the absence of a spokesman or means of communication with the whites over imagined grievances, he has brightened his countenance, smiled and sung to give ease to his mind.


188 The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, The Negro in Chicago, 486.
The vocal tendencies in African-American churches in 1920s Chicago fell across class boundaries, with the lower-class Holiness and some Baptist church members typically singing spirituals with uninhibited freedom of expression, in contrast to the upper-class Episcopal and Congregational churches whose members sang from hymnals such as those found “in dignified white churches.”¹⁸⁹ The “noisy” Chicago churches were Pentecostal, store-front Baptists, Holiness, and other store-front churches, and some Baptist churches with physical church buildings, including Ebenezer Baptist and Pilgrim Baptist;¹⁹⁰ the churches with only occasional demonstrative interjections and behavior included the large, mixed, old-line Baptist churches, such as Olivet and Bethesda, and Church of Christ, Colored Methodist Episcopal (CME), and African Methodist Episcopal (AME); the “quiet” churches of the elite class included Protestant Episcopal,¹⁹¹ Evangelical Lutheran, Congregational, and Presbyterian.

**Black Minister by Class**

The educational level of the minister was also a determining factor in the musical repertoire, the vocal tendencies of the congregants, and the type of sermon presented. The uneducated ministers typically chose Scriptural themes, while the educated ministers, such as at Olivet Baptist, attempted to appeal to “two classes of listeners—the educated and sophisticated members of the congregation as well as those who love freedom in expressing their feelings”¹⁹²—through delivering “intellectual” sermons that were typically read from a script and contained eloquent text and delivery. However, some ministers in mixed churches switched midway through the sermon to an impassioned delivery with a higher pitch level and included shouts

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¹⁹⁰ In the early 1930s, Thomas A. Dorsey introduced his gospel blues at Ebenezer Baptist church and later at Pilgrim Baptist church. See Harris, *Gospel Blues*, 191-200.


and singing. They might begin with intellectual preaching, then transition to emotional preaching with shouting and congregational responses. Most of the educated ministers in the middle-class or mixed churches used a natural tone of voice and delivered practical sermons, in contrast to the lower-class uneducated ministers who prompted emotional outbursts from congregants. Because the lower-class ministers were typically uneducated, they usually presented an improvised-type of sermon, rather than one written-out, and depended on the power of emotion and Bible stories to convey their messages. This type of preaching is a reminder of the early black preachers, such as Black Harry, who preached from memory and with vigor. Again, Nix demonstrates that he is the exception to the rule, in that he was an educated minister but did not read from a script or use “eloquent” language in his sermons, but instead improvised his sermons from bullet-points. He often spoke in a vernacular dialect with impassioned emotion, and in his earlier sermons, relayed Bible stories, while simultaneously offering practical solutions to his congregants, especially in his later sermons. Although he was educated, his homiletical techniques would have appealed to lower-class congregants.

The assimilationist-type/upper-class churches typically did not include verbal responses from congregants and the minister spoke in a natural tone of voice with texts considered “practical.” These ministers tended to associate demonstrative behavior and audible responses with the lower class. For example, one minister claimed, “If I were talking to a bunch of farmers who had been out in the field all day shouting to each other [read: lower class], I couldn’t get their attention by a calm, quiet address. Yet for my congregation the best approach is the calm.” Other “quiet” ministers associated shouting with irrational behavior: “Shouting is a form of emotional insanity. . . . People who shout the most are often the very devils afterwards.

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They go from heaven to hell in a short time.”¹⁹⁴ Spear claims, “many sophisticated upper- and middle-class Negroes were no longer content with traditional Negro religion and sought other forms of religious expression.”¹⁹⁵ Again, Nix is the exception to this rule because his congregation did include verbal responses, and, instead of speaking in a natural tone of voice, he shouted, moaned, and included other vocal deliveries associated with folk traditions, despite the content of his sermons.

**Reverend Nix’s Church**

Categorizations such as these are difficult because, in the case of Nix, some do not fit comfortably into the three main categories of lower, middle/mixed, or upper class. Although Nix used vocal traditions typically associated with the lower-class storefront churches, such as shouting, moaning, and falling out, his congregation was composed of lower-, middle-, and elite-class congregants. Genester Nix confirms, “in all his churches he did have the average as well as the elite. He had doctors and lawyers in his congregation.”¹⁹⁶ However, while his musical and vocal tendencies would have appealed to the lower classes, his sermon texts would have appealed to the elite classes and their aspirations towards uplift and advancing the race. The most notable difference between Nix’s church and the mixed type of church was in his musical choices. Nix sang only spirituals and traditional hymns, while the typical middle-class mixed church sang a combination of anthems and spirituals as well as classical music. Nix appealed to the middle-class sensibilities associated with self-help and the elite class of the Talented Tenth. Genester remembers, “Every church he went to he emphasized education,”¹⁹⁷ which was one of

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¹⁹⁴ Sutherland, “An Analysis of Negro Churches in Chicago,” 126.

¹⁹⁵ Spear, *Black Chicago*, 93.


the goals of racial uplift. However, despite his sometimes-patronizing attitude towards the lower classes, Elwood insists that his father was a person with a big heart, who helped everyone he met. Rev. Nix’s desire to help others was an inherent part of his good nature, not the result of an elitist attitude. Genester remembers the kindness her father showed to everyone, regardless of their status or class. “He did that all through his life because I can remember . . . he was sitting on the porch and a drunk came down the street, [and he said], ‘Oh Professor, how you doing?’ He would give them some self-worth. . . . Everyone was ‘Professor’ to him.”

Because Nix carried on black traditional vocalities in his preaching and singing but also spoke of the need for advancing the race through practical means, I consider his church and preaching style to be of a hybrid sort rather than one of the established old-line, mixed, middle-class churches of Chicago. Nix was an educated minister, yet he improvised his sermons and encouraged shouts, moans, congregational responses, and “falling out,” typical of the lower-class churches of the time. He utilized the chanted sermon, which had evolved from African-American preachers in the late 1700s, and only sang folk spirituals or hymns rather than arranged spirituals or classical music. Nix privileged sound and utilized his voice as an instrument of power to communicate with his listeners and congregants, as had early, illiterate African-American preachers. His voice can also be considered a hybrid voice in that he carried forth and preserved traditional black vocalities through the commodified medium of the phonograph, achieving celebrity status in competition with the secular music of the day.

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CHAPTER 4
TRADITIONS ASSOCIATED WITH BLACK VOCALITIES

African-American vocal characteristics that were carried forth from the era of slavery were closely linked to notions of African-American folk tradition and cultural identity. Through extensive research of primary historical and secondary source documents, I have identified the characteristics that were mentioned most frequently and therefore likely assumed to have been commonplace during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Correlations between concepts of traditional black vocalities extend from historical documents from the nineteenth century to contemporary secondary sources.¹ In other words, many of the same vocal characteristics and performance practices that were mentioned in historical documents are addressed and categorized in contemporary documents. While not inclusive of every document, the following list comprises a summary of the most frequently mentioned expressions and techniques that came to define traditional black vocalities, including singing, spoken, and chanted performance practices of sacred singing and preaching. While African-American voices are frequently described in essentialist terms throughout the literature, the present research is not meant to essentialize all African Americans as naturally possessing the same vocal traits, but rather to identify a common set of vocal practices that were linked closely with the ideas (positive and negative) of an African-American folk tradition.

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The vocalizations typically associated with African-American vocal traditions include shouts, moans, calls, cries, whoops, holllers, the singing of folk spirituals, the use of dialect or Black English (BE), improvisation, call-and-response, use of the pentatonic scale, bent notes, “blue” notes, loud vocal volume, vocal percussiveness, heterophonic textures, use of the entire gamut of the voice, gravelly, gravelly, “dirty,” or “throaty” vocal timbre, “shrill, hard, full-throated, strained, raspy, and/or nasal tones, with frequent exploitation of falsetto, growling,” and speech-song, also known as chanting or intoning. I have created four main headings to more easily categorize these vocal characteristics: 1) Vocal Performance Practices and Sounds in Singing or Chanting, 2) Group Expressions, 3) Language and Text, and 4) Speech-like Song. Vocal style in both secular and sacred music, as Thomas Brothers posits, functions as a “deeply rooted marker of cultural identity.” The purpose of this categorization is to suggest which vocalities were considered as a part of vocal traditions and if Nix employed these traditions. I have found that the vocal traditions that were commonly associated with folk repertoire of the spirituals are also (mostly) present in the chanted sermon. We must remember that the spiritual and chanted sermon were both present in the nineteenth century, possibly sooner, and could have influenced each other. Nix chose to use some, but not all of the following vocal characteristics linked to black folk tradition, demonstrating the diverse tendencies of black vocalities.

1. Vocal Performance Practices, Qualities, and Sounds in Singing or Chanting
   a. Shouts
   b. Moans
   c. Calls/Cries/Whoops/Hollers
   d. Loudness/Dynamics
   e. Vocal Embellishments
   f. Pitch Inflections
      i. Bent notes/Blue Notes
      ii. Slides/Scoops
   g. Timbre
      i. Gravelly/Throaty
      ii. Shrill/Nasal

2. Group Expressions
   a. Participatory Performance
   b. Call-and-Response
   c. Heterophony
3. Language and Text
   a. Dialect/Black English (BE)
   b. Sacred Texts
      i. Folk Spirituals
4. Speech-like Song/Chanting
   a. Rhythm
   b. Riffs and Repetition
   c. Improvisation
   d. Pitch Choices
      i. Pentatonic scale

**Vocal Performance Practices, Qualities, and Sounds in Singing or Chanting**

**Shouts**

Shouts and shouting refer both to ecstatic behavior as a spontaneous expression of Spirit and to the vocal utterance associated with increased volume. Examples of ecstatic behavior include a report of a church service from 1926 that explained, “there is one man who shouts by leaping from one bench to another over the heads of his fellow worshipers.” Other shouters explain, “I shout because there is a fire on the inside. When I witness the truth, the fire moves on the main altar of my heart, and I can’t keep still.” Another adds, “Shouting is but the outward manifestation of an inward joy.” Shouting was specifically associated with “getting in the Spirit” or feeling the Spirit and expressing one’s innermost feelings in physical actions. Shouts in the black folk church service tended to go hand-in-hand with “getting happy” and “falling out.” Getting happy was an expression of feeling the Spirit and was physicalized through singing, dancing, shouting, and other physical movements. Elwood Nix recalled a memory of his mother

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3 The “ring shout” was also a known as the “holy dance” and is not the same as shouts or shouting. The ring shout was a dance in which participants formed a circle and moved in a counter-clockwise manner while shuffling their feet. See Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 38.

getting happy when he was a baby: “When she started in church one time when Father was preaching and she got happy and she had me in her arms and next thing you know I am flying through the air and a deacon had to catch me.”5 Shouting and other physicalized emotional religious expressions were often looked down upon by those in the upper-middle class churches. One member of a large Baptist church in Chicago commented on the “frenzy” associated with the lower-class churches:

They run up and down the aisles shaking and yelling, overcome as it were with emotion. I get happy to the point of wanting to cry and sometimes do, but I have known the sisters and brothers to become so happy that persons around them are in actual danger of getting knocked in the face. They might even get their glasses broken sometimes if the ‘nurses’ didn’t watch out for them.6

Emotional expression was and is one way to “escape from a wretched condition”7 of discrimination and injustice throughout the span of African-American religious traditions. The experience of getting happy allows one to forget one’s troubles, and feel the spirit of God, which “makes you cry . . . sometimes makes you pray; sometimes makes you moan. . . .”8 My research informants explained that emotional expressivity is an essential quality in African-American vocal performances, which they believe to represent an authentic outpouring of emotion from deeply embedded pain, stemming from a long history of oppression. Soul, in Elwood Nix’s opinion, is a result of long-term repression of African Americans that results in an “authentic” sound that “comes from within,” which can only be acquired through “living it,” by being

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6 Drake and Cayton, Black Metropolis, 672.
7 Pipes, Say Amen, Brother! 77.
8 Pipes, Say Amen, Brother! 85.
exposed to oppression over a long period of time. Elwood contends that white people “can’t make the sound like the black people . . . [because] they just don’t have the soul.”

Genester Nix’s experience in her father’s church was one that allowed for an articulation, either physically or vocally, of the pains of life:

> Emotion, and you know, when you have problems at home, regardless to whether they were financial or marital, or whatever the problem was, you come to church for relief. And for getting consolation. And when a preacher preaches, it has a certain effect on you. Black people are spiritually-minded anyway. I mean, it’s in our soul, it’s in our blood; we feel the Spirit easily. And it probably comes from our background. Being treated so badly and so forth. And so, when we feel the Spirit, we have to let it out, we have to give debt to it and whether it’s falling out or whether it’s getting happy or dancing or jumping, you do all of that. And they did that a lot in those days. You don’t hear too much of it nowadays. People are more reserved. But back then, that’s when you gave way to it . . . Black people love to give vent to their feelings. They don’t hold back.

Genester differentiates between merely talking back to the minister versus shouting:

> Shouting is getting up and jumping up and down, turning, twisting, crying, hollering, falling out, letting the spirit hit you, so much so that you are oblivious to your surroundings at times. People used to do a lot of this in past days, especially women. It seems as if they let their home life affect them to the extent that they let everything go in church. Most women back then were controlled by their husbands and felt relief in the church.

Similar to the plantation church, Nix’s church was an outlet for the pouring of emotions and was the place that allowed congregants to express themselves without judgment from the outside world. Although falling out was supposed to be an expression of Spirit, which led one to physically collapse from the emotional intensity of the sermon, Genester admits that some of the church women had a tendency of falling out into the arms of her handsome brother, Theophilus. However, for the most part, falling out was a result of the spiritual experience.

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9 Elwood Nix, interview by author, Philadelphia, May 24, 2017
11 Genester Nix, email message to author, March 25, 2018.
The vocalizations of the shout served not only as a release of emotions, but also as a spiritual process of salvation. A slave from a Louisiana plantation remarked about being rebuked for her vocalizations: “He didn’t want us shoutin’ and moanin’ all day ‘long, but you gotta shout and you gotta moan if you wants to be saved.” Levine contends, “For many slaves shouting was both a compelling personal need and a religious requirement.” As discussed previously, religious conversion depended upon feeling and experience, and shouting contributed to the feelings of one’s need to be saved.

Historical documents explain how shouting often began as a participatory activity. For example, during the slavery era, enslaved individuals would gather outdoors after the dinner hour to talk and sing. “Somebody would start humming an old hymn, and then the next-door neighbor would pick it up. In this way it would finally get around to every house, and then the music started. Soon everybody would be gathered together, and such singing! It wouldn’t be long before some of the slaves got happy and started to shouting.” In Murphy’s study of African-American singing in the late eighteenth century, she explains, “suddenly they all began to sing and pat with me, and quickly adapted their different versions [of the song she was singing] to me. They lost no time in getting happy. They all jumped up and down in a perfect ecstasy of delight, and shouted, ‘I feel like de Holy Spirit is right on my hade!’” One of the criticisms

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12 Elizabeth Ross Hite, quoted in Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 41.

13 Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 43.


from upper-class church members in the 1920s was that shouting and its associated physical activity were a throw-back to slavery days.\textsuperscript{16}

Early discourses also refer to shouting as a vocal utterance with increased volume, or the shout-as-vocalization, such as Elizabeth Kilham’s discourse from 1870: “In the pauses between the hymns, some brother or sister give their ‘experience,’ always talking in a scream, and as if crying; a natural tone of voice not being considered suitable for such occasions; while the others slap their hands, stamp, and shout, ‘yes, yes;’ ‘dat’s so;’ [and] ‘praise de Lord.’”\textsuperscript{17} Another account by Mary Boykin Chesnut, who wrote from her South Carolina plantation during the Civil War, describes the voices of her slaves during a praise-house church service: “The Negroes sobbed and shouted and swayed backward and forward, some with aprons to their eyes, most of them clapping their hands and responding in shrill tones: ‘Yes, God!’ ‘Jesus!’ ‘Savior!’ ‘Bless de Lord, amen,’ etc. It was a little too exciting for me. I would very much have liked to shout, too.”\textsuperscript{18} These accounts of shouting note a “shrill tone,” not in a “natural tone of voice,” and a “screaming” voice, insinuating that the vocal production occurs in the upper register of the voice with higher pitches, and was uttered with a loud volume. In this sense, the shout-as-vocalization suggests an accent or a quick expulsion of a loud sound with shrill timbre.

Shouting can create a participatory performance by the minister and the congregation together. As the minister builds tension in his sermon, the congregation shouts their enthusiasm with words, such as “Amen!” and “Preach it!” creating an even higher level of excitement that often sends practitioners into the aisles for dancing and other physical movements. Elwood Nix remembered that as a child in his father’s church, “they really hollered and screamed and

\textsuperscript{16} Drake and Cayton, \textit{Black Metropolis}, 674.

\textsuperscript{17} Kilham, “Sketches in Color: Fourth,” 305.

\textsuperscript{18} Mary Boykin Chesnut, quoted in Lawrence Levine, \textit{Black Culture and Black Consciousness}, 28.
shouted,”\textsuperscript{19} which was a tool Nix used to build up the emotional excitement and spiritual connection in his sermons. “In those days,” Genester explains, “ministers preached differently than today’s preachers. They preyed on the congregations’ emotions a lot. This was to get them feeling the Spirit to talk back to the preachers as well as to shout. In some churches, this kind of spirit lasted for hours which prolonged the services.”\textsuperscript{20} The participatory aspect of shouting between the preacher and congregants functions as call-and-response and a continuous flow of action/reaction throughout the sermon dialogue.

\textbf{Moans}

The moan also has a dual purpose and function. It is not only a vocal inflection, but also serves as an index of African-American musical tradition. I contend that the moan takes on different meanings according to its context, but is nonetheless a vocal practice closely associated with traditional black vocalities, regardless of the genre, due to its deep-seated history in both sacred and secular contexts. Moaning has been mentioned as one of the primary vocalizations used in the early black folk church; the moan and moaning are also associated with the secular traditions of the blues; and the moan functions as an expressive device used by African-American ministers and an integral part of the chanted sermon. The moan is thus an intertextual element used in multiple genres (sacred and secular) associated with black vocal traditions. While the moan and moaning have been frequently addressed as a common feature in the music and preaching of African Americans, little commentary exists that reveals the actual properties of the moan.

\textsuperscript{19} Elwood Nix, interview by author, Philadelphia, May 24, 2017.

\textsuperscript{20} Genester Nix, email message to author, February 24, 2018.
Sacred Moans

Multiple accounts from white travelers and visitors to African-American churches from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century noted the presence of the moan. Paul Svin’in, a Russian diplomat who visited an African-American Methodist church in Philadelphia sometime between 1811-1813, described the black voices he heard as “wild,” and “piercing,” in “loud, shrill monotone,” with “howling and groaning,” by “sad, heart-rending voices.” 21 Ernest Abbott’s report in 1901 described a prayer meeting in Atlanta in which the congregants’ moaning “resembled nothing so much as the lowing of a great herd of cattle.” 22 In The Souls of Black Folk, Du Bois describes a black church service: “The people moaned and fluttered, and then the gaunt-cheeked brown woman beside me suddenly leaped straight into the air and shrieked like a lost soul, while around about came wail and groan and outcry, and a scene of human passion such as I had never conceived before.” 23 Natalie Curtis Burlin described the vocalizations she heard in an early twentieth-century black church service in the South, which came “from the depths of some ‘sinner’s’ remorse and imploring came a pitiful little plea, a real Negro ‘moan,’ sobbed in musical cadence.” 24 The evidence from Svin’in, Abbott, Du Bois, and Burlin suggest the moan as a sort of intoned cry, groan, or wail sounding in anguish as the result of spiritual passion and/or emotional pain. “For people with a certain background,” as Mitchell explains, “it appears that a moaned message is more deeply spiritual than an unintoned one.

21 Pavel Petrovich Svin’in, Picturesque United States of America, 1811, 1812, 1813, being a memoir on Paul Svin’in, Russian Diplomatic Officer, Artist, and Author, Containing Copious Excerpts from his Account of his Travels in America with Fifty-Two Reproductions of Water Colors in his Own Sketch-Book (New York: W. E. Rudge, 1930), 20.


Although this is not necessarily true, tone does signal a kind of affirmation of Black identity which is often used of the Holy Spirit as a catalyst for a deep religious experience.”25 The musical qualities of the moan demonstrate that resonation in the voice was preferred to the spoken word for the spiritual experience.

Folklorist and anthropologist, Harold Courlander, discussed the moan as a “noteworthy” part of the African-American vocal tradition that was featured in “religious songs, worksongs, old-style blues, and field cries.” However, he contrasts Svinin’s and Burlin’s statements and explains that “‘Moaning’ does not imply grief or anguish; on the contrary, it is a blissful or ecstatic rendition of a song, characterized by full and free exploitation of melodic variation and improvisation, sometimes with an open threat [throat], sometimes with closed lips to create a humming effect.”26 Burlin’s description of the moan as “tortured” conflicts with Courlander’s explanation of it as “blissful.” Possibly it was both, depending on the circumstance, and also an expression of deep emotion, such as that described by Du Bois. Jon Michael Spencer contends that “the moan and hum express that which cannot be articulated,” yet Spirit is capable of discerning between “inarticulate speech (glossa) and grants interpretation of the same.”27 In Spencer’s view, the moan is release of deep-seated emotions that can be easily interpreted by Spirit.

Gospel-music composer and bluesman, Thomas A. Dorsey, aka “Georgia Tom,” reflected on the moan, stating that it “is just about known only to the black folk.” Dorsey’s comment suggests cultural “ownership” of the moan and its deep alignment with African-American vocal traditions. Dorsey’s biographer, Michael Harris, adds that moaning “may be considered a set of

performance practices, usually embellishments, that were applied to any of the genres of religious song that blacks then sang.” The non-verbal quality of the moan gave it power over words, “prompted by ‘something from within.’”28 Dorsey’s moaned version of “Amazing Grace,” includes melismas, grace notes, and other embellishments (Example 4-1).


As is evident in Dorsey’s moan, the humming quality and addition of embellishments extend the linear space from the worded version of the song. From the comments and musical transcriptions, we can speculate that the moan was a hummed sound with extended or augmented rhythmic and melodic embellishments.

Moaning was often associated with the chanted sermon of the black folk church, as Miles Mark Fisher explains:

Preaching, or the utterance of a leader of worship, has occupied a unique place. This element [was] obtained from the beginning of spirituals. Preaching to the black masses has in many cases remained a singsong affair with a deep guttural accompaniment like in “a-weeping or –moaning.” It is interesting to note that those independent Negro preachers who can “moan” their gospel, a method now dignified by its resemblance to the intonation and chanting of Roman Catholicism and to the head resonance taught in public speaking, are the pastors of the larger and more influential churches of the black masses, while those who intellectualize the gospel must remain in smaller churches, if at all, or in classrooms denouncing the administrations of independent Negro churches.29


Fisher’s assessment not only identifies moaning with the spirituals, but also with the chanted sermon, familiar in black folk churches. His reference of the chanting of the Roman Catholic church implies the use of monotone and repetitiveness pitches. However, this type of chanting is differentiated from both sung moans, which include melismas and multiple pitches, and moans in sermons, which are chanted over repetitive pitches without the addition of melismas.

Elwood Nix describes the preacher’s moan, such as his father’s, as a melodicized utterance, but not necessarily a sung utterance. Rather, in the style of the speech-song vocalizations of the chanted sermon, Elwood claims, “They hold the syllables longer and hum, like a hum, like when he says “How long…. How long…” [he holds the vowel out for an extended amount of time]. Do you hear the humming in my voice?” According to Elwood, the preacher’s moan is an elongation of a word or vowel on a static pitch for the sake of emphasis.

In a metered score, the moan could be analyzed as an augmentation of a word or syllable. Coulander concurs with Elwood’s description of the moan as a “humming effect,” sometimes with closed lips. In Jeanette Robinson Murphy’s 1899 study of African-American singing, she emphasizes vocal characteristics and stylist traits that were necessary for one to sing “negro melodies.” She necessitates that a singer “must also intersperse his singing with peculiar humming sounds – ‘hum-m-m-m.’” These sounds were apparently moans. Drake and Cayton explain the moan, as used by a lower-class minister in a Chicago church: “It is possible to find preachers who merely repeat phrases over and over with a rising and falling inflection of the voice, or who take one word such as ‘Oh-h-h-h’ and sing it as a chant, with the congregation

31 Courlander, Negro Folk Songs, 25.
shouting all the while.” The extension of “Oh-h-h-h” implies a moan. Both Murphy’s and Drake and Cayton’s examples provide evidence of the augmentation of the word or syllable to produce a moan.

Secular Moans

The moan in the secular setting of the blues also presents two differing qualities; one associated with meaning, the other a vocalization with a distinct sound quality. Meaning in the blues moan often referred to sexualized themes or broken-hearted, unrequited love, while the sound of the blues moan was consistent with the sound of the sacred moan.

A survey of Dixon, Godrich, and Rye’s *Blues & Gospel Records: 1890-1943* reveals over eighty titles recorded between 1923-1941, mostly blues, which include “moan” or “moaning” in the title. Of those titles, there are forty-seven recorded between April 1927 and March 1931, the same years that Nix recorded his sermons. The fact that the word “moan” was prevalent in recordings during the years of Nix’s recording career provides evidence that the moan was a well-known vocal feature in both African-American sacred and secular recordings.

Representative recordings of blues from the 1920s with the word moan in the title are listed in Table 4-1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blind Lemon Jefferson</td>
<td>“That Black Snake Moan”</td>
<td>Okeh, OK 8455; Jazz Classic, JCI 511; Jazz Society, JSo AA513</td>
<td>March 14, 1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furry Lewis</td>
<td>“Sweet Papa Moan”</td>
<td>Vocalion, VO 1116</td>
<td>April 20, 1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kid Cole</td>
<td>“Sixth Street Moan”</td>
<td>Vocalion, VO 1186</td>
<td>May 28, 1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma Rainey</td>
<td>“Deep Moaning Blues”</td>
<td>Paramount, Pm 12706, 14011; Jazz Collector (British), JC L1</td>
<td>June 12, 1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tampa Red and Georgia Tom</td>
<td>“Chicago Moan Blues”</td>
<td>Vocalion, VO 1244</td>
<td>January 9, 1929</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-1. Blues songs with moans.

Table 4-1. Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tampa Red</td>
<td>“Moanin’ Heart Blues”</td>
<td>Vocalion, VO 1484; Supertone Spt S2230</td>
<td>February 7, 1930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tampa Red</td>
<td>“Chicago Moan Blues”</td>
<td>Vocalion, VO 1484</td>
<td>February 7, 1930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tampa Red and Georgia Tom</td>
<td>“I. C. Moan Blues”</td>
<td>Vocalion, VO 1538; American Record Company, ARC 7-03-73; Conqueror, Cq 8860</td>
<td>Mid-June 1930</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The lyrics to Jefferson’s “That Black Snake Moan” link the vocal technique to sexual physicality:

I ain’t got no mama now.
I ain’t got no mama now.
She told me late last night, “You don’t need no mama no how.”

Mmm, black snake crawlin’ in my room.
Mmm, black snake crawlin’ in my room.
And some pretty mama had better come an’ get this black snake soon.

While Jefferson’s moan refers to sexual ecstasy or sexual desires, Ma Rainey’s “Deep Moaning Blues,” (Paramount, Pm 12706) recorded June 12, 1928, links the moan to feelings of being “down-hearted,” typical in blues lyrics associated with lost or unrequited love. Ma Rainey’s song not only demonstrates the meaning of the moan associated with heartbreak, but also the vocalized traits of the moan. The entire chorus section of Rainey’s song is moaned through her use of hums on “hmmm” and slides in the melody. Ma Rainey’s moan was also hummed but vocalized with distinct pitches.

Hmmm, hmmm
Hmmm, hmmm
Hmmm, hmmm
Hmmm, hmmm

My bell rang this morning, didn’t know which way to go.
My bell rang this morning, didn’t know which way to go.
I had the blues so bad, I sit right down on my floor.

I felt like going on the mountain, jumping over in the sea.
I felt like going on the mountain, jumping over in the sea.
When my Daddy stay out late, he don’t care a thing for me.

The transcription of Ma Rainey’s “Deep Moaning Blues” (Example 4-2) illustrates the singer’s use of slides between notes (using the glissando figure), scoops up to a note, also called a “bent note,” (using the bent arrow symbol) and blue notes, in this case the Ab in the fourth measure of the treble clef.


The lyrical focus of Rainey’s song centers on love lost or a love that “treats me mean,” causing pain and heartache, with the moan functioning as an index of emotional, romantic pain. Thomas A. Dorsey mentions that he wrote “the low moaning type” of blues, which was typically associated with romantic heartbreak. The blues singers of the 1920s were most likely familiar with the sacred context and sound of the moan, and employed similar vocal features in their blues repertoire, such as Rainey’s moans, to emulate the sad, forlorn feeling associated with the moan in the early black church services.

Though Blind Willie Johnson’s “Dark Was the Night – Cold Was the Ground” (Columbia, Co 14303-D) (Example 4-3), recorded December 3, 1927, does not mention the word “moan” in the title, the entirety of the piece consists of moaning throughout.

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The transcription of Johnson’s moans demonstrates a similarity with Rainey’s moans, in that the blues moans consist of hums, slides between notes, and scoops up to notes (bent notes). A comparison of Dorsey’s sacred moan and the blues moans reveals differences in the use of embellishments in the sacred moan. However, both types of moans feature hums, slides, and scoops.

The distinctions between the secular broken-heart moan and the sacred spiritual-ecstasy moan were sometimes blurred through the close relation of musical characteristics in the blues, the folk spiritual, and the chanted sermon. Advertisements for race records in the 1920s, placed by white-owned record labels, frequently mentioned the secular blues and sacred sermons together in the same ad, despite objections to the blues as the “devil’s music” by the black religious folk. An advertisement for blues singer Furry Lewis’ “Sweet Papa Moan,” in the Chicago Defender (Figure 4-4) places Rev. Nix’s “Black Diamond Express to Hell,” parts I and II, under the “moan” rubric, linking it to both sacred and secular genres and African-American vocal traditions.  

Moans, along with other vocal characteristics associated with African-American voices, were also used for marketing purposes as a means to demonstrate authenticity of black vocal traditions. An advertisement for one new blues release emphasized several vocal gestures: “Here They Are—Moanin’, Whinin’, Shoutin’ Blues.” The association of specific vocal gestures with the religious traditions of the black church clearly helps establish the blues as an “authentic” African-American genre meant to appeal to the sensibilities of the black masses, and marketed as a commodity to black audiences. While ministers in the Baptist tradition demonized the blues and jazz for their association with worldly matters, using the word “moan” in advertisements for both religious and secular music functioned to conceptually link these two arenas of African-

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American music in the 1920s as it simultaneously pointed to the vernacular vocal traditions associated with the “down-home” folk of the South.

**Calls, Cries, Whoops, Hollers**

Although calls, cries, whoops, and hollers are not present in Nix’s chanted sermon, they possibly influenced its vocal utterances and served as a precursor, and are thus worth describing here as part of the Africa-American vocal traditions. These secular traditions were used by enslaved African Americans in the fields of rural communities and by street vendors selling their wares in urban communities. Sometimes calls and cries were known as “hollers,” as in “corn field hollers,” or as “whooping.” Whooping is also the term used to describe the minister’s melodicizing of the chanted sermon, creating another possible correlation between the two genres. Courlander explains:

> According to the testimony of a number of older informants, calls and cries were used in the old days in the corn and cotton fields, in the woods, and on the rivers, wherever men and women worked. There were calls to communicate messages of all kinds – to bring people in from the fields, to summon them to work, to attract the attention of a girl in the distance, to signal hunting dogs, or simply to make one’s presence known. There were still others, more aptly described as cries, that were simply a form of self-expression, a vocalization of some emotion. . . . It might be filled with exuberance or melancholy. It might consist of a long ‘hoh-hoo,’ stretched out and embellished with intricate ornamentation of a kind virtually impossible to notate.37

Calls and hollers are reminiscent of what Courlander describes as “African signal drumming,” which was based on “simulation, through rising and falling inflection, of speech tones” and could have been used as communicative devices,38 not usually understood by white overlords.

Courlander provides an example of a call (Example 4-4).

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37 Courlander, *Negro Folk Songs*, 81.

Example 4-4. Courlander’s example of a call. Transcription by Courlander, *Negro Folk Songs*, 83.

The ornamentation and improvisatory nature of field calls were also heard in “prayers, moans, spirituals, blues, and solo worksongs,” essentially transferring them from one tradition and incorporating them into another.

The communicative function of calls and cries implies the use of a loud dynamic due to the volume needed to carry the sound for distances over fields or through noisy urban streets. As calls and cries were originally a means of outdoor communication, it is possible that vocal power was the result of the external environment. Because Nix grew up on his parents’ farm in Texas, it is possible that he developed and used his voice to communicate across the fields, thus granting him the ability to project his voice loudly.

**Loudness**

Several sources that witnessed singing by African Americans in the nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries identified loudness itself as a common feature among black vocalists. In the early nineteenth century, George Pinckard, on his journeys to the West Indies in 1816, remarked on the singing of enslaved Africans he encountered on a slave ship: “Their song was a wild yell, devoid of all softness and harmony, and loudly chanted in harsh monotony.” The qualities of songs being “loudly chanted” in “harsh monotony” are similar to the chanted sermon’s


predilection toward loud enunciations around a somewhat static pitch center, thus suggesting the possible influences to its sound. The preference for loud church services was noted by a nineteenth-century Baptist preacher, “Uncle Jack” of Nottaway County, Virginia, who expressed his disdain for “black noise,” stating, “You noisy Christians remind me of the little branches (of streams) after a heavy rain. They are soon full, then noisy, and as soon empty. I would much rather see you like the broad, deep river, which is quiet, because it is broad and deep.”

Jack’s “proper” decorum was noted by a white Presbyterian minister, William White, who in 1859 wrote admiringly of Jack’s “silence” as a symbol of his stature. In the same year, a letter written from Rev. R. Q. Mallard to Mrs. Mary S. Mallard describes the vocal tendencies at a revival meeting of slaves: “The whole congregation kept up one loud monotonous strain, interrupted by various sounds: groans and screams and clapping hands. . . . one woman specially under the influence of the excitement . . . accompanying the whole by a series of short, sharp shrieks.”

In the first book of Negro spirituals, *Slave Songs of the United States*, published in 1867, its authors described the black stevedores who loaded West Indian vessels who sang “with a volume of voice that reached a square or two away.”

In 1870 at a church service in Richmond, an anonymous writer, presumably white, described how the service began with a hymn followed by foot-stomping, “until the noise was deafening; and as the excitement increased, one and another would spring from their seats, and jump up and down, uttering shriek after shriek; while from all

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parts of the house came cries of, ‘Hallelujah;’ ‘Glory to God;’ ‘Jes’ now Lord, come jes’ now;’ ‘Amen;’ and occasionally a prolonged, shrill whoop, like nothing earthly, unless it be some savage war-cry.” W. E. B. Du Bois commented on a church service he attended in the late nineteenth century, in which

the Frenzy or ‘Shouting’... was the last essential of Negro religion and the one more devoutly believed in than all the rest. It varied in expression from the silent rapt countenance or the low murmur and moan to the mad abandon of physical fervor, - the stamping, shrieking, and shouting, the rushing to and fro and wild waving of arms, the weeping and laughing, the vision and the trance. ... These were the characteristics of Negro religious life as developed up to the time of Emancipation. 

Du Bois’ comments infer contrasting dynamics that ranged from “silent” to the “mad abandon,” of noise and physical activity. McIlhenny, who attended black church services during Reconstruction in Louisiana as a child with his “Mammy” described the “great volumes of voices when the hymns were sung, and the activity of both men and women in jumping up and down when in the frenzy of ‘getting religion’ and the jumping about of those who had been baptized when the ‘spirit’ struck them as they came up from the water.” 

The consistent descriptions of loud singing or “shrieking” in these discourses suggest that both black and white observers interpreted loud volume as an important characteristic of black vocal traditions.

One sister in the early black folk church discussed the necessity of loudness as a harbinger to the spiritual experience and a prerequisite for the release of pent-up emotions:

I goes ter some churches, an’ I sees all de folks settin’ quiet an’ still, like dey dunno what de Holy Sperit am. But I fin’s in my Bible, that when a man or a ‘ooman gets full ob de Holy Sperit, ef dey should hol’ dar peace, de stones would cry out; an’ ef de power ob God can make de stones cry out, how can it help makin’ us poor creatures cry out, who feels ter praise Him fer His mercy. Not make a noise! Why

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46 E. A. McIlhenny, Befo’ De War Spirituals: Words and Melodies (Boston: Christopher Publishing, 1933), 15.
we makes a noise ‘bout ebery ting else; but dey tells us we mustn’t make no noise
ter praise de Lord. I don’t want no sich ‘ligion as dat ar.\textsuperscript{47}

The need for “making a noise” was necessary, at least for this woman, for praising God. She
contends that “we makes a noise ‘bout ebery ting else,” suggesting that loudness was
commonplace in both sacred and secular African-American vocalizations in the post-Civil War
era.

Loudness was a vocal characteristic that also became an index for class affiliation. In the
early twentieth century, new migrants from the South who moved to Chicago during the Great
Migration were instructed to by \textit{The Chicago Defender} to “Keep Your Mouth Shut, Please!”
adding, “There is entirely too much loud talking on the street cars among our newcomers.”\textsuperscript{48}
Southern migrants were associated with “low breeding” and their loud vocal tendencies often
brought embarrassment and shame to middle-class Chicagoans. One Chicagoan commented,
“When I first came to Chicago I was a member of the Baptist Church. But I never joined a
church here because I did not like the way people exhibited their emotions. At home, in the
church I belonged to, people were very quiet; but here in the Baptist churches I found people
rather noisy.”\textsuperscript{49} Instruction for new migrants to Chicago was given by the Urban League on how
to conduct one’s behavior in public, which included “\textit{I will refrain} from loud talking and
objectionable deportment on street cars and in public places” (italics in original).\textsuperscript{50} In the 1920s
in Chicago, southern migrants sometimes conducted themselves in accordance with what they
believed whites expected of them. This included boisterous behavior, creating the image of the

\textsuperscript{47} Kilham, “Sketches in Color: Fourth,” 306.


\textsuperscript{49} Drake and Cayton, \textit{Black Metropolis}, 538.

\textsuperscript{50} The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, \textit{The Negro in Chicago}, 193.
happy-go-lucky and loud “Negro,” who was tolerated by whites “as long as his dialect, his wit, and his manner are amusing enough.” Loudness thus became an index for southern migrants and lower-class status, with some in the upper class feeling that “Lower-class people are those who give free rein to their emotions, whether worshiping or fighting, who ‘don’t know how to act.’” Although Nix’s congregation was diverse in terms of class, his loud, booming voice and the interactive chatter by the sisters would probably have been condemned by many elite Chicagoans.

**Vocal Embellishments**

Indications of the uses of vocal embellishment in African-American vocal expressions are evident in writings from the late nineteenth century. In 1899, Jeannette Robinson Murphy had first-hand experience with newly-freed African Americans and attempted to notate some of their songs. She wrote of her experience as she “followed these old ex-slaves . . . in their tasks, listened to their crooning in their cabins, in the fields, and especially in their meeting houses.” Although her primary research goal was to identify the African origins of the songs, her transcriptions are useful for identifying the types of melismas and slides practiced by African Americans (Example 4-5).

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In one transcription she indicates “portamento” within the sheet music and writes out the ornamented passages in Western notation. In Example 4-5, the words “be,” “ready,” and “die” all have melismatic passages (multiple notes sung over one syllable of text). Obviously, we cannot determine the accuracy of Murphy’s transcription (the C#-Bb interval in Measures 1, 2, and 3 seems unlikely – she probably intended a b7 for the C₃, changing it to a C natural). However, she apparently heard the inclusion of numerous “small” notes, which she called “trimmings,” between the main notes of the melody. Regardless of the accuracy of her transcription, it nonetheless suggests that Murphy heard multiple notes sung per syllable in certain parts of the text. The lyrics of the song to which Murphy refers have spiritual content and thus the song may have been considered a spiritual. The sacred nature of the lyrics, therefore, links spiritual songs with melismas or florid passages within the African-American sacred songs context. However, Reverend Nix never used melismas, but instead performed basic melodic lines, similar to the style of blues singers of the 1920s, and embellished his texts with scoops, slides, shouts, and moans.

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Pitch Inflections: Bent Notes, Blue Notes, Slides, Scoops

Mary Allen Grissom noted “The Negro’s innate feel for a simple, harmonic background for all his melodies would appear largely responsible for the queer sliding manner in which he sings. It has been noted that he does this much more when singing alone than when singing with a group.”\(^{55}\) Some vocal tendencies, such as slides, bends, timbral changes, and rhythmic complexities, were not transcribed according to the doctrines of Western art music and were often misinterpreted by white performers, such as in Lucy McKim’s transcriptions in *Slave Songs of the United States*. McKim, in her work with the freedmen stated,

The best that we can do, however, with paper and types, or even with voices, will convey but a faint shadow of the original. The voices of the colored people have a peculiar quality that nothing can imitate; and the intonations and delicate variations of even one singer cannot be reproduced on paper... And what makes it all the harder to unravel a thread of melody out of this strange network is that, like birds, they seem not infrequently to strike sounds that cannot be precisely represented by the gamut, and about in ‘slides from one note to another, and turns and cadences not in articulated notes.’\(^{56}\)

Both Grissom and McKim had difficulty in either understanding or transcribing the “queer slides” that were not within the twelve-note Western diatonic system. With the advent of music notation software, embellishments in African-American vocal traditions that are pitch-based additions or changes, including “blue notes” (lowered third and seventh degrees of the major diatonic scale), melismas, bends (microtones or pitch ambiguity), and other ornaments can now be notated more easily in standard Western notation with notes or with symbols.\(^{57}\) Other

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\(^{55}\) Mary Allen Grissom, foreword to *The Negro Sings a New Heaven* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1930), [i].


vocalizations that do not rely on pitch or rhythm can be notated through expressive markings, such as dynamics, phrasing, articulation, and tempo. However, as Ingrid Monson argues, notation cannot catch the musical nuances or the human element of social and cultural interrelationships created in participatory music-making. The transcription of Blind Willie Johnson’s “Dark Was the Night – Cold Was the Ground” (Example 4-3), provides evidence to his slides between notes and scoops up to pitches. Even Murphy’s transcription in Example 4-5 features grace notes before the pitches on downbeats, which could have possibly been her interpretation of scoops or bends up to these pitches.

**Vocal Timbre**

Historical documents describe black voices as having similar vocal timbre and often referred to vocal timbre to bring attention to racial difference. For example, Natalie Curtis Burlin discussed that the “rough sons and daughters of toil, ragged and unkempt,” (implying field hands and poor rural blacks), were exempt from the “smooth influence of ‘refined white environment.’” In another example which appeared in 1855, a collector of slave songs commented on the “rich, unctuous, guttural” sounds of the southern African-American minstrel singer. Consistently, black voices were described as hoarse or guttural while white voices were considered smooth or sweet. Smooth and sweet sounds were usually associated with the European tradition and were not the desired timbres for traditional black voices. Instead, the timbres typically associated with the spirituals, blues, gospel, and jazz were often “foggy, hoarse,

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rough, or sandy.”⁶² Ernest Hamlin Abbott’s report of a black church service, reported in the 1901 *Outlook*, describes a minister who “was as wrought up as his audience” and declaimed his sermon with a “hoarse and screaming voice.”⁶³

LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) discussed differences in timbre by African-American jazz musicians in New Orleans in the early twentieth century as a measure of their assimilative aesthetics. Jazz musicians were distinguished between “Downtown Creoles,” trained in the Euro-classical tradition, and “Uptown Negroes,” who were ear-trained musicians influenced by the blues. Timbres associated with classical music had a “purity of tone” that was eventually discarded by black jazz musicians who favored instead “the more humanly expressive sound of the voice.” For Jones, “the rough, raw sound the black man forced out of these European instruments was a sound that he had cultivated in this country for two hundred years. It was an American sound, something indigenous to a certain kind of cultural existence in this country.”⁶⁴ Jones’ statement suggests that the sounds of black voices were not only rooted in African-American tradition, but were also capable of more emotional output than instruments were, and that the “rough, raw sound” was an “authentic” creation of African-American culture.

Early blues singers, such as Leadbelly and Mississippi John Hurt, “all had in common the vocal quality and variations in timbre that make the genre distinctive: the nasal, foggy, hoarse texture that delivered the elisions, hums, growls, blue notes, and falsetto, and the percussive oral effects of their ancestors,”⁶⁵ attributing timbral distortions to African traditions. Specific timbres can also be associated to specific musical genres. For example, Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. associates a

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⁶⁴ Jones, *Blues People*, 79.

“nasal, foggy, hoarse” vocal timbre with the blues, similar to the association of the distorted tone of an electric guitar to heavy-metal music. These generalizations do not imply a homogenous sound ideal that cannot be changed, but a sound ideal that typifies common performance practices of the genre.

As discussed earlier, gospel-composer Thomas A. Dorsey realized that he needed a voice similar to the “itinerant evangelistic singer or the blues artist,” not a voice that was “sweet,” or “high-class,” suggesting his preference for traditional sounds of black vocalities as opposed to smooth or sweet timbres associated with white singing. The key to Dorsey’s success was what he called a “heavy” voice. Although Dorsey uses the moniker of “heavy,” what he required was a voice with a full, resonant timbre—not a nasal or “sweet” voice. Dorsey’s use of a traditional voice for his new gospel-blues of the 1920s and 1930s was a reminder that the people wanted to hear a voice that was “their” sound, not one emulated from whites. The vocal sound implied ownership, something that could not be taken away or appropriated by whites. Sound became a marker of pride in ownership, of identity, of group affinity, of tradition, of positive association with cultural traditions of the past, and not a rejection of it as so many, such as Payne, had emphasized.

Although raspy, hoarse, and guttural timbres have often been associated to racial categories, associations to class standing were also common. For example, a 1906 account of a service at Little St. John’s Church describes the singing of a black male whose voice was “not of the rasping, guttural variety common among mountain whites [read: lower-class whites], but deep and suave as an organ-pipe.” Guttural vocal timbres have typically been associated with the voice of African Americans, yet the preceding example clearly designates vocal timbre by

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class. The purpose of mentioning the common vocal characteristics of blacks and whites is not only to dissuade the common essentialist notions that black and white voices sounded differently based on biological differences, but also to bring attention that voices, whether black or white, were often distinguished by class.

**Group Expressions**

Group expressions are those that require two or more vocalists. In African-American traditions, these typically involve participatory performances in which multiple voices interact together. Call-and-response (antiphony), usually in the format of soloist-leader/group, and heterophony, in which two or more vocalists improvise and modify versions of the same melody, are common formats for group expression.\(^{68}\)

**Participatory Performance**

Thomas Turino defines “participatory performance” as “a special type of artistic practice in which there are no artist-audience distinctions, only participants and potential participants performing different roles.” He explains that in a participatory performance, the attention is centered on the doing of the performance, and that each participant’s contribution is equally important, resulting in a heightened social interaction. It is the social interaction that creates a communal experience, in which participants engage with each other, but focus on their inward feelings. Through heightened concentration, the performer creates a feeling of “flow,” in which thoughts and distractions fade from awareness, leaving only “feelings of transcending one’s normal self.”\(^{69}\) The level of feeling becomes the gauge for the quality of the performance.\(^{70}\) As previously discussed, feeling is imperative in the conversion experience and for spiritual


\(^{69}\) Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 4.

awareness. The interaction of congregants, inspired by the minister and his chanted sermon, creates heightened emotions leading to the spiritual experience.

Courlander describes the interaction between preacher and congregational responses as “something akin to singing,”\(^\text{71}\) in that rhythmic patterns become established, and if the minister chants, pitches are established as well. Pitts contends that “The congregation’s call-and-response cries, which linguists refer to as backchanneling cues, are actually vocalized agreement and consent for the speaker to continue” (italics in original).\(^\text{72}\) The preacher and congregation work in tandem, feeding off of each other’s responses and emotional energy. “The congregation is actively involved in the service,” as Hubbard explains, “They hum, sing aloud, yell, and join in the sermon as they choose, and almost always their timing is impeccable. The quality of the congregation appears to have a great effect upon the sermon, influencing the preacher’s timing, his involvement in his delivery, and sometimes even the length of the performance.”\(^\text{73}\)

**Call-and-Response**

Call-and-response is a musical feature in which one singer or a group of singers sing a line of text, which is then answered with a response from another singer or group. Call-and-response is thus a participatory performance, as it is necessary for multiple voices to interact, functioning as question-answer, antecedent-consequence, or leader-group. Call-and-response has been well-documented as both a feature of many African song forms and African-American slave song forms. The process of call-and-response may have evolved through the process of “lining out,” in which a minister sings a line answered by the congregation’s response for the purpose of learning the musical and lyrical material. Jeff Todd Titon claims that lining out dates

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\(^{71}\) Courlander, *Negro Folk Songs*, 27.

\(^{72}\) Pitts, *Old Ship of Zion*, 160.

\(^{73}\) Hubbard, *The Sermon and the African American Literary Imagination*, 35.
to the colonial period, in which both “slaves and freed blacks learned the process while attending
curch services with whites.” Titon also explains that lining out differs from call-and-response
in that in lining out “the leader briefly chants a line alone, and then the group repeats the words
but to a tune that is much longer and more elaborate than the leader’s chant or lining tune.”
Call-and-response, on the other hand, is not used for instructional purposes and usually vocalizes
a line that functions as a refrain line. While both processes are responsorial, the voices in call-
and-response serve as part of the melody of the song, functioning within the rhythmical structure
as established by the call, with both the call and the response lines equal in importance.

An example of call-and-response is found in the spiritual, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,”
in which the solo singer sings the call, which is then answered by the refrain line of “Comin’ for
to carry me home.”

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Call: Swing low sweet chariot,} \\
\text{Response: Comin’ for to carry me home} \\
\text{Call: Swing low sweet chariot,} \\
\text{Response: Comin’ for to carry me home} \\
\text{Call: I look’d over Jordan, an’ what did I see,} \\
\text{Response: Comin’ for to carry me home} \\
\text{Call: A band of angels comin’ after me,} \\
\text{Response: Comin’ for to carry me home}
\end{align*}
\]

In the setting of the black church, the interjection of words and phrases by the congregation serve
as the “response” to the minister’s “call.” This tradition of call-and-response continued into the
early black church and is evidenced in Nix’s sermon recordings. Nix serves as the leader and

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74 Jeff Todd Titon, “North America/Black America,” in Worlds of Music: An Introduction

75 Jeff Todd Titon, “‘Tuned Up with the Grace of God’: Music and Experience among Old Regular Baptists,” in
Music in American Religious Experience, ed. Philip V. Bohlman, Edith L. Blumhofer, and Maria M. Chow (Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 2006), 319.

initiates a line of spoken or sung text, which is then answered by the female congregants, who usually interject with vocal utterances, such as “Preach it,” “Hallelujah,” “Yes, Lord,” and “Amen!”

Thomas Turino further claims that call-and-response is a type of “interlocking practice,” which creates “feelings of intimacy, familiarity, and mutual attention among participants.” As one person sings the “base” melody, others respond with improvisational parts. It is through extended repetition in the call-and-response process that elaboration is possible. Ingrid Monson also suggests that repetition is fundamental to the improvisatory nature of participatory music and contends that repeating patterns create interlocking and layered combinations in which “layered repetitions construct a context in which musical creativity can take place over successive periodic units.”

**Heterophony**

In many of Nix’s sermons, the female congregants, or “prayer band,” sing a spiritual melody simultaneously, but not in unison. Each of the singers contribute in their own individual way, some entering with slight rhythmic alterations, and some with melodic alterations. This type of group singing is called heterophony, which is defined by the *Harvard Concise Dictionary of Music* as “an improvisational type of polyphony, namely, the simultaneous use of slightly or elaborately modified versions of the same melody by two (or more) performers, e.g., a singer and an instrumentalist, the latter adding a few extra tones or ornaments to the singer’s melody.” Although they sing together, their performance is not “strict,” as in European choral music,
which depends upon vocal blend. In Nix’s recordings, the female singers each stand out individually despite the group-nature of the performance.

Language and Text

Vernacular Language and Dialect

Early black preachers, such as John Jasper, were criticized for their use of Black English (BE), or dialect. For example, William E. Hatcher’s 1908 description of Jaspers’ use of dialect incited Hatcher to declare, “Did mortal lips ever gush with such torrents of horrible English. Hardly a word came out clothed in its right mind.” 81 Jasper spoke in a manner in which his audience could understand, appreciate, and that was appropriate for them. Old-time preachers used Biblical English and simple, short words in a familiar idiom, creating as Pipes claims, a “language of common things rather than of ideas” (italics in original). 82 The use of simple words colored with dialect created sermons that were “powerful and enthralling,” as Houston A. Baker, Jr. posits, capturing “the ethos of their people.” 83 BE is spoken by many working-class African Americans, as Pitts claims, “as the language of the home, familiarity, racial identity, and group loyalty.” 84 For these reasons alone, we can establish that dialect reflected group values, identity, and class standing. Howard Odum, in his study of Negro Folk Songs, declares that “In giving the dialect no attempt is made at consistency; for the negro [sic] of the present generation has no consistency of speech. He uses ‘the’ and ‘de,’ ‘them’ and ‘dem,’ ‘gwine’ and ‘goin’, ‘and’ and

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81 William E. Hatcher, quoted in Pipes, Say Amen, Brother! 133.
82 Pipes, Say Amen, Brother! 136.
84 Pitts, Old Ship of Zion, 136.
‘an’, together with many other varied forms.” Thomas Wentworth Higginson, in his memoirs published in 1869, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, describes a “marching song” that was sung by his black regiment in which the singers use dialect with words such as “gwine,” “de,” and “ob”:

All true children gwine in de wilderness,
Gwine in de wilderness, gwine in de wilderness,
True believers gwine in de wilderness,
To take away de sins ob de world

The word, “gwine,” was also used consistently in the spirituals, with titles such as “Gwine Up,” and “Dry Bones Gwine Er Rise Ergin.” Mary Allen Grissom’s 1930 account of the singing of freedmen in Kentucky also notes the inconsistency of not only speech, but also pronunciation. For example, she explains, “one word may have three pronunciations in the same song, as for example, my, mah, or muh according to what precedes or follows it, - my, if much emphasized” (italics in original).

Another use of dialect is the predominance of the last syllable to be changed, resulting in a hum or moan effect. For example, Nix changes the word “ship” to “shim” in the sermon, “Hiding Behind the Stuff.” Folklorist Harold Courlander states that this kind of “softening” of the ultimate consonant is a typical feature in black folk songs, especially religious songs. Dialect shifts from Standard English (SE) to BE, as Pitts claims, “fits the linguistic pattern that Afro-American religious rituals seem to follow,” and if Jasper had spoken in SE, his congregants

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85 Howard W. Odum, “Religious Folk-Songs of the Southern Negroes” (PhD diss., Clark University, 1909?), 37.
87 Thomas P. Fenner, *Cabin and Plantation Songs as Sung by the Hampton Students* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1876), 216.
89 Grissom, *The Negro Sings a New Heaven*, [iii].
would have thought his dialect was “horrible.” Dialect was significant for both Jasper and Nix to identify with their congregants. Mitchell claims, “There is a science of how identity is associated with the typical sounds and vocabulary of various regions, classes, professions, and ethnic or cultural groups. The identity established by sound takes precedence over the identity suggested by appearance, so Black preachers don’t have to look Black to communicate if they can sound as if they belong” (italics in original).

Ministers of the mixed-type of church in Chicago, associated with the middle classes, used dialect shifts to develop rapport with their lower-class members. Genester Nix claims her father used dialect “so that his congregation could understand. That was in the beginning of his preaching, but as time moved on and people became more educated, he continued to preach the same way for emphasis.” Nix used the word, “gwine,” on several occasions, which will be discussed in Chapter 8. In other words, Nix used style switching, in which he chose to speak in BE for emphasis, although he could have just as easily spoken in SE. Pipes claims slang words and phrases are “down-to-earth words that are within the experiences of the hearers.” Regardless of the class level of his congregants, Nix’s use of BE was “within the experience” of his listeners who were familiar with BE as an expression of traditional black vocalities.

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91 Pipes, Say Amen, Brother! 141, 133.
93 Drake and Cayton, Black Metropolis, 675.
94 Genester Nix, email message to author, February 24, 2018.
95 Style switching is also known as code switching.
96 Pipes, Say Amen, Brother! 138.
Dialect as Resistance

The use of dialect was possibly also linked to the secret coded messages the slaves used to communicate amongst themselves, creating a type of secret language understood only by community members. For example, in Georgia in 1925, a white woman by the name of Elisha Kane remarked on the difficulty of recording Negro folklore: “Negroes, when talking to white people, will consciously modify their speech so that it is quite hard to get a close approximation of the language as they speak it among themselves.”

Lawrence Levine posits, “Living in the midst of a hostile and repressive white society, black people found in language an important means of promoting and maintaining a sense of group unity and cohesion. Thus while the appropriateness and utility of speaking Standard English in certain situations was understood, within the group there were frequently pressures to speak the vernacular.” In this regard, dialect functions as an expression of double-consciousness, in that African Americans spoke one way within their community, and a different way when interacting with dominant society.

In contrast, resistance to dialect, as Gaines explains, was used to disassociate oneself from “the primitive, dialect-speaking ‘Old Negro.’” However, for some such as Booker T. Washington, the use of dialect “exploited plantation stereotypes,” and for others “dialect was also a sign of a covert political consciousness that could resist whites.” In other words, depending on the situation, dialect could be used to create cultural unity, to exploit stereotypes, or to resist racism.

97 Elisha Kane, quoted in Lawrence Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness, 144.
98 Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness, 153.
99 Gaines, Uplifting the Race, 198-199.
Textual Themes

Early black preachers from the late nineteenth century were often criticized for “talking too much about how all God’s children would surely get shoes in heaven, while doing almost nothing for the wretched poor who were left to go barefoot on earth.”¹⁰⁰ Many Baptist ministers based their topics on fear, i.e. fear of what would happen if one did not give one’s life to Jesus or of living in sin. Many lower-class preachers took sin as the prevailing topic, which included “adultery, anger, atheism, cheating, ‘acting stuck-up,’ covetousness, ‘being too critical,’ deceit, dishonesty, disloyalty, gambling, hypocrisy, ‘backbiting,’ and ‘spasmodic speaking to one another,’ lack of personal cleanliness, fighting in the home, drunkenness, and ‘sex immorality.’”¹⁰¹ Emphasis on family life and the proper conduct in relations with the opposite sex were prevalent. Rev. Nix addressed many of these topics in his recorded sermons, speaking directly to his listeners. In addition, many lower-class preachers emphasized “fire-and-brimstone” themes, including the end of the world, and atoning for one’s sins in order to get to heaven. According to Genester Nix, Rev. Nix’s congregation reacted to “fire and brimstone” sermons with themes of “if you don’t do right, you go to Hell” with “crying and hollering and falling out.”¹⁰² Evidence of this type of doomsday text is present in the sermon “Your Time is Out,” in which Nix relates the story of Noah and the Ark and the end of the world. He warns, “Brother, before your time is out, God wants you to get right with Him. Seek Jesus now.”¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Tucker, Black Pastors and Leaders, 102.

¹⁰¹ Drake and Cayton, Black Metropolis, 613.


Sacred Texts

African-American singing traditions include the singing of folk songs with sacred texts, known as Negro spirituals or folk spirituals, which were originally transmitted orally, not in written arrangements. The folk spiritual differs from the arranged spiritual in that the folk spiritual was sung a cappella, without extensive harmonies, and included improvisatory elements, whereas the arranged spirituals, such as those by university jubilee groups, were written out and included vocal harmonies. Because no recordings exist of performances of the spiritual from the slavery era, we must rely on historical descriptions of the singing. For example, McIlhenny describes the unique qualities of the spirituals, which included “oft repeated words, which if read seem monotonous, but when properly sung causes, through voice inflections and by the monotony of repetition, a hypnotic effect and spirit exaltation on both singers and listeners quite beyond the power of other music.” He discusses the heterophony present in the spirituals as multiple voices sang: “each one will be singing the same song, only differently, but the whole is a delightful and thrilling blend of harmony in which the words mean almost nothing.”\(^{104}\) In the 1867 classic, *Slave Songs of the United States*, the authors note the presence of interjections between phrases, such as “I say now,” and “God say you must.” The authors also report on the use of dialect, improvisation, blue notes, slides, and melismas. In addition, they comment on the layering effects created by numerous voices interjecting simultaneously: “The rests, by the way, do not indicate a cessation in the music, but only in part of the singers. The over-lap in singing, as already described, in such at no time is there any complete pause.”\(^{105}\) These commentaries provide evidence of the correlation between the folk spiritual and the folk sermon. The monotonous repetition of words and pitches, interjections

\(^{104}\) McIlhenny, *Befo ’ De War Spirituals*, 21-22.

between phrases, use of dialect, improvisation, guttural timbre, and layering, together with the heterophonic quality of the voices embrace many similarities with the chanted sermon.

According to Jeff Todd Titon, “The best performances of the folk spirituals remain buried on the ‘sermons with singing’ 78 rpm records marketed to the black communities in the 1920s.” Recordings by African-American ministers, such as Rev. Nix, released in the 1920s often included the singing of folk spirituals as part of their recorded sermons. However, these traditional spirituals were often demonized in the middle-class northern black churches of the 1920s. As written by James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson, “Immediately following Emancipation those ranks revolted against everything connected with slavery, and among those things were the Spirituals.” Recorded sermons thus are significant for their inclusion of folk spirituals, not only allowing researchers to listen to and transcribe audio recordings of actual voices singing these songs, but also to contest the shunning of the spiritual as has been noted.

The Chanted Sermon

Now that black vocal traditions have been described and categorized, the association of these traditions with the chanted sermon becomes clearer. The use of chanting itself is a tradition that extends back possibly to the eighteenth century and involves a combination of speaking and singing. It is used in several black oral traditions and emphasizes the words through the use of a half-spoken, half-sung quality of delivering the text to create heightened emotion among members of the congregation. I will discuss the musical characteristics of the chanted sermon after giving a brief historical background of the genre.

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Preaching traditions in the folk church include the chanting of sermons, sometimes called “whooping, intoning, chanting, moaning, and tuning.” Historically, black preachers intoned their sermons, possibly influenced by the heritage of the African griots who chanted stories, history, and tribal laws in West Africa. According to Jon Michael Spencer, oral traditions were passed from African chants to African-American hollers, moans, and to the intoning and chanting of preachers. Spencer has outlined the vocalized features of the chanted sermon into seven distinct features: melody, rhythm, call-and-response, harmony, counterpoint, form, and improvisation.

Historical documents provide evidence of some of these features. For example, a chanted sermon performed at a camp meeting in Nashville, Tennessee in 1928 was reported as beginning with a “warming up” section, in which the preacher presents sound argument, making practical applications to everyday life. . . . He is feeling his way until the spirit strikes him. With the coming of the spirit . . . the speaker’s entire demeanor changes. He now launches into a type of discourse that borders on hysteria. His voice, changed in pitch, takes on a mournful, singing quality, and words flow from his lips in such a manner as to make an understanding of them almost impossible.

A “Negro” preacher in former slave quarters near Fort Motte, South Carolina was featured in a report from 1926, which described the words of the sermon as “short, staccato drum-beats,” emphasizing their rhythmic qualities. As early as 1847, Peter Randolph, a slave

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109 Spencer, *Sacred Symphony*, 1-16.


in Virginia, discussed the qualities of the chanted sermon as demonstrated in prayer meetings:
“The speaker usually commences by calling himself unworthy, and talks very slowly, until feeling the spirit, he grows excited . . .”\textsuperscript{112} The chanted sermon and the spiritual share many common features, as is evident from John Mason Brown’s 1868 “Songs of the Slave,” in which he states: “Many years ago there originated a negro ballad. . . . It was generally sung in chanting style, with marked emphasis and the prolongation of the concluding syllable of each line.”\textsuperscript{113} Reports such as these provide evidence of the preacher’s use of speech-like song, rhythmic declamation, dramatic delivery, and heightened emotional expression.

**Melody and Pitch**

One of the most prominent features of the folk minister is his use of speech-like song, a definitive characteristic in the chanted sermon and the very element that makes the chanted sermon chanted. Some describe the chanting feature as melody or as being intoned. Spencer again correlates African and African-American speech-like singing, noting that black preachers do not sing in the *bel canto* style, but rather in a style somewhere in between speech and song.\textsuperscript{114} Brothers claims that speech-like song is a sign vehicle that through semiotic analysis provides meaning in African-American cultural symbols.\textsuperscript{115} He explains that speech may be musical through “a systematic use of precisely measured spectrums of pitch and time,” with the speech-like quality attained through the use of “‘dirty’ timbre, growling, or vocal straining.”\textsuperscript{116} Speech-like inflections can heighten the emotional content of a piece and the transition from speech to

\textsuperscript{112} Peter Randolph, quoted in Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 217.


\textsuperscript{114} Spencer, *Sacred Symphony*, 2.

\textsuperscript{115} Brothers, “Ideology and Aurality,” 172.

\textsuperscript{116} Brothers, “Ideology and Aurality,” 173.
speech-like song can be sudden or transitional. Once the pitch center, or “tuning pitch,” is established, both the minister and the congregants respond via this pitch, singing in the same “key.”

In *The Science of English Verse* (1911), Sidney Lanier analyzes what he calls, “speech-tune,” or speech-like song, of the African-American chanted sermon:

One who has ever heard a typical negro sermon will have observed how the preacher begins, in the ordinary tones of voice, announcing his text and gradually clearing the way to the personal appeal of the sermon: here he rises into a true poetic height, and always falls into what is an approach to musical recitative: “Yes, my bretherin and sisterin,” (he will say) “ef you don’ make haste and repent of all your sins and wash yourself clean in de river of life, de Lord will fling de las’ man of you down into everlasting perdition.”

Lanier, as was typical for the time, adds his own bias toward the African-American chanted style, comparing the “crude approach to the speech-tune made in the half-chanted sermon of the negro . . . [with] the highest delicacy of the cultivated speech-tune,” such as is present in a sonnet.\(^{117}\) Despite his bias, Lanier provides evidence of the sermon moving from “ordinary tones” to “musical recitative,” i.e. chanting. Lanier transcribes the preacher’s text and chanting (Example 4-6).

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From Lanier’s transcription, it is evident that he heard clear pitches, meter, and rhythm. He notates the melodic back-and-forth pattern between the tonic and third scale degree, as well as rhythmic declamations and accents.

**Performance**

We have mentioned the importance of shouting, loud vocal dynamics, and physicalized expression as integral to the spiritual experience. However, as Hubbard contests, it is the minister who, through his chanting, “builds up the emotions of the congregation as can no other means, and it is at such moments of emotional intensity that the Spirit of God is most noticeable.”¹¹⁸ The minister’s job is to create the environment in which Spirit is evident. The chanted sermon is the

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medium through which he performs. Raboteau confirms the importance of not only oral traditions, but also the performative qualities and style associated with the preacher:

Because the oral rather than the written word has been the primary bearer of black culture, verbal skill is valued highly in the black community. . . . Style of delivery determines the success of the oral performer whether bluesman, gospel singer, or preacher. It is not, then, merely the word as spoken – much less read – but the word as performed that must be taken into account if the sermon is to be adequately understood. In this case, more than in most, style is content [italics in original].

The performative qualities of chanting equates it with performed song, rather than mere spoken words. Whereas spoken words are often read, singing and chanting are performative expressions, with chanting most often being improvised. However, whereas in song the emphasis is on melody, in chanting the emphasis is on the text or words. Thus, chanting embraces both the melodic and rhythmic qualities of the spoken voice, as well as the regularized intonation of the sung voice, but reduced to a recitative type of utterance. Nix easily transitions or style switches between speaking, chanting, and singing, without hesitation, delivering a wide range of performative qualities through his voice, and providing a continuum between language and song. Spoken words alone are not of the same importance as chanted words, which produces additional layers of meaning. Performed language in the form of chanting, rather than spoken language, allows for enhanced emotional nuances to be communicated.

Non-Articulated Sound

In addition to words and verbal skill, Davis discusses the importance of non-articulated sound to the African-American sermon:

“Sound” manifested during an African-American sermon is not “noise.” Community-determined ideas and values are communicated in the coded sound channels of the sermon event. And the concurrent coding and decoding processes which characterize preacher and congregational oral-aural interaction during sermon segments have philosophical and aesthetic dimensions. This nonarticulated

119 Raboteau, A Fire in the Bones, 142.
but full voice is as significant to a congregation’s interpretation of the preached sermon as the articulated word.\textsuperscript{120}

“Preacher-produced sound/semantic units,” which Gerald L. Davis calls “sermonphones,” are the “qualitative unit of sound in the performed African-American sermon.”\textsuperscript{121} Sound/semantic units can include verbal sermonphones in the form of a single word or phrase, while nonverbal sermonphones are non-articulated sounds that are the stylistic feature of chanting in preaching, and “are used at that point in the sermon performance when articulated words are inappropriate to the quality of the affect requiring expression and may consist of highly stylized, and easily recognized, grunts, groans, and hums.”\textsuperscript{122} Davis also suggests that the sound of the African-American sermon takes precedence over the words or text and “carries semantic affect in the context of African-American narrative performance.”\textsuperscript{123} For examples, Thomas A. Dorsey credited the “cry” in the voice as powerful enough to evoke an emotional response from both secular- and sacred-music listeners, inspiring listeners to shout, creating a participatory response.\textsuperscript{124}

Nonverbal sounds convey meaning and often outweigh the importance of words in the oral transmission of the sermon. According to Davis, the preacher and congregation generate sound intentionally with full knowledge of its historical precedents and appropriateness. He adds that phonetic qualities such as timbre are “cognitive ideas” that the ear “remembers.” For example, timbre created through the elongation of open vowels, such as in the moan, are

\textsuperscript{120} Davis, \textit{I Got the Word in Me and I Can Sing It, You Know}, 95.

\textsuperscript{121} Davis, \textit{I Got the Word in Me and I Can Sing It, You Know}, 98.

\textsuperscript{122} Davis, \textit{I Got the Word in Me and I Can Sing It, You Know}, 99-100.

\textsuperscript{123} Davis, \textit{I Got the Word in Me and I Can Sing It, You Know}, 7.

\textsuperscript{124} Harris, \textit{The Rise of Gospel Blues}, 181.
remembered in the ear after these tones have been produced. “The voice produces qualities that can be identified as part of a group cognition system,” and this cognitive aural memory remains embedded in the subconscious and is drawn upon by the group in the sermon setting, creating a phenomenological, communal experience that is historically preserved.  

As previously mentioned, specific sounds are often associated with particular genres or performance styles, such as raspy timbres with African-American voices, and distorted timbres of the guitar with heavy metal, for example. Similarly, speech-like song is often associated with African-American musical practices, and as Brothers explains, “this stylistic code had to be attained, that it did not unfold inevitably, as a natural, unifying principle for a diverse community.” In other words, the sound of speech-like song is a stylistic code to which African Americans not only identify, but also use to create unity among community members.

**Rhythm**

“Rhythm,” as spoken by Rosenberg, “is perhaps the most important aspect of the preacher’s musical art.” Rhythmic declamation of text, accented by shouts, moans, and other vocal inflections, creates the foundation of the sermon. A regular rhythmic pulse underlies the minister’s declamation, with the words spoken in the vernacular at a moderate pace. He then adds intensity to his words, which are delivered with much gusto and fervor, increasing in intensity, dynamics, and tempo, eventually reaching the climax section, called the “celebration.” It is in the celebration that congregants get happy, inspiring them to shout,

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125 Davis, *I Got the Word in Me and I Can Sing It, You Know*, 96.
127 Rosenberg, *The Art of the American Folk Preacher*, 42.
128 Pipes’ transcriptions of modern-day black minster’s sermons concludes that the climax of the celebration usually arrives near the end of the sermon. Thus, Nix’s forty-minute sermons would have arrived twenty-five minutes into the sermon. In recorded sermons to accommodate for the three-minute maximum per recording, the climax begins almost immediately.
dance, and so on. Increased word count causes the preacher to speak or shout faster, so that the tempo of the “measure” remains relatively constant. “As the preacher moves in to the chanted section of his sermon,” as Raboteau explains, “he fits his speech to a beat. When necessary, he lengthens vowels or rushes together words in order to make a line match the meter.” The minister also can also add time by “extending the length of notes at climactic points, by repeating words, phrases, and entire sections of songs, and by adding vocal…cadenzas.” The use of accents, shouts, higher pitch, and percussive declamation further enhance the rhythmic intensity. Vocal percussiveness, sometimes called “hitting-a-lick,” which Spencer notes as having historical reference as early as 1855, is utilized through accented and verbalized consonants, such as Ps.

The following is a report of the celebration of a sermon by a minister who pastored a United Primitive Baptist church in Chicago in the 1920s:

By this time he had found his gait and maintained it for the next thirty minutes. Words came so fast that an effort to discover any coherence was futile. One could only hear a hurried jumble of syllables. The marvel of it all was the preacher’s endurance. Long after one would suppose him utterly exhausted he forged onward never lessening the time of the rhythm. Even his body followed a regular cycle of motions. . . . His breathing became more and more difficult. Every gasp was loud and made with a jerky contraction of the chest.

The encouragement from the crowd was a stimulus to his efforts – “Preach on! Preach on!” “Well! Well!” “Now he’s Preaching!” “That’s real preaching!” “Glory be to God!” “Sho ‘nuf Oh, sho ‘nuf!” “Yes indeed! The whole truth!” Finally words failed to come. He paused for a few breaths. An elder seated near by solicitously remarked, “There now, take it easy. Don’t hurry.” But in an instant he was off again for another lap. After two more such pauses and fresh starts he stopped abruptly, exhausted, and probably convinced that he had done well enough.

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129 Pipes, Say Amen, Brother! 74.

130 Raboteau, A Fire in the Bones, 144.


132 Sutherland, “An Analysis of Negro Churches in Chicago,” 93.
The celebration portion of this sermon included a regular rhythmic gait and a fast delivery of the text, so much so that the syllables became slurred and the pastor gasped for breath to keep the timing regular. It is in the celebration section that a minister will intone or sustain pitch, with congregational responses interjected to inspire him to continue. The minister responds to their enthusiasm, building to an even higher climax, with his voice raising in pitch and emphasis. A preacher may also create rhythmic motives or textual motives, which are either repeated throughout the sermon, or are part of the congregations’ response. Motivic devices such as these help to alleviate the possibility of a static, monotone, or dull sermon.

**Call-and-Response**

Call-and-response is a primary feature of the chanted sermon. Congregational responses are as important as the preacher’s declamation, creating a participatory performance, in which both congregation and preacher are equal co-creators. The second paragraph of the sermon discussed above includes mention of the congregational responses of “Preach on! Preach on!” “Well! Well!” “Now he’s Preaching!” “That’s real preaching!” “Glory be to God!” “Sho ‘nuf Oh, sho ‘nuf!” and “Yes indeed! The whole truth!” The congregants are preaching back to the preacher, inspiring him to continue, building emotion and intensity, leading to the climactic portion of the sermon. The responses from the congregation allow the preacher to pause momentarily for breath.

Emotional appeal is one formulaic approach that old-time preachers used to draw in their congregants. By appealing to core emotions, such as fear, shame, etc., a minister can stir the emotions of his listeners and incite emotionalism in the congregation so that they may get happy and in touch with Spirit. Singing and/or chanting also stirs the emotions and is used as a device, physicalizing the emotions. Audience responses signal to the preacher that he has indeed stirred their emotions and has drawn them in, and that he has touched them personally. As the sermon
builds in intensity, the audience’s emotions build simultaneously, unlocking their reservations, exploding into shouts, moans, dancing, and getting happy. He achieves this by means of “rhythm, sensationalism, rhetorical figures, imagery, suggestion, etc.,” as Pitts claims. He adds, “the minister puts the audience into a mood to accept his ideas; this is the greatest appeal.”

Other means used to emotionalize content include accents, inflections, dynamics, and so on.  

Harmony

One-word sermonphones, such as “Amen” and “Yes,” if pitched, can create the effect of harmony with the preacher’s pitched chanting. “Sometimes the effect [of multiple voices interjecting simultaneously] is that of a discordant Babel, but sometimes the voices blend and harmonize,” as Boisen claims, “The general effect of the singing, when it is done well, is to give the individual a sense of being caught up and fused with the group.” Although harmonization is common in the singing of hymns, harmonization can occur during the chanting section of the sermon as congregants interject on pitch.

Counterpoint

The intertwining of phrase sermonphones and non-articulated sermonphones create a layering effect and contrapuntal texture. Multiple voices, singing, preaching, shouting, or humming simultaneously, create this effect. For example, while the minister preaches, he may interject grunts or moans within his sermon while the congregation simultaneously interjects single words or phrases, creating a contrapuntal texture. According to Spencer, heterophony, or the result of multiple voices joining together to sing the same melody, occurs “when worshipers join the preacher in the intoning of familiar scripture, hymnody, ‘phrase sermonphones,’ and

133 Pitts, Old Ship of Zion, 72.
134 Pipes, Say Amen, Brother! 128.
iterated aphorisms.” Congregants’ responses are “active and congregationally felt,” with each interjecting with his or her own unique melodic choices.

**Form**

The African-American chanted sermon may have adopted some of its traits from Puritan sermons from New England. One standard form of the early sermons was to begin with a quotation from Scripture (text) followed by an explanation of the text (context), thus called the text-and-content form. The minister applies these concepts by speaking of everyday affairs within a simple structure that is orderly and easily understood. The chanted sermon arises out of the text-and-content form and, as we will see in Nix’s sermons, this format was used consistently in his early sermons.

There are usually three main sections to the chanted sermon: the opening, the buildup, and the climax, or sections A, B, and C. In the recorded chanted sermon, the A section usually consists of a brief introductory line, such as a line from Scripture and the title of the sermon. Because of the three-minute time limitations of the recorded sermon, ministers such as Rev. Nix proceeded quickly between sections B and C, sometimes blurring the distinction of the two sections. In a standard (church-given) sermon, the opening section, A in this case, begins calmly and slowly, spoken in a conversational manner. The minister then becomes more dramatic and will usually speak at a faster pace (section B), until he reaches the climax (section C), or celebration, which is the section in which the minister begins chanting. In the B section, the

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139 Pitts, *Old Ship of Zion*, 160.
chanted sermon can be further divisible into independent units through the repetition of words, phrases, melody, rhythmic motives, or textual themes, creating individual strophes or verses.  

A theme-and-variation type form uses “bridge material,” or the repetition of the primary theme or refrain line, to link and transition between the sermonic units. For example, in Nix’s “The Matchless King,” he ends each strophe with the phrase “All have had a match,” or “He finally met his match.” These phrases serve as bridge material, separating the material preceding and following into independent verses or strophes.

It is in the celebration that the preacher’s chanting evolves from being an individualistic expression to a group expression with participatory performance characteristics including the congregants’ verbal interjections, shouting, singing, and clapping. “While the buildup involves the stacking of parallel syntactic phrases,” as Pitts explains, “raising the intensity of the voice, the beginning of chanting signals to the listener that the climax has arrived.” However, in the recorded sermon, the minister usually begins chanting almost immediately. Therefore, in the recorded sermon, I have re-structured the units as: A (brief introduction), B (buildup and chanting), C (brief conclusion). Thus, the main section of the recorded sermon and the one we will be discussing fully in Chapter 6 is the B section.

Throughout the sermon, a minister may use “riffs,” or repetitive motives, to build to the climax. For example, Nix uses the theme of “How long,” in his sermon “How Long, How Long,” as a repetitive device. With each utterance of the “how long” theme, he varies the melodic

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141 Gerald L. Davis, *I Got the Word in Me*, 56.
143 Pitts, *Old Ship of Zion*, 140.
content. Vocal inflections can also serve as improvisational techniques, through the use of note bending, slides, glissandos, grace notes, and so on.\footnote{Spencer, *Sacred Symphony*, 16.}

**Similarities of the Chanted Sermon and the Blues**

The chanted sermon of the folk preacher has often been compared to the blues due to the extensive use of improvisation and the pentatonic scale in both. However, as we have just discussed, both the sermon and the blues are rooted in the folk church and the rural fields of the South, with the chanted sermon likely emerging prior to the blues. Blues scholar David Evans supports this influence of the folk church on the blues by claiming that “it seems very likely that prayers, along with field hollers and perhaps preaching, helped to shape blues singing.”\footnote{David Evans, liner notes to *Goodbye Babylon*, Dust-to-Digital, B0000DBOCB, October 27, 2003, 11.} While Nix may have employed numerous vocal characteristics as heard in the blues, such as the pentatonic scale and improvisation, his roots were in the field and the church and, as confirmed by his daughter, he did not listen to the blues.

Scholars have shared their opinion that some similar features link the chanted sermon with the blues. Harris, for example, explains that after the abolition of slavery, music that had previously been a communal, participatory experience of the group and a collective experience expressed “by the group,” and after freedom, music became an individualized, performative expression “to the group,” such as in the blues. Harris contends that the folk preacher also communicated “to the group,” thus concluding that “the bluesman and the preacher, beyond surface distinctions, were cultural analogues of one another. . . . [and shared a] homologous development.”\footnote{Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues*, 154.} However, as we will hear in Nix’s recorded sermons, the folk sermon was both
a group, participatory performance and also a performative individual expression with the minister “performing” to his congregation.

In addition, Nix employed many other features of traditional black vocalities, including shouts, moans, and folk spirituals, which I discuss more fully in Chapter 6. What is significant in the present context is that Nix chose to record particular sounds that were associated with African-American folk identity during an era of transition, advancement, and modernity for African Americans—the 1920s. It is to the description of this encounter with modernity that we now turn our attention in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 5
CONFRONTING MODERNITY

For African American communities, confronting modernity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries presented different options. According to William H. Pipes, “The new ideas (which attend freedom, enlightenment, and man’s humanity to man), are certain to triumph over the old ideas (which attend slavery, ignorance, and man’s inhumanity to man).”\(^1\) Elements linked to traditional African-American musical expressions were creations aligned with the past, slavery, the spiritual, and the “Old Negro,” conceptualized as “lowbrow” creations. Modernity highlighted encounters with two other expressions: “highbrow” expressions and modernized traditions. Where the first expression blended African-American musical idioms and folk music with Western classical, creating what was conceptualized as “highbrow” artistic expressions, the second blended traditional folk forms, or “lowbrow” expressions with modern technology, creating, what I call, “modernized traditions.” In this sense, there are two streams of musical modernity for African Americans: the efforts of groups like the Fisk Jubilee Singers and established African-American congregations that sought to update and transform (modernize) selected African-American musical traditions by adopting/adapting vocal techniques and other formal elements from the music of the dominant group; the second, the advent of commercial recordings of vernacular African-American musical traditions—including the blues and recorded sermons—in the 1920s in which selected folk traditions were presented in more unvarnished, stylistic ways. I designate these two moments in this study under the subheadings of “Creating Modern Black Voices” and “Modernizing the Folk Tradition.”

In the first, the blending of the folk traditions of the spiritual with classical music created modern voices that countered the voices associated with the past. For the New Negro, traditional

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\(^1\) Pipes, *Say Amen, Brother!* 89.
folk music, such as the spiritual, as a lowbrow art form, was not originally revered for its folk qualities, but as a foundation for higher forms of music. Lawrence Levine claims that terms, such as “highbrow,” “lowbrow,” and “culture” were used frequently as “a congeries of values, a set of categories that defined and distinguished culture vertically, that created hierarchies,” with the word “culture” being defined as “refinement,” that “symbolized the consciousness that conceived of the fine, the worthy, and the beautiful as existing apart from ordinary society.” He adds,

from the time of their formulation, such cultural categories as highbrow and lowbrow were hardly meant to be neutral descriptive terms; they were openly associated with and designed to preserve, nurture, and extend the cultural history and values of a particular group of peoples in a specific historical context.²

As cultural differences widened in the late nineteenth century, elite citizens continued the pattern of enforcing cultural gaps between the emerging classes as a means of distinguishing, distancing, and protecting themselves from those in the lower classes.³

**Historical Background**

The period from approximately 1880-1920 effectively and legally disenfranchised African Americans by taking away the rights they had acquired during the Reconstruction period.⁴ For example, from the 1870s to the turn of the century, African Americans’ representation in Congress declined from sixteen black members to zero; organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan emerged to assist white Southerners to regain control of their states; African Americans became victims of brutal violence and were often targeted simply for attending school or financially advancing; lynchings increased in the South; and whites instilled “Black Codes,” such as literacy tests, to ensure that blacks would lose their rights to vote. In addition,

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Jim Crow laws kept the races separate, and the Supreme Court legalized segregation as “separate but equal,” in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896.

In this hostile environment, visual and musical representations publicly demeaned African Americans. Blackface minstrelsy depicted blacks as lazy and ignorant, reinforcing prejudices of working-class whites who feared for their jobs as a result of increased black migration to industrialized cities in the North. White actors painted their faces black using burnt cork and performed “comedic” musical skits that presented African Americans in demoralizing representations. The first decades of the twentieth century were also a period of racial turmoil, which included race riots in multiple U.S. cities, including Nix’s hometown of Longview, Texas (Figure 5-1).

![Figure 5-1. “The ‘New Crowd Negro’ Making America Safe for Himself”](image)

**Assimilation**

Civil rights advocate Howard Thurman argues that African Americans had three alternatives to deal with the injustices they faced: assimilation, nonresistance, and resistance. In

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the first case, Thurman suggests that assimilation created a status of unworthiness and lack of self-respect for African Americans because they must resist opposition to the dominant society’s power over them. With assimilation, which Thurman positions as imitation, black citizens had to deny their faith, customs, and heritage. For many African Americans in the early twentieth century, this manifested as a denial of folk performance practices and music forms, including the spiritual. Nonresistance isolated African Americans from the larger society, engendering feelings of bitterness, hatred, and fear from the cultural isolation. The third alternative, resistance, which can be either passive or active, “cannot fail.” Thurman explains, “It is never to be forgotten that one of the ways by which men measure their own significance is to be found in the amount of power and energy other men must use in order to crush them or hold them back.” Historian Jennifer Hildebrand also discusses three options for African Americans: assimilation, resistance, or a life of double consciousness in which they exist in two separate worlds with two separate selves, creating lives “torn between two identities.” Although Thurman advocated for resistance, many African Americans turned to assimilation as an option they believed could help them attain equality and security. Social status equated with the degree of assimilation into white culture, which, as Gaines explains, was the responsibility of black elites:

Adopting the racialized terms of bourgeois morality, elite blacks’ intellectual response to popular and scientific racism was to affirm their humanity through the evolutionary idea of progress, assuming the authoritative role of agents of civilization and uplift in relation to the black majority. Black intellectuals and elites would guide blacks’ assimilation into American society.

Musically, many black leaders, including clergy, advocated for assimilation by rejecting folk expressions linked to the African-Americans’ past, instead opting for expressions linked to

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8 Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 74.
cultural sophistication and respectability, including listening to and performing classical music. The adoption of classical music, in both public performance and in the private spheres of the black church, was seen as a way to elevate African Americans through association with higher artistic merit. Instead of taking pride in folk heritage, many who adopted European musical values shut out the association with these folk forms, essentially demonstrating their shame of these forms.

Feelings of shame persisted into the black churches of the early twentieth century, as James Weldon Johnson explains, “the Negroes themselves do not fully appreciate these old slave songs. The educated classes are rather ashamed of them, and prefer to sing hymns from books.”

Johnson’s comments reveal the disparaging attitude the elite took towards the spirituals and their preference for standardized, arranged hymns. Half a century later, in 1926, Langston Hughes, a staunch supporter of the black folk, sarcastically commented on the emerging classist hierarchies and their effect on the arts: “And many an upper-class Negro church, even now, would not dream of employing a spiritual in its services. The drab melodies in white folks’ hymnbooks are much to be preferred. ‘We want to worship the Lord correctly and quietly. We don’t believe in “shouting.” Let’s be dull like the Nordics.’”

Hughes’ comments reveal the conflicted beliefs within African-American communities about the spiritual and spontaneous vocal expressivity, such as shouting, and their association with traditional folk voices. The upper class’s assimilation to the dominant society’s cultural aesthetics separated African Americans into

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hierarchal categories in both society and in their churches, often rejecting the musical expressions of the folk.

In an article from 1922, A. E. Perkins notes elite blacks’ preference for classical music in the black church and the gradual erasure of the folk spiritual:

A growing sentiment for standard and classical music, both in church and social life, is tending to push the spirituals into the background. They must go, in fact. Many, many years will pass by, of course, before they will be forgotten and have fallen into complete disuse by the rural church, and in the church of the masses in the cities even; nevertheless they are passing away. They are almost entirely discarded to-day [sic] by the élite church of the race. They have no striking meaning for the spirit and life of the forward and intelligent groups of Negroes of to-day [sic].

Class standing therefore included musical preferences, with many “of the forward and intelligent groups,” i.e. the elite class, preferring classical music in the European tradition. However, some recognized the spiritual for its beauty, leading to new attention to reforming them as the basis of classical performance.

**The Modern Era and Reforming the Spiritual**

The so-called modern era that developed in the mid-nineteenth century reflected a growing consciousness towards the new, the progressive, the future, positivism, and realism. The progress of science, technology, and industry were coupled with mass urbanization and rising literacy rates. Industrialization and urbanization contributed to the transformation of economic life and a rise in capitalism and included an “antagonistic relationship between ‘high art’ and mass culture, rejection of the norms and values of bourgeois culture, and, in some cases,

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an alignment with progressive cultural politics.”

Class divisions linked the black elite with the high art of Western classical music in one realm, and the black folk with vernacular forms of music, including the popular music of jazz and blues, and sacred music of the spirituals in the other.

The new freedoms afforded to modern African Americans created shifts in perspectives and material gain and can be delineated into three specific changes that affected not only the bigger issues of life itself, but also musical and vocal expressions. First, the participatory elements of the traditional spirituals were transformed into an individualist approach with not only more solo-centered performances, but also with the personalization of the subject matter in the lyrics, as in blues performance and blues lyrics respectively. Second, as more rural southerners migrated to the North to work in urban industries, they had, for the first time, expendable income, which they used partly for the pursuit of pleasure in entertainment, including phonographs and records. Third, the idea of the black body was reimagined from the minstrel trope of subjugation and ridicule to one that celebrated a sexualized black body, as expressed and performed by both male and female blues singers.

By the 1920s, African Americans who had migrated from the rural South to northern metropolises, such as Chicago, had gained access to many new forms of secular entertainment including jazz and blues, and new urban performance contexts where drinking, dancing, and

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16 Harris, Gospel Blues, 154


gambling also occurred. However, these new options frequently conflicted with the goals espoused by some African-American intellectuals who sought to reform the social and moral values of the folk. “Elite blacks’ vision of self-help,” as Gaines explains, “regarded bourgeois values of self-control and Victorian sexual morality as a crucial part of the race’s education and progress. Black leaders and intellectuals sought to demonstrate to potential white sympathizers African Americans’ capacity for assimilation and citizenship.” In addition, many black elites “sought status, moral authority, and recognition of their humanity by distinguishing themselves, as bourgeois agents of civilization.” Black elites took it upon themselves to prescribe the standards to which the folk should adhere, including their public behavior, dress, sexual conduct, and musical expressions. African-American ministers often aligned themselves with these Victorian ideals of sexual purity, chastity, and cultural propriety and, as community leaders, sought to guide their communities, especially those of black migrants, to these goals of racial uplift. Du Bois claimed that the “Talented Tenth” and the leaders of the race would be the appointed ones to lead the black masses to equality. Though Booker T. Washington supported and encouraged “industrial education,” he also encouraged blacks “to get property, to be more thrifty, more economical, and resolve to establish an industrial enterprise wherever a possibility presents itself.” In addition, Washington and other elites hoped to transform the negative image associated with the black folk through the written arrangements of folk spirituals that conformed to the aesthetic principles derived from Western classical music. Gaines explains,

To Washington and many others, black culture was an admissible idea only within the context of elite culture. Washington lauded Coleridge-Taylor’s settings of ‘plantation songs’ of the past generation and complained that ‘the Negro song is in too many minds associated with “rag” music and the more reprehensible “coon”

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19 Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 35.
song, that the most cultivated musician of his race, a man of the highest aesthetic ideals, should seek to give permanence to the folk-songs of his people by giving them a new interpretation and an added dignity.\textsuperscript{22}

Although these elite leaders may have had the highest of intentions for the folk, both Du Bois and Washington accepted the “new interpretation” of the spirituals as measures of advancement. These transformations were realized in the idea of the New Negro, who became the embodiment of black sophistication and advancement in the modern age.

\textbf{The New Negro}

The term, the “New Negro,” was in use as early as the late nineteenth century. As published in the June 28, 1895, edition of the \textit{Cleveland Gazette}: “A class of colored people, the ‘New Negro,’ . . . have arisen since the War, with education, refinement, and money.”\textsuperscript{23}

American literary critic, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., posits, that “the fiction of a Negro American who is ‘now’ somehow ‘new’ or different from an ‘Old Negro’ generated to counter the image in the popular American imagination of the black as devoid of all the characteristics that separate the lower forms of human life from the supposedly higher forms.”

In 1900, Booker T. Washington, along with Fannie Barrier Williams and N. B. Wood, published \textit{A New Negro for a New Century} that had as its goal the reorientation of African Americans’ image in society, positioning African Americans away from the stereotypes found in blackface minstrelsy, the plantation slave, and other racist propaganda, to a new attention to black accomplishments as the “progressive” classes of the race.\textsuperscript{24} Washington and his co-authors provided discourses on African Americans and their achievements, including the formation of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[22] Gaines, \textit{Uplifting the Race}, 77.
\end{footnotes}
women’s clubs and the accomplishments of artists. By 1908, an essay titled “The New Negro” defined the differences between the Negro of the past and the present: “The ignorant, uncivilized and empty-handed man of 1865 has become a man of culture, a man of force and a man of independence. We shall have to look to this man to complete the great work of reconstruction.”

Booker T. Washington emphasized the necessity of vocal sophistication more so than facial features as a marker of the New Negro. As Gates asserts, it was “the precise structure and resonance of the black voice by which the very face of the race would be known and fundamentally reconstructed. Both to contain and to develop this black voice, a virtual literary renaissance was called for” [italics in original].

The new black voice would eliminate the stereotypical voices associated with the black Sambo or “coon songs.” According to Gates, along with education and refinement, “to speak properly was to be proper” and would ensure one’s rights (italics in original). Thus, the voice and vocal properties themselves became closely aligned with what was considered proper decorum.

**Harlem Renaissance**

The term New Negro, as a “new racial self,” most commonly refers to the experience of African Americans during the Jazz Age of the Harlem (or Negro) Renaissance. In the 1920s, Harlem became the center for a “new black intelligentsia,” composed of writers, artists, and musicians. These New Negroes were “products of a modern age, breaking with established traditions and celebrating black life and culture.”

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Ramsey, an “Afro-modernist moment” during the mid-1920s in which African-American arts, including literary, visual, and musical, flowered with prolificacy, initially in New York’s Harlem, later developing in Chicago and Philadelphia. Nathan Irving Huggins describes the era as “a new age of urbanity and sophistication for blacks in America.”\textsuperscript{30} The urban community of Harlem contrasted with the rural South, in which almost 75% of the nation’s black population lived.\textsuperscript{31} The hallmarks of the New Negro, were their recognition of “education, refinement, and money,” as well as property rights.

Books and reading were considered middle-class symbols of status, culture, and sophistication and allowed for a heightened sense of self-worth over the presumed “lower-classed Negroes.”\textsuperscript{32} Reading was also a concern of the black church organizations—many of which published their own literature, hymnals, newspapers, and books. The National Baptist Convention stressed that “The Negro Baptists of this country . . . must discuss, produce or provide literature capable of keeping the identity and increasing race pride of the rising generation or they must be entirely overshadowed by the dominant race of this country.”\textsuperscript{33} The Harlem Renaissance also stressed the importance of literature by African-American authors. Photographs of African Americans sitting and reading books were aimed at reversing the problematic, stereotypical and racist images that had prevailed in media, film, art, and books.\textsuperscript{34}


\textsuperscript{33} National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., quoted in Higginbotham, “The Black Church,” 197.

The six primary leaders of the Renaissance, dubbed “The Six,” included Alain Locke and James Weldon Johnson, who will be discussed later. The intellectuals at the helm of the movement believed that the development of higher forms of African-American art would diminish racism and improve social relations, and positioned themselves in a self-imposed higher social order in league with the Talented Tenth and other uplift advocates, separating migrants from intellectuals in hierarchal class systems.\textsuperscript{35} The divisions reflected two separate conceptual categories, with the New Negro, the Talented Tenth, the Renaissancians, and high art in one court, and the Old Negro, folk, jazz, spirituals, the blues, and low art in the other, which created intra-cultural tensions. As Floyd writes,

Two cultural universes existed: one based on the values of the jook, in the form of rent parties, cabarets, and after-hours joints; the other, on those of the concert hall, the art gallery, the conductor’s podium, and the composer’s studio. . . . But these conflicts, differences, and paradoxes, significant as they may have been, should not obscure a unity that dominated the movement. That unity lay in black nationalism, for even with the movement’s integrationist stance, black nationalism was its real ideology [italics in original].\textsuperscript{36}

Although black nationalism may have been the objective, the movement did create class tensions that have often been expressed as dualities between high-art/low-art, art/folk, etc.

One purpose of the Harlem Renaissance was to negotiate the arts as leverage in the war for equality with white citizens. Some believed that the arts were the primary means for racial equality and advancement. The leaders of the movement praised folk materials, including the spiritual, not for their intrinsic nature, but as source material that could be reformed into higher forms of artistic expression. Initially the traditional spirituals were demonized by some Renaissance leaders; however, others “encouraged the aristocratic adaptation of folk materials in

\textsuperscript{35} Ramsey, \textit{Race Music}, 111.

\textsuperscript{36} Floyd, \textit{The Power of Black Music}, 134.
The creation of ‘high art’ with the purpose of replacing existing values with their newly formulated ones." The sophisticated New Negroes looked down upon the “existing values” of tradition that were associated with the low art forms of the folk. Floyd claims, “the idea was to integrate with white society by selling black people and black culture to the larger society as worthy and equal. . . . the secular music of the black masses was rejected by New Negro leaders in favor of music that was not stereotypical or ‘vulgar.’” This statement suggests that African Americans, as a result of societal racism and discrimination, sought to reform black folk culture as a possible solution to the race problem. However, their denial of the autonomous value of black folk music, except as the basis for higher art forms, speaks of the Renaissance leaders’ negative assumptions of their own musical heritage and underlying shame for these art forms. As Rawn Spearman explains, blacks were often relegated to performances of minstrelsy, Vaudeville, or other “primitive imagery,” regardless of their talent or musical preferences and were often condemned for performing folk materials. Whites often ridiculed minstrelsy, blues, and jazz as “vulgar,” and “primitive.” Black classical singer Roland Hayes remarked, “My people have been very shy about singing their crude little songs before white folks. They thought they would be laughed at—and they were! And so they came to despise their own heritage.” The main reason for this shame, of course, was the history of white racism and prejudice toward African Americans.

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40 Roland Hayes, quoted in Eileen Southern, 411.
However, some black intellectuals, such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and, as I suggest, Reverend A. W. Nix, looked to folk forms, not as low-class expressions unworthy of the sophistication of the concert hall, but as autonomous expressions that had artistic value in their own right. The now-famous statement by Langston Hughes stands up to the elitist stance presented by other Renaissance leaders:

> Let the blare of Negro jazz bands and the bellowing voice of Bessie Smith singing Blues penetrate the closed ears of the colored near-intellectuals until they listen and perhaps understand. . . . We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn’t matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn’t matter either. We build temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.  

Hughes’ statement evokes pride in the value of the folk, including the secular music of blues and jazz. He explicitly states that that he and other young artists are “without fear or shame.”

Although the Renaissance leaders and the Talented Tenth claimed to be taking charge of the image of the black masses for the sake of uplifting the race and entering into white society as equals, race records, such as those recorded by Nix, contested elite hegemony on cultural expressions, granting ascendency to folk, rural black voices.

**Alain Locke**

One of the New Negro leaders, Alain Locke, in his 1925 book, *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, espoused moving past the “old” ways, claiming that “the day of ‘aunties,’ ‘uncles’ and ‘mammies’ is . . . gone,” and proposed instead a new self-determination

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by those who had “broken with the old epoch of philanthropic guidance, sentimental appeal and protest.”

Locke believed the tide had turned for African Americans, stating,

Neither labor demand, the boll-weevil nor the Ku Klux Klan is a basic factor, however contributory any or all of them may have been. The wash and rush of this human tide [of the Great Migration] on the beach line of the northern city centers is to be explained primarily in terms of a new vision of opportunity, of social and economic freedom, of a spirit to seize, even in the face of an extortionate and heavy toll, a chance for the improvement of conditions.

Locke reflected the modernist attitude of an improved economic climate and the creation of new opportunities for African Americans. The Great Migration provided a transition from the rural, old-South mindset to the new modern era of the urban environment. With migration to urban centers came class divisions that no longer considered African Americans en masse as a singular whole. Locke explains that African Americans had previously been bound as a singular entity by means of their “common condition rather than a common consciousness; a problem in common rather than a life in common.”

Locked argued that the New Negro was individualistic, had his own consciousness separate from others, and no longer had need for philanthropic guidance from dominant society. Instead of sentiment, the New Negro had a new self-awareness and accountability, and a desire for “objective and scientific appraisal” to be “known for what he is.”

Locke hoped for a re-evaluation of African Americans based on their artistic achievements, “past and prospective,” including the spirituals as a folk art, and new contributions, as “collaborator and participant in American civilization” by means of creative expression. In other words, creative expression was a key that could improve race relations, not by doing away with
the old, but by appreciating the past and adding new contributions.\textsuperscript{47} However, despite his sentimental attitude towards the spiritual, Locke stressed, “we must be careful not to confine this wonderfully potential music to the narrow confines of ‘simple versions’ and musically primitive molds.”\textsuperscript{48} In other words, he believed the spirituals were a “primitive” source to be molded into modern versions of sophistication. He emphasized this point by stating, “Only with the original Fisk Singers was their real simplicity and dignity maintained. . . . They will find their truest development then, in symphonic music or in the larger choral forms of the symphonic choir.” In Locke’s opinion, “the art music and the folk-music must be fused in a vital but superior product.”\textsuperscript{49} Locke’s comments, as Paul Burgett suggests, “suggest a psychological undercurrent of cultural inferiority about Negro music.”\textsuperscript{50}

**James Weldon Johnson**

James Weldon Johnson was another member of The Six, and a lyricist, author, and educator. As a continuation of Locke’s philosophy, Johnson commented on the importance of art and literature to the status of African Americans:

> A people may become great through many means, but there is only one measure by which its greatness is recognized and acknowledged. The final measure of the greatness of all peoples is the amount and standard of the literature and art they have produced. The world does not know that a people is great until that people produces great literature and art. No people that has produced great literature and art has ever been looked upon by the world as distinctly inferior.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{47} Locke, ed., *The New Negro*, 15.


Johnson, as author, demonstrated his own elitist attitude towards the more downtrodden of the race. In his 1912 book, The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man, the unnamed narrator discusses rural blacks, as “dialect-speaking darkies,” “dull, simple people,” and as a “happy-go-lucky, laughing shufflin', banjo-picking being.” The narrator adds, “Occasionally I would meet with some signs of progress and uplift in even one of these backwood settlements.” The use of stereotypes based on the minstrel character prevented serious attention to the achievements of African Americans, instead focusing on him or her as an “absurd caricature of ‘white civilization.’” Although the book is implied as a fiction novel, many believe that it was an autobiography, which may have revealed Johnson’s classist affiliations.

In 1925, James Weldon Johnson and his brother, J. Rosamond Johnson, discussed how the spirituals had the influence to create a new prideful race consciousness through their raw power, replacing the previous shame and beginning the New Negro’s association with classical music:

This reawakening of the Negro to the value and beauty of the Spirituals was the beginning of an entirely new phase of race consciousness. It marked a change in the attitude of the Negro himself toward his own art material; the turning of his gaze inward upon his own cultural resources. Neglect and ashamedness gave place to study and pride. All the other artistic activities of the Negro have been influenced. There is also a change of attitude going on with regard to the Negro. The country may not yet be conscious of it, for it is only in the beginning. It is, nevertheless, momentous. America [read: white America] is beginning to see the Negro in a new light, or, rather, to see something new in the Negro. It is beginning to see in him the divine spark which may glow merely for the fanning. And so a colored man is soloist for the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Philharmonic; a colored woman is soloist for the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra and the Philharmonic; colored singers draw concert goers of the highest class; Negro poets and writers find entrée to all the most important magazines; Negro authors have their books accepted and put out by the leading publishers. And this change of attitude with regard to the

52 Johnson, Autobiography, 79.
53 Johnson, Autobiography, 78-79.
Negro which is taking place is directly related to the Negro’s change of attitude with regard to himself. It is new, and it is tremendously significant.  

In addition to classical performers and success in the literary world, the reformed folk spiritual was incorporated into “dignified” genres of art song, symphony, and opera as an attempt to validate the status of African Americans.  

While the Johnsons’ comments reflect not only an introspective analysis of advancement and confidence from one’s own “divine spark,” they also reveal assimilationist ideologies, i.e. that art music could create a new image for African Americans in the eyes of white America.

**Creating Modern Black Voices**

**Classical Music and Trained Voices**

With the flowering of the Harlem Renaissance, African-American vernacular forms, such as the spirituals, ragtime, and the blues, were transformed into the “high art” of operas and symphonic works, such as Dett’s *The Chariot Jubilee* (1921) and Still’s *Afro-American Symphony* (1930). Black classical singers, such as Roland Hayes, Paul Robeson, and Marian Anderson became “exemplars of the New Negro movement.”  

However, as Hildebrand espouses, “Many involved in the New Negro Movement . . . emphasized the emotions that they considered characteristic of African-American culture, but they generally agreed that to be respectable, those emotions needed to be clothed in the garments of European ‘form and technique.’”  

Hildebrand has discussed that Hayes felt torn between using “black timbres and

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enunciations” while simultaneously feeling the “pressure to conform to the standards of white America.”

The blending of folk elements, such as those in the spirituals, with European classical techniques produced a hybrid product that created conflicts between those who believed in the “pure” forms of the spiritual and those who were interested in “elevating the music of their race.” While some of these New Negro musicians may have performed classical music for “art’s sake,” others, such as William Grant Still and Paul Robeson, believed that “Art is one form against which such [racist] barriers do not stand.” They essentially used high art as propaganda, clothed as dignity. Harry T. Burleigh, quoted in the Chicago Defender, states, “The spiritual is the only legacy of slavery of which we can be proud and it represents for us the Race’s ascendancy over oppression and humiliation.”

However, as Floyd posits, the spiritual as the foundation of classical renditions divorced these musicians from the Euro-American tradition, specifically German romanticism, and instead reinforced black folk music as their source. The use of African-American idioms and performance practices “ensured the spreading of the expressions of black culture.” Black vocalists were, however, conflicted about incorporating the spiritual into their performances. Many, having been classical trained for years prior to the 1920s, may have merely wanted to be acknowledged for their talents as classical singers. Many had learned the standard European repertoire and wanted to display those skills, but were also enticed with the blending of African-American idioms.

58 Hildebrand, “Two Souls,” 274.
American idioms with classical practices. According to Spear, the inclusion of the spiritual in recital programs was the means to achieve both goals.63

The Fisk Jubilee Singers

The Fisk Jubilee Singers stood as one of the early symbols of African-American modernity, epitomizing a “new authenticity” that blended characteristics of the folk spiritual with Europeanized arrangements in the Western art-music tradition, creating new hybrid forms. The Fisks were marketed as singing “authentic” songs of their forbearers. For example, in 1873 Dwight’s Journal of Music, a white-owned music journal, states that “these songs, therefore, can be relied upon as the genuine songs of their race, being in words and music the same as sung by their ancestors in the cabin, on the platform, and in the religious worship.”64 Despite Dwight’s comments, the Fisks’ songs transformed many of the performance qualities of the folk spiritual, as Mellonee V. Burnim explains:

While the repertoire of these new arrangements was identical to that of the folk spiritual, this change in function – performing before paying transracial audiences – was accompanied by a change in performance practice. The hand clapping, foot stomping, and individual latitude in interpreting the melodic line that had characterized the folk spiritual were replaced by a degree of formality and reserve that distanced this new version from its predecessor.65

While the performative expressions of the voice, such as improvisation, were substituted with written arrangements, “formality” and “reserve” required a change in vocal expressiveness associated with black folk culture to one associated with the western European tradition. Epstein claims, “What is quite likely is that a more authentic performance would have had difficulty finding an audience in 1871” because the “rough” musical features of the folk spiritual would

63 Spear, “Vocal Concert Music,” 47.
64 Dwight’s Journal of Music 32, no. 26 (April 5, 1873): 411.
have been “too offensive to be tolerated.” The “rough” musical features of the voice were often associated with folk traditions, while the Fisk versions smoothed the vocal timbres, conforming the repertoire to concepts of vocal blending, similar to the sounds of white choral groups. The new reformed spiritual included written, four-part arrangements as in the Western-art choral tradition, utilized standard English rather than dialect, and transformed participatory works into presentational performances that required diligent training with attention to pitch and rhythmic standardization and accuracy. Vocal moans, cries, slides, and melismas were more or less replaced (or used less extensively) with standardized and pitch-accurate performances. This transference of an oral tradition to written arrangements constituted a leap into the modern era.

The Fisks’ audiences comprised mostly North American and European audiences, most of whom had never seen a black person before, had never been to a Southern plantation, and had only heard the racialized, musical parodies of blackface minstrelsy. To these audience members, the Fisks represented real blackness epitomized, and audiences assumed that the music they heard came directly off the plantation. Nineteenth-century advertisements, such as the following: “Negro Minstrelsy in Church – Novel Religious Exercise,” complicated the status of the spiritual with its reference to blackface minstrelsy. Other advertisements referenced the Fisks as “genuine negroes.” However, the new hybrid versions did not appeal to all – former slaves complained about the new sound of the spiritual: “Dose are de same ole tunes, but some way dey do’n sound right.” Another former slave complained about the European elements: “I do not like the way they have messed up our songs with classical music.” These comments problematize the


69 Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness, 166.
meaning of authentic. Although audiences (largely white) believed the Fisks to be delivering authentic folk music, many former slaves contested the new hybrid arrangements.

Prior to the new technologies of the phonograph, sound film, and radio, the Fisk Jubilee Singers and other university jubilee groups travelled within the United States and to Europe to disseminate what were then considered modern black voices: those that adopted Euro-American ideals suited to white aesthetics. Although the Fisk singers did not entirely do away with the folk elements of the antebellum spirituals, the singers did revise them into concertized versions that were more “digestible” to white audiences. The Fisks’ renditions continued some folk features, such as call-and-response, slides, asymmetrical rhythms, and melismas, but incorporated Euro-American aesthetics as well. Many of their arrangements featured homophonic textures in SATB, expressive devices such as dynamics and fermatas, standard English rather than vernacular dialect, and incorporated “controlled, modulated vocal production” rather than the full-voiced singing typical in the folk tradition.70 John W. Work describes the training the Fisk Singers received at the hand of their first director, George L. White:

> At designated intervals he would gather his choir into a room, close the door and the windows as closely as advisable, and rehearse in pianissimo tones, the song of the cabin and of the field. The training of this company was a work of patience. Many were the devices and methods to teach them the proper tone production. The smoothing down of their voices was an accomplishment which came after long and hard labor.71

The “smoothing down of their voices,” in addition to teaching them “proper tone production” reveals White’s desire to at least partially assimilate the Fisk singers to Western European vocal aesthetics for singing on the concert stage. George White worked with colleague Theo F. Seward in publishing the *Jubilee Songs*, a booklet that included written arrangements of the spirituals.

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However, Seward admitted that the arrangements were not accepted as “authentic” renderings by southerners who were familiar with the songs and performance style in their original settings on slave plantations.

It has been frequently said, especially by persons who have been at the South, and heard the singing of the camp-meetings: “this music is too good. It is too refined. There is too nice a balancing of the parts, and too much delicate shading to be a genuine representation of slave music.” The objection is easily answered, in this wise. The manner and style of singing at the South depends entirely upon the degree of culture in the congregation. There is a very great difference between the lowest and the highest, in this respect.72

Seward’s comments on the “degree of culture” provide evidence that considerations of culture (or lack thereof) were already part and parcel in the musical expressions in the post-Civil War era. Alain Locke also commented on the singing of the spirituals as a “classic” art form rather than as an expression of the folk:

This universality of the Spirituals looms more and more as they stand the test of time. They have outlived the particular generation and the peculiar conditions which produced them; they have survived in turn the contempt of the slave owners, the conventionalizations of formal religion, the repressions of Puritanism, the corruptions of sentimental balladry, and the neglect and disdain of second generation respectability. They have escaped the lapsing conditions and the fragile vehicle of folk art, and come firmly into the context of formal music. Only classics can survive such things.73

In his statement, Locke opines that the spirituals were too “fragile” as a folk art and could only survive as formal music, i.e. music that was written, arranged and performed in the classical music tradition. John Wesley Work,74 director of the Fisk singers in 1915, shared Locke’s vision, claiming,

there has been a studied endeavor at development which has produced some new harmonies and arrangements much preferable to the old ones. In truth, the general

72 Theo F. Seward, preface to Jubilee Songs: As Sung by the Jubilee Singers (New York: Biglow & Main, 1884), 3.
73 Locke, ed., The New Negro, 199.
74 Work, along with his brother Frederick J. Work, and W. M. Nix served on the committee that published Gospel Pearls.
adaptability of this music to a high degree of development is its hope of gaining artistic recognition. It deserves to be put into a finished form; it lends itself admirably to such a purpose; and those who would keep it as it was first reduced to writing, in their mistaken zeal would doom it to stagnation and to the contempt of highly musical people.\textsuperscript{75}

In other words, Work sought to develop the spirituals from an oral tradition to one that would gain the respect of “highly musical people,” i.e. whites and elite blacks, through the addition of harmonies and written arrangements, creating a “finished form,” that was more stylized than the original “simple” forms in which they were first written down by collectors, such as those by Allen, Ware, and McKim.

The Fisks, under the supervision and advice of George White, adapted their performance style to their white audience members’ tastes, thus accommodating to white sensibilities in an effort to raise financial contributions for Fisk University. However, making sounds acceptable to audience demands can reduce music to a mere commodity to be bought and sold. The Fisks under White’s direction were in one sense, “selling out,” acting as willing participants in the commodity of culture to appeal to white musical sensibilities for financial gain. As Radano claims, the Fisks provided “commodified folkness ready for public consumption.”\textsuperscript{76} The fact that the Fisks were performing for primarily all-white, paying audiences denotes how vocal blackness and whiteness have both functioned as a commodity in the hybrid versions of the Fisks.

In their modified versions, the Fisk spirituals signified modernity for African Americans, contrasting with the oral, vernacular traditions from the past. Gilroy argues that the position of doubleness (or double consciousness) in which the Fisks were represented as both American and black, was problematic:

This doubleness has proved awkward and embarrassing for some commentators since it forces the issues of cultural development, mutation, and change into view.

\textsuperscript{75} Work, \textit{Folk Song of the American Negro}, 92.

\textsuperscript{76} Radano, “Soul Texts,” 84.
and requires a degree of conceptual adjustment in order to account for the tension that is introduced between the same and the other or the traditional and the modern. This has caused problems, particularly for those thinkers whose strategy for legitimating their own position as critics and artists turns on an image of the authentic folk as custodians of an essentially invariant, anti-historical notion of black particularity to which they alone somehow maintain privileged access.  

The Fisks were situated between the traditional and modern. Those who did not recognize the Fisks’ interpretations as hybrid creations, but instead clung to notions of a pre-modern authentic Blackness, essentialized the Fisk creations as homogeneous expressions rather than one that represented change and expansion.

The question of authenticity was addressed by two of the most vocal black leaders of the time: W. E. B. Du Bois and Zora Neale Hurston. In Du Bois’ landmark book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, he devotes an entire chapter to the spiritual, claiming that “the Negro folk-song—the rhythmic cry of the slave—stands to-day not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side the seas.” Du Bois realized that the Fisk arrangements of the spiritual did not represent authentic folk renditions, but instead were a “new hybridity” of African-American musical style that carried the power to create a modern, “new black civilization.” Although Du Bois revered the folk spiritual, he signified the emergence of the Fisk versions as the entrance of a new era of modernity for African Americans that represented the epitome of black progress, advancement, and self-consciousness. “For Du Bois,” as Radano explains, “the Fisk song-texts were both a marker of a profound moment of change and a harbinger of the new black civilization, of a fully realized consciousness of vast critical potential, clearly distinguished from, and more powerful than, the separate and pure


semi-consciousness of an uncompleted black folk.”\textsuperscript{80} In other words, the black folk could not attain self-consciousness or advancement by continuing oral traditions in their original forms; instead, they needed to become “sophisticated,” written works to become “fully realized consciousness.”

In contrast, Zora Neale Hurston, who wrote extensively from the working-class perspective, resisted Du Bois’ concept of a modern, African-American musical expression. She bitterly disagreed with Du Bois’ sentimentality of the “sorrow songs,” calling his labeling “ridiculous”:

In spite of the goings up and down on the earth, from the original Fisk Jubilee singers down to the present, there has been no genuine presentation of Negro songs to white audiences. The spirituals that have been sung around the world are Negroid to be sure, but so full of musicians tricks that Negro congregations are highly entertained when they hear their old songs so changed. They never use the new style songs, and these are never heard unless perchance some daughter or son has been off to college and returns with one of the old songs with its face lifted, so to speak.

I am of the opinion that this trick style of delivery was originated by the Fisk Singers . . . This Glee Club style has gone on for so long and become so fixed among concert singers that it is considered quite authentic. But I say again, that not one concert singer in the world is singing the songs as the Negro song makers sing them.\textsuperscript{81}

The Du Bois/Hurston debate demonstrates the conflicts in which vernacular forms of music, such as the spiritual, were transformed to appeal to a wider audience. As Gilroy states, “Du Bois places black music as the central sign of black cultural value, integrity, and autonomy.”\textsuperscript{82}

Hurston, on the other hand, supported the original versions of the songs as authentic representations of folk life.

\textsuperscript{80} Radano, “Soul Texts and the Blackness of Folk,” 74.

\textsuperscript{81} Zora Neale Hurston, quoted in Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic, 92.

\textsuperscript{82} Gilroy, The Black Atlantic, 90.
Highly Musical People

The idea that musical accomplishments could translate into equality was initiated with James M. Trotter’s *Music and Some Highly Musical People* (1880), which demonstrates the ideal of artistic sophistication through Western classical art music. The purpose of Trotter’s text was to bring attention to the public the “highly musical” skills of African-American musicians, which had been ignored due to racism from whites. Trotter explains,

> the haze of complexional prejudice has so much obscured the vision of many persons, that they cannot see (at least, there are many who affect not to see) that musical faculties, and power for their *artistic* development, are not in the exclusive possession of the fairer-skinned race, but are alike the beneficent gifts of the Creator to all his children [italics in original].

Besides, there are some well-meaning persons [read: white] who have formed, for lack of the information which is here afforded, erroneous and unfavorable estimates of the art- capabilities of the colored race. In the hope, then, of contributing to the formation of a more just opinion, of inducing a cheerful admission of its existence, and of aiding to establish between both races relations of mutual respect and good feeling; of inspiring the people most concerned (if that be necessary) with a greater pride in their own achievements, and confidence in their own resources, as a basis for other and even greater acquirements, as a landmark, a partial guide, for a future and better chronicler; and, finally, as a sincere tribute to the winning power, the noble beauty, of music, a contemplation of whose own divine harmony should ever serve to promote harmony between man and man, – with these purposes in view, this humble volume is hopefully issued.  

Trotter praises the skills of African-American classical musicians, not only to establish blacks as “highly musical,” but also to demonstrate that whites were not the only race with sophisticated musical abilities. Trotter writes of the musical skills of African-American musicians, including Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, (the “Black Swan”), The Colored American Opera Company, and the Fisk Jubilee Singers, to name a few. Trotter’s text is but one example of numerous claims of blacks’ musical excellence in the European classical tradition meant to improve the white majority’s poor opinion of African Americans and thus inspire a more equitable existence.

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between the races. In addition, Trotter hoped to instill race pride into those who he believed were lacking in confidence and to inspire them to accomplish other feats of greatness. However, as Schenbeck contests, Trotter’s denial that racism was the core issue reflecting blacks’ assumed lack of confidence revealed his own adherence to whites’ assumptions of black racial inferiority.  

**Music and Class Hierarchies in Black Churches**

By 1902, class divisions in black churches were already apparent. Ernest Hamlin Abbott, a white man who wrote about his visits to black churches in both the North and the South, describes a split in the style and delivery of services, with some churches moving away from emotionalism, typically associated with folk performance, toward quiet services. He describes the differing opinions and expressions of the two classes: “those which believe that the emotional character of the negro [sic] ought not to be suppressed, but educated and guided; and those which believe that that emotional character should be minimized by the magnifying of the intellectual and ethical.” The “emotional character” was also present in the black preachers and their presentational styles. For example, in a Charleston church, Abbott encountered a preacher who “felt it necessary to spend a good part of his sermon on very plain speaking concerning moral conduct,” while an Atlanta preacher delivered an address that was “violent [in] manner.” We can assume that Abbott’s commentary of a “violent” address implied the speaker’s use of vocalized shouts, moans, and other expressive devices known to be common in black folk churches.

During his research, Abbott encountered W. E. B. Du Bois, who told him “that all such churches give similar evidence of two factors: one, the old-style darkey whose religion is of the

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hallelujah order; the other, the younger generation who are ashamed of these emotional outbreaks.” According to Du Bois, the split was based on generational identity, with the older members affiliating with black vocal traditions, and the youth moving towards assimilation. Abbott’s driver, whom he described as “a young colored man of twenty-two,” commented “that even in his short experience he had noted an improvement toward quietness and good order.”

In other words, quietness was equated with progress, which was opposed to shouting and the emotionalism associated with the traditional black folk church.

One reason for these splits was based on class hierarchies in which economic and educational levels impacted which type of service one attended. Abbott visited an upper-class black Episcopal church, which included “regulated appeal by means of the liturgy of the High Church service,” i.e. formalistic rituals. Abbott writes that the Episcopalian minister informed him of “the fact that the Episcopal Church among the colored people [is] composed of the better-paid and better-educated class made it difficult . . . to reach ‘the masses;’ for the negroes have very well defined class distinctions among themselves.” In other words, the higher class could not (or would not) stoop below their class level to reach the masses. This minister added that, of the white Northerners who were doing charitable work in black churches, “we want their advice, not because it is white, but because it is right.” Abbott reveals that some churches chose to imitate the behavior of whites to “give dignity to the service,” believing that the dominant society’s ways were what was “right.”

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The upper-class educated ministers, as Harris explains, “stood for one ideal as the social foundation of the black America that he was committed to build: assimilation.” Thus, the homiletical style of black ministers coincided with the “sophisticated” music chosen for middle-class churches. Both the music and the preaching styles reflected the greater concern for proper decorum and restraint. Abbott’s visit to a Christian Endeavor prayer meeting at a church in Baltimore revealed “its success in imitating the most perfunctorily respectable meeting of white ‘Endeavorers’,” which was “almost perfect.”

Mixed-Style of Preaching

Although assimilation and imitation of “respectable” white services were apparently the keys to and measures of success in many upper-class black churches, some ministers developed a mixed-style of delivery in which some aspects of the sermon continued folk traditions, such as shouts, and other parts of the service replicated the vocal styles of preaching and singing found in white church services. Apart from the traditionalism of the working-class church and the assimilation of the upper-class church, this third, mixed-style of preaching attempted to appeal to both groups. For example, Abbott attended a church service in which the preacher’s intonations were, according to Abbott, “ejaculatory,” implying a loud, shouted, passionate sermon delivery. Conversely, the service’s inclusion of gospel hymns, “indicated an effort to give dignity to the service.” Thus, in this service, both traditional and “dignified” expressions were employed.

The mixed style of preaching also developed in Chicago black churches as a result of classist hierarchies, which “attempted to appeal to two classes of listeners” through a mixture of mind and emotion. The “mixed-type” churches appealed to both the middle-class and to the

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89 Harris, The Rise of Gospel Blues, 155.
“shouters” through the adjustment of the ritualistic aspects of the sermon. These churches tended to have a large number of congregants, ranging from one thousand to six thousand, such as at Olivet Baptist Church. Mixed-type sermons, as Best explains, typically began “at a slow, studied pace with the preacher reading from a prepared text. It was not uncommon for preachers during this portion of the sermon to illuminate their exposition with passages from the Bible, allusions to current events, or quotes from classical literature.”92 As the sermon progressed, “the minister moved from text to extemporaneous speaking, the volume of his voice rising steadily. Decorum would soon be cast aside as he worked himself, and at least a portion of the congregation, to an emotional frenzy.”93 Usually the minister prepared a message with “intelligent allusions to current affairs,” interjected with shouting by the lower-class congregants. However, the shouting was “rigidly controlled,” as Drake and Cayton contest, but varied according to each pastor’s inclinations.94

Music in 1920s Chicago Churches

By the 1920s, African Americans who had migrated from the rural South had gained access to many new forms of secular entertainment including jazz and blues, and new urban performance contexts where drinking, dancing, and gambling also occurred. However, these new options frequently conflicted with the goals espoused by some African-American intellectuals who sought to reform the social and moral values of the folk.

Within the African-American communities of Chicago in the 1920s, class affiliations often separated the educated elite from the middle and working classes, each with their own religious affiliations and vocal preferences. Southern migrants were unaccustomed to the

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decorum and Europeanized inflections of the elite and middle class churches, and instead brought their demonstrative and emotional vocal practices with them to newly emerging churches in the North, usually in storefront locations.

While the lower-class churches, typically Holiness and Sanctified churches, continued with traditional forms of worship and music, upper-class churches, such as Episcopalian, strove for quiet restraint. Such restraint was extended into the music of Chicago churches in hopes of educating recently arrived members of the community as well:

The decade from 1910 to 1920 witnessed an unprecedented growth of church music programs in urban northern communities. Some church choirs became so intent upon cultivating and performing great sacred music, including masterpieces of Western art-music literature, that they created monthly non-liturgical concerts at which they delivered complete renditions of Messiah, Elijah, The Crucifixion, and other staples of oratorio literature. . . the belief that exposure to “good music” would help re-acculturate recent emigrants from the rural South: rustics who heard Mendelssohn at church would be more easily persuaded to adopt the other habits that marked out respectable Negroes as a class in Chicago.95

The music of old-line Chicago black churches reflected the class-oriented mindset of its practitioners. The practices that had been associated with traditional African-American worship services, including congregational singing, hand-clapping, foot stomping, and body movement, were replaced by organized choirs directed by trained musicians. However, the goal towards progress essentially removed the markers associated with black vocal traditions in favor of Euro-American classical singing practices and repertoire. For example, the Chicago Choral Study Club at Olivet Baptist Church, with the goal of cultural advancement, began performing classical works, such as Handel’s Messiah.96 Although African Americans had been singing the hymns of white composers since their first attendance at white, Protestant churches, they had sung the

95 Schenbeck, Racial Uplift and American Music, 175.
96 Harris, The Rise of Gospel Blues, 106.
music utilizing their own traditional performance practices. Harris states, “selections like *Amazing Grace* . . . were sung in the same style and evidently with the same frequency as blacks had been accustomed to, whether they were recently from the South or old settlers in Chicago.”

However, many black choirs in the 1920s were restructured to eventually do away with the traditional music and styles, replacing them with hymns and anthems. Harris explains,

> The feeling seemed to be that in their search for high standards of worship, directors had too readily discarded their own music: ‘We were being hincty [snobbish] toward our own music. It was rejected. We just didn’t want to sing our music.’

However, in efforts to satisfy some practitioners, some choir directors began incorporating arranged spirituals, such as those in the Fisk tradition, into their repertoires. Harris contends:

> Whereas old-line directors had considered the spiritual in its classic form to be crude and its first descendent musically trite, they found the anthem/octavo spiritual a worthy medium through which to restore some aspect of their racial heritage to the liturgy from which it had been so effectively expunged.

Therefore, many middle-class churches, such as Olivet Baptist, incorporated both classical music and arranged spirituals into their repertoire as a replacement for the music associated with the traditional black service. They did away with the traditional spiritual as ministers adopted a mixed-style of delivery that kept vocal practices, such as shouts and moans, in check.

I posit that Nix did not belong to any of these three categories. As we have no recordings of Nix’s live sermons, we must judge his homiletical disposition from the recordings in which he addressed a variety of topics, including uplift themes. Vocally, Nix never controlled his own or his congregants’ shouts and did not incorporate music known to be affiliated with white churches into his recordings. Instead, he opted for the inclusion of Negro spirituals and hymns. His

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congregants were a mixture of classes, yet Nix made no attempt to please every group by incorporating both classical music and spirituals, as some churches did in the 1920s. Rather, he spoke, sang, and chanted using vocalities associated with the black folk church. Thus, I do not include Nix as a “mixed-type” preacher, but as one who favored black vocal traditions.

Black Women in the Church

Women, typically the majority in black church denominations, were also involved in reform and uplift, as well as civic activity. The women of the black Baptist church supported self-respect and Victorian modes of respectability as themes for advancement, believing that “respectable” behavior would gain them favor by members of white society, and thus attempted to align the black lower class with “temperance, industriousness, thrift, refined manners, and Victorian sexual morals.” In Washington’s book, A New Negro for a New Century, the black woman was central to images of self-respect and was praised for her work in the women’s club movement. The female image of respectability was also a key feature in the Voice of the Negro, a black-owned monthly magazine, which focused on not only images of black females in proper attire, but also as lovers of art, literature, and of possessing a “sweet” voice. One photograph details the appearance of a dignified lady: “You cannot avoid the motion of this dignified countenance. College training makes her look so.” It deserves mentioning that while black women were the majority in the Baptist church and held in respect, they were not given


101 Higginbotham, “The Black Church,” 199.


opportunities to serve in ministerial positions in the 1920s. Recorded Baptist sermons reflect this inequality.

The Voice and Vocal Pedagogy

In addition to the preference for classical music and classical singers, the voice itself was associated by class and received scrutiny for its sound qualities. This section outlines the vocal preferences according to vocal manuals and journals from the late nineteenth century, coinciding with the Victorian era, to the early twentieth century. Vocal pedagogy literature established the vocal aesthetics considered the norm in Western classical singing, to which many African-American elite musicians aspired. What were the vocal sounds so desired as signs of sophistication, culture, modernity, and progress?

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, numerous manuals on vocal pedagogy allowed amateur singers the opportunity to receive instruction on vocal training. Voice teachers emphasized tone and breathing, among other things, and included references to scientific data, such as anatomical drawings of the vocal chamber, muscles, and even diagrams to assist in explaining the modern concepts of sound waves and vibration. (Figure 5-2 and 5-3).104

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The emphasis on proper vocalizing was not only on Italian concepts of singing, but also on the vocal qualities of consonance and soft dynamics, qualities that were highly praised as the ideal

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vocal sounds. We can situate the preference for soft, pure voices as part of the general moral standards expected of Victorian middle-class women, who were considered models of social purity, chastity, sophistication, and femininity. Racial uplift leaders often used Victorian modes of conduct to establish their own goals. As I have demonstrated in Chapter 2, quietness was the mark of sophistication for both newly established migrants to Chicago, as advertised in the Chicago Defender, and for students at State University.

The voice manuals emphasized repeatedly a preference for a soft, pure tone, while a dark tone or “throaty” tone was to be avoided. In Voice, Song, and Speech, a vocal instruction manual published in 1884, Lennox Browne describes a typical vocal lesson: “A pupil on going over an exercise or piece is told by the master, ‘You are singing with nasal, or throaty, or muffled quality,’ as the case may be; ‘let the tone be a pure vocal one.’” Another manual from 1921 cautions, “To avoid what is known as the ‘throaty tone’ we must have equable poise.” The goal of the singer was to create a pure and beautiful tone that was consistent throughout the registers.

Modern vocal techniques depended on newly discovered scientific data that aided in the advancement of vocal production. Dr. H. R. Streeter, the author of an 1871 voice manual titled, Voice Building: New and Correct Theory for the Mechanical Formation of the Human Voice, writes, “So long as this tone remains properly located we shall have a uniform, flexible, pure, sympathetic quality of tone throughout the whole compass of the voice.” The title of his manual emphasizes the mechanical formation of the voice rather than its emotive qualities, and


how the attention to the physical workings of the body could bring about the desired results of purity of tone.

Vocal Sweetness

Some elite African Americans adopted these vocal aesthetics as a means of expressing their own class status. *The Negro Music Journal*, published only between 1902-1903, promoted classical music-making in the European tradition by African Americans. It featured columns on music performance, African-American and European classical-music composers, music theory, and music history and frequently featured columns on African-American vocalists and pedagogues. The purpose of the journal, as defined by its editor, was to endeavor to get the majority of our people interested in that class of music which will purify their minds, lighten their hearts, touch their souls and be a source of joy to them forever. It is the music of yesterday and today, or in other words, the music of the old masters like Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart and others: the music of today as given us by S. Coleridge Taylor, Grieg, Chaminade, Saint Saëns, Paderewski, McDowell, Mrs. Beach and others, these names being only a few of the many great and good composers and musicians the world has given us.\(^{110}\)

The journal’s sketch of Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, a.k.a. the “Black Swan,” describes her “sweet clear voice” as the standard for vocal beauty.\(^{111}\) The journal frequently mentioned the “sweet” qualities of classical singers’ voices as a marker of their vocal perfection, and as a marker of class and respectability. In a column titled, “The American Negro in Music,” Clarence Cameron White discusses a soprano with “a remarkably strong and sweet voice” and another singer’s aptly-named rendition of “My Heart at Thy Sweet Voice,” by Saint-Saëns, which he considered “grand.”\(^{112}\) Reviews of operatic singer Matilda Sissieretta Jones, a.k.a. “Black Patti,” also focused on the “sweetness and smoothness of her tones, [and] her distinct enunciation” as


proof of not only her “phenomenal voice” but also her higher-class status.113 In Trotter’s Music and Some Highly Musical People, a text of roughly 350 pages, ninety pages mentioned “sweet” or “sweetness” as a positive feature of an artist, either vocal or instrumental. Sweetness was described as an attribute of timbre, emotions, melody, harmony, sounds, or voice.

Vocal sweetness was also the preferred tonal quality by which vocal pedagogues trained their students. In 1921 William Benjamin writes, “the teacher who works only along the lines of physiological training may produce a big, noisy voice; but without the psychological element, such a voice would be wholly lacking in sympathy and sweetness of tone.”114 Benjamin adds that singers should avoid the “throaty tone” and the “nasal pose,” instead opting for “full, round, resonant and beautifully expressive tones . . . the bel canto of the old Italian school.”115

In contrast, in The Negro Music Journal, jazz and blues were demonized as a “low and degrading class of music . . . . It can not [sic] be denied that the lower type of ‘rag-time’ – and the bulk of it – has done much to lower the musical taste and standard of the whole musical public, irrespective of color or nationality.”116 The journal’s preference for sweet voices ran counter to the hard and gravelly timbres associated with jazz, blues, the folk spirituals, and the chanted sermon.

**Vocal Smoothness**

In addition to vocal sweetness, vocal pedagogues emphasized the importance of vocal smoothness, i.e. legato phrasing. Vocal instructor, A. A. Pattou, wrote “the perfect legato

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sostenuto of vocalization (coloratura of the Italian school),” could be achieved through “voice control,” creating “the pure, round vowel sound.”¹¹⁷ The tone colors considered undesirable included: “tremolo,” “nasal,” “guttural or throat[y],” “wiry or harsh,” and as characteristic of “the uncultivated voice in general.”¹¹⁸ Other non-desired tones and techniques, as explained by Pattou included, “The deficiencies in tone-quality, the want of smoothness, the indistinctness of glottis articulation, the blurring or confusing of the connecting intervals, the improper phrasing, the deficient articulation, etc., etc., all these defects would then stand out prominently in all their crudity.”¹¹⁹ As we have discussed, these “non-desired tones” were typically associated with African-American voices, and included gravelly timbres, shouts, loudness, vocal percussiveness, and vocal slides. Additionally, “proper” singing technique would eliminate the very musical gestures that had come to define the black vocal tradition presented on Nix’s recorded sermons.

Phonograph manufacturers also attempted to appeal to middle-class sensibilities by marketing their product’s sweet and smooth tonal qualities. For example, in 1910, Victrola placed an ad (Figure 5-4), which advertised “the sweetest, most mellow tone ever known.”¹²⁰


¹¹⁸ Pattou, The Art of Voice-Production, 75.

¹¹⁹ Pattou, The Art of Voice-Production, 93.

In a 1915 Aeolian-Vocalion product manual, the company repeatedly commented on the sweet and smooth tonal qualities produced by its phonographs: “How smooth, how wonderfully true are these tones . . . the bell-clear sweetness of the tenor voice . . . the sweet melody flows from a master’s violin,” and so on.\textsuperscript{121} Victor compared the instrument with a Stradivarius, but “greater because it is all musical instruments and the perfect human voice.”\textsuperscript{122} Thus, apparently sweetness and smoothness were the desired goals of both the “perfect human voice” and the phonograph.


\textsuperscript{122} \textit{The Atlanta Constitution} (1881-1945) (Jan. 20, 1910): 5.
Ascribing Biological Differences to Voices

In *The Negro Music Journal*, in a column titled “Negroes as Singers,” the author describes the qualities of black voices in essentialist terms as the result of biological differences between whites and blacks:

There is a peculiar vibrating quality in the Negro voice, due perhaps to a peculiar arrangement of the vocal chords, which is not found in the white race. Its effect is absolutely unique and indescribable. In some degree this remarkable quality is lessened by cultivation although it is not entirely re-removed [sic], so that the most striking, even if less artistic, results are obtained from Negroes on the plantation... Unquestionably some of this music is as old as the world, for it has been chanted in the wilds of Africa to the accompaniment of rude drum and punctured reed ever since human beings could articulate. It still retains music of its original savagery, and when sung with the peculiar timbre which is the especial attribute of the Negro’s voice, it produces an effect which sets the nerves tingling with unwonted feeling.  

The author suggests that “cultivation,” i.e. voice training, can remedy some, but not all, of the “natural” resonances of black voices. In the author’s opinion, black voices retain their “original savagery,” regardless of vocal training. Another vocal instruction manual from 1884 even claimed that race affected the tessitura of the voice: “The races which are still in the rear of civilisation [sic] ought... to have higher voices than the white races. This... is the case with the negroes and the Mongolians.” Essentialist narratives that focused on biological differences were not uncommon in general music and vocal pedagogy manuals of the early twentieth-century, even from those published by highly esteemed institutions, such as the New England Conservatory of Music’s *The Realm of Music*. Published in 1900, it discussed the varying vocal sounds produced by different ethnic groups, including African Americans:

The voice of the American Negro is distinguishable from that of the white singer, and here, perhaps anatomy may afford a partial clue, for thick lips and a flat nose

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must influence the tone-production in a certain degree, and many, though by no means all, of our colored population have these anatomical peculiarities. Where these are absent however, the tone is more akin to the ordinary standard of the singing of other races.\textsuperscript{125}

The white singer’s sound was thus considered the standard by which other races were measured, and was gauged as the norm in vocal pedagogy to which instructors should aspire. For example, instructors Browne and Behnke claim, “it is necessary in all training to make the student conscious of his possibilities, of nature’s ideal intention regarding what is normal not only for the race but for himself.”\textsuperscript{126} Thus, ideals of a standard or “normal” tonal quality were measured by race.

Vocal pedagogues did not limit their commentary to singers, however, but also to speaking and preaching voices. For example, Browne and Behnke comment on the voices of ministers:

A preacher is something more than a sermon-maker, he is a “thought-creator” and a “thought-conveyer,” and it is his duty to convey his thoughts to his auditors in a suitable and impressive manner. But if his tone-production be faulty, rendering his voice unmusical and unsympathetic; if he put upon it an unnatural strain and use an unnecessary expenditure of force; if his speech be weak and unintelligible, then his most beautiful thoughts and profoundest learning will be powerless to elevate and instruct his congregation.\textsuperscript{127}

Although Browne’s and Behnke’s commentary provides evidence of their support for strong preaching voices, they advise against strain and force, which were the primary vocal tools used by many black folk ministers, including Nix.


Voice Culture – Vocal Whiteness as a Commodity

“As a part of the body,” according to Grant Olwage, “the voice stands for the subject more directly than any other instrument. Indeed, so tied to the body is the voice that even when disembodied we easily identify it as belonging to a particular subject, whether individual or social.” Olwage explains that the idea of the “modern singing voice” appeared in the 1830s and 1840 and was defined by a specific quality of tone. Classical singing and “pure” or “good” tones were linked to the middle classes and “the educated ear” in contrast to “bad,” or “rough” tones associated with “othered voices.”

Scott Carter explains, “Between 1880 and 1920, over 150 singing manuals were published throughout the United States and marketed as tools in the development of “voice culture.” Voice culture depended on the achievements of vocal performance and the attainment of a “cultivated sound.”

African-American and immigrant voices were considered “an aural and physical threat” to national culture, and were limited in their ability to represent “national belonging” by the voice culture movement. The voice became a “marker of difference that delineated the boundaries between native and Other, elite and mass culture,” and, as Carter contends, “elites heard these ‘newcomers to the city’ as a ‘boisterous’ threat to notions of proper social decorum and to established racial and class hierarchies.”

Voice culture practitioners privileged Western classical vocal aesthetics and pedagogical techniques as methods to achieve vocal “whiteness” and discouraged vocal practices that

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130 Carter, “Forging a Sound Citizenry,” 12.

131 Carter, “Forging a Sound Citizenry,” 15.

signaled lower-class voices, such as vocal loudness and rough timbres. Carter claims that racial
degeneracy could be “cured” through voice training by focusing on Western vocal norms, such
as pure tone. Jann Pasler explains, “the idea of a pure tone suggested more than a vocal ideal and
signified, instead, a notion of racial purity embodied by Western European definitions of
whiteness.” Poor training, on the other hand, was revealed through “exaggerated gestures and
the vulgar sounds of [the] non-Western.” For example, guttural tones, excessive vibrato, or
pharyngeal singing (singing from the back of the throat) were all considered the result of poor
training and associated with immigrant and ethnic voices. Carter explains,

The circulation of people brought about by global capitalism and imperial
expansion [in the modern era], in particular, shaped a sonic epistemology based on
racial Otherness, that heard music, and singing more specifically, as an index of the
corporeal and social body. . . . Most striking was the reliance on corporeal language
to describe foreign music making, either through nonverbal, psychological
descriptions (screams, cries, and moans) or physiological terminology (nasal,
throaty, guttural). Voice culture represented a physical manifestation of the attempt
by the nation’s cultural elites to secure their continuing monopoly over the
conditions of national, racial, and class belonging.

As discussed in Chapter 4, wails, cries, and moans as well as nasal and guttural timbres were
David Bispham writes, “at this time, when general education and particular regard for the
English language is at such a low ebb in America, I cannot too seriously impress upon all singers
the absolute necessity of culture, of refinement of mind and body, of demeanor, and of
diction.” These values were associated with Victorian values of respectability and refinement,

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135 Carter, “Forging a Sound Citizenry,” 29.

which contrasted with African-American voices. Thus, voice culture appears to have purposefully discriminated against these voices in the name of national belonging and privileged vocal whiteness.

Vocal pedagogy and pedagogues were themselves associated with elite culture. In a 1913 edition of *The New York Tribune*, multiple voice practitioners advertise their services for voice instruction and preface their name with titles, such as “Mme. Vinello,” or “Signor Corruccini,” implying not only their sophisticated status, but also their association with European vocal pedagogy. Their names alone were markers of sophistication and culture. One means that cultural elites could “secure their monopoly” was to exclude lower classes from access to the privileged knowledge of vocal pedagogy.

**Vocal Pedagogy and the Phonograph**

In 1916, the Victor Talking Machine Company published the *Oscar Saenger Course in Vocal Training*. Saenger was a well-known vocal instructor, residing in New York, who was recognized as “one of the greatest authorities and one of the most successful teachers of the present day” [italics in original]. His students had reportedly sung roles at the Royal Opera House in Berlin and the Metropolitan Opera in New York. A voice manual by Saenger includes photos of a well-dressed white man demonstrating the proper physical posture for singing, standing next to a large Victrola, which was required to play the 78 rpm records of vocal exercises that accompanied the manuals (Figure 5-5).

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His fine attire suggests that trained singing was an expression of sophistication and culture. The availability of recorded vocal exercises, complete with ten double-sided records of an “exemplar,” (a tenor singing an example of the exercise) and accompanist, along with written notation of the exercises, was novel for its time. Recorded exercises on phonographs allowed students repetitive playing for practice purposes – something which could not be done previously. Repetition of the lessons allowed the student to grasp the subtle instructions given by the teacher that might easily be overlooked or misunderstood in a live lesson. It also allowed for the sound of the “proper” elocution of the voice to be heard wherever a phonograph player was available and in the comfort of one’s home. Saenger’s manual stressed that “students anywhere”
(italics in original) could benefit from his recorded lessons, implying the availability of the phonograph recordings worldwide, or at least in the United States. Thus, the sounds of a classical voice, well-trained by a renowned teacher in New York, were potentially disseminated to all parts of the country. Also, the one-time purchase of phonograph recordings of vocal lessons were marketed as less expensive than weekly formal instructions with a live teacher. Saenger’s manual included instructions on “how to use the Victrola” and “how to practice with the records.” However, not everyone could afford the new technology as the cabinet versions of the Victrola were priced between $75-200 in 1918 (Figure 5-6)\textsuperscript{139} at a time when the average worker earned only $1518 per year.\textsuperscript{140}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{victrola_ad.png}
\caption{Ad for Victor-Victrola, 1918.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{139} “Victor-Victrola,” (advertisement), \textit{The Talking Machine World} 9, no. 12 (Dec. 15, 1913): 5.

Saenger’s lessons included instruction on breath control, tone and resonance, sustained tones, and the like. His advice on tone was to avoid “faulty emissions of tone,” which included “nasal, guttural, throaty, [and] tremulous,” favoring instead a “beautiful” tone, “free, clear, steady, and true to the pitch.” In other words, he clearly disfavored sounds typical of black, folk voices, preferring instead trained voices associated with the Western classical tradition. Saenger also advised against voices that included scooping, the “hard stroke of the glottis,” or were breathy.141 “Hard” voices and vocal bends and scoops were also typical of black folk voices, such as the voice of Rev. Nix. For Saenger, the only time a slide between notes was allowed was in the portamento, but, as Saenger advises, “care must be taken to execute this peculiar effect with elegance and grace [italics in original]. Nothing is more ugly than a slovenly portamento, but it produces a most valuable effect when employed with taste and skill.”142 The recordings include the voice of tenor Paul Althouse, whose voice is round and full, demonstrating the European standard, which was counter to the black voices heard in popular music genres, such as blackface minstrelsy and vaudeville.143

Purchasing a Victrola, voice lessons, phonograph recordings, or vocal instruction manuals would have been a hardship for most working-class African Americans, as many worked as porters or domestic servants, earning sub-standard wages.144 For these reasons, it is doubtful that working-class black singers would have had the income to afford these luxuries. Voice manuals and private vocal lessons, like the phonographs themselves, were most likely marketed to white, elite consumers, thus commodifying vocal whiteness. Therefore, voice

141 Saenger, The Oscar Saenger Course in Vocal Training, 32-33.
142 Saenger, The Oscar Saenger Course in Vocal Training, 63.
143 Carter, “Forging a Sound Citizenry,” 29.
144 Gaines, Uplifting the Race, 15.
culture can be deemed as an attempt by white society and vocal practitioners to retain aesthetic values associated with Western sophistication and the elite class. Although African Americans did own phonographs, the question remains if they would or could have purchased vocal manuals and their accompanying records.

Phonograph cabinets and records themselves also became symbols of middle-class respectability and sophistication. Kenney explains,

improvements to original design of the phonograph and to records were guided by the Victorian era’s association of the home with ‘an oasis of calm’ at which the wife/mother provided, among other things, refined and uplifting music with which to rejuvenate her hard-working husband and edify, enrapture, and improve the memories of her children, imparting a sense of proportion, good taste, high moral purpose, and brotherly and sisterly affection through inspiring music.145 Victrola featured a “Victorian-style cabinet” that was “elegant and artistic in appearance,” designed to lure the white, middle class into purchasing a piece of furniture that would add to the elegance of their home parlor.146 The Cecilian Phonograph marketed its instrument as an “answer to the question of how to make the home truly the ‘social center’” [italics in original], replacing the home piano as the center of domestic music-making.147 An advertisement for Victrola from October 1916 featured white operatic stars as a reinforcement of their elite cultural values (Figure 5-7).148

145 Kenny, Recorded Music in American Life, 46.
146 Kenney, Recorded Music in American Life, 51.
Victrola apparently believed that it knew the type of music the upper-middle-class consumer wanted and marketed specifically to this elite group. An advertisement for Aeolian products, obviously marketed for elite whites, features couples dancing, dressed in elegant attire (Figure 5-8).\textsuperscript{149}

Phonograph Recordings by African Americans

Pre-1920s recordings

Phonographs were not made for home use until 1888, distributed through Edison’s North American Phonograph Company, beginning the recording of musicians and celebrities for entertainment purposes. In 1890, commercial recordings became available to the public through coin-operated phonograph machines.¹⁵⁰ By 1902, the Victor Talking Machine Company (the new name for the North American Phonograph Company) issued releases by opera stars, actors, speakers, music-hall entertainers, and vocal quartets. Prior to World War I, record companies primarily featured “military-style” marching band brass ensembles. In addition, many of these military bands incorporated social dance music, which included waltzes, polkas, cakewalks, and ragtime.¹⁵¹ Prior to 1921, according to Humphrey, recorded black music typically featured


concert spirituals, such as those by the Fisk Jubilee Singers, “coon” songs or other demeaning stereotypes, or black music “smoothed out for white consumption.”

As Kenney explains, the “phonograph business developed a new socially democratic type of popular entertainment that seemed, like electricity itself, the movies, and show business, to define what was ‘modern’ about the modern world.” The emergence of the phonograph swept the market as new companies entered the playing field. In 1914, 1915, and 1916 the number of phonograph manufacturers rose from six, to eighteen, to forty-six, respectively. The phonograph itself became a marker of modernity. In the second decade of the 1900s, labels such as Paramount released recordings by ethnic groups to appeal to immigrant populations initially, with recordings by African Americans only coming into national prominence in the 1920s.

Although not as well known, beginning in 1890 record companies issued releases by African-American artists performing early ragtime, classical music, poetry and speeches. However, recordings from the burgeoning record business were considered novelties for the amusement of the white middle class. According to recording industry scholar Tim Brooks, “While white record companies were willing to record blacks, they wanted those who would appeal to white customers. Curiously, the prevailing thinking was that blacks themselves were not a market worth pursuing.” Victor, for example, did not believe that blacks “would support their own.”

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153 Kenney, Recorded Music in American Life, 27.


155 Kenney, Recorded Music in American Life, 115.

156 Brooks, liner notes to Lost Sounds, CD-ROM, 6-7.

157 Brooks, Lost Sounds, 7.
Records were marketed for seventy-five cents apiece in 1918; however, these were initially marketed to southern whites, not blacks. The number of phonograph owners rose in accordance: 540,000 in 1914 to 2,225,000 in 1919. Even dilapidated houses on the West Side of Chicago included a radio and a Victrola:

The building is very old and has probably been condemned. The furnishings of this home are those of very poor people, but everything is clean and in order. The only new article in the living-room is a modern portable Zenith radio. Other furnishings include a large old-fashioned stove, a day-bed, three chairs, a trunk with a clean white towel spread over it, a Victrola, and a table.\(^{158}\)

This began to change when, in October of 1916, the *Chicago Defender* sent out a notice for phonograph owners to alert the *Defender* of their status of ownership, which would be passed on to the Victor company: “the record companies are seeking to find out how many victrolas [sic] are owned by members of the Race. When this is known, then records of the Race’s great artists will be placed on the market.”\(^{159}\) In November of 1916, the *Defender* encouraged its readers again to write to Victor Records to ask the company to record “noted artists,” such as Anita Patti Brown, Roland Hayes, and other classical music celebrities.\(^{160}\)

Prior to the recording of race records, white-owned labels that recorded African Americans insisted that they record songs that continued the demeaning stereotypes associated with the “plantation darkie.” The *Chicago Defender* responded by speaking to the “stupidity of the white folk who had wanted to keep him [the African American] down to ‘coon shouting.”\(^{161}\) However, an article in the *Chicago Defender* from 1921 describes how Carroll Clark, who was a

\(^{158}\) Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 580.


trained baritone, was forced to sing “coon songs,” with his photograph published for marketing purposes. The Chicago Defender reported that his photo “must not be identified with the finer ballads, but with the type of song which has come to be associated in the popular mind with the smart, sophisticated ‘coon’ who furnishes use with ragtime and jazz.” In other words, record labels that marketed black voices insisted on perpetuating racial stereotypes through both the repertoire assigned to the singers and the images associated with them. In an effort to dismiss previous demeaning stereotypes and instead represent African Americans, especially successful ones, as cultured and sophisticated individuals, another Defender article describes the physical features of Harry Pace, the owner of Pace Phonograph Corporation, and its musical director, a Mr. Henderson, as “possessed of regular, refined features, and to the poise of the educated and cultured and that of trained musicians.”

On February 14, 1920, Okeh recorded Mamie Smith, who was a Vaudeville and blues artist, releasing, “That Thing Called Love,” and “You Can’t Keep a Good Man Down,” selling 7,500 copies in the first week. Because of the success of these first recordings, Okeh quickly recorded Smith again, accompanied by her Jazz Hounds, on August 10, 1920, and issued her first major hit, “Crazy Blues.” Due to Okeh’s success with Smith, other labels followed suit by recording other African-American singers. By 1920, Smith’s records were selling for one


165 Kenney, Recorded Music in American Life, 114.

166 Kenney, Recorded Music in American Life, 114.
Records were often sold by mail order or by Pullman porters, who sold copies on their routes to the South, which opened up the rural market. Not until black newspapers, such as the *Chicago Defender*, began advertising for the record companies, partly for increased advertising revenues and partly to disseminate race pride, did the marketing to African-American consumers begin.  

**Race Records – Vocal Blackness as a Commodity**

After the success of Mamie Smith’s 1920 release of “Crazy Blues,” record companies realized that a viable market existed for African Americans. On January 7, 1922, Okeh placed an ad in the *Chicago Defender* that stated, “All the greatest Race phonograph stars can be heard on Okeh Records.” With the new phonograph and recording technologies, some independent record companies discovered success through marketing and distributing recordings by black artists to black consumers, not as a particular musical genre, but as a new commercial category, which they called “race music.”

The term “race records” did not have a negative connotation in the 1920s. Between World War I and II, race consciousness was a positive, but defensive reaction to racism. Race pride and “advancing The Race” were emphasized for building morale, supporting black businesses, for political organization, and for economic power. Thus, as a result of race pride, certain figures developed: “the Race Hero, the Race Leader, the Race Man, [and] the Race

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Therefore, race records can be thought of as expressions of race pride and group affinity (Figure 5-9).

Advertisements in the Chicago Defender often included photos and replications of blues artists for marketing purposes. The element of authenticity was used for marketing purposes as well, as is demonstrated in an advertisement for a new blues release: “Here They Are – Moanin’, Whinin’, Shoutin’ Blues,” which was mentioned in Chapter 4. The use of terminology of vocal characteristics associated with the religious traditions of the black church clearly defined the blues as an authentic black genre meant to appeal to black musical tastes, and was thus marketed as a commodity to black audiences. According to Kenney, “an estimated 5,500 blues and 1,250 gospel recordings by about 1,200 artists were issued between 1920 and 1942.” The technologies of the phonograph and sound films carried forth vocal traditions of blues, jazz, and

171 Drake and Cayton, Black Metropolis, 390-392.


174 Kenney, Recorded Music in American Life, 110.
recorded sermons into the modern era, creating new, modern voices. Although record companies benefitted financially, African Americans also benefitted from race records by the dissemination of black voices, and by the entrance of African Americans into the consumer market. As Levine posits, “In this sense records can be seen as bearers and preservers rather than primarily destroyers of folk traditions.” Phonograph records and radio and sound films thus influenced a hybrid, blending as music, sound, and voices filtered from urban cities to rural communities and from the North to the South.

Black Swan Records

Black Swan Records, under the umbrella of the Pace Phonograph Corporation, released classical, jazz, and blues music recordings by black artists beginning in May 1921. The Pace Phonograph Corporation, owned by Harry Pace, was unique for its time in that it was operated by and marketed to African Americans, and released folk songs, including spirituals, work songs, and “emancipation” songs. Pace’s philosophy was oriented to “challenge stereotypes about African Americans, promote African Americans’ cultural development, and impugn racist arguments about African American barbarism.” Black Swan aspired to middle-class standards of “dignity, refinement, and self-restraint”—the same tenets accorded to racial uplift. Pace was able to easily navigate between both white and black realities, as ragtime composer Eubie Blake claimed of Pace, “When he’d go downtown he was colored; when he’d go uptown he was white.” The company sought to infuse its uplift philosophies with the business of music as an

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175 Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 231.
176 Suisman, “Co-Workers in the Kingdom of Culture,” 1297.
177 Suisman, “Co-Workers in the Kingdom of Culture,” 1309-1310.
endeavor to promote racial equality, and to revoke stereotypical representations of blacks’ supposed inferiority.

Black Swan’s business model was established as a symbol of African-American economic development and capitalist entrepreneurship. W. E. B. Du Bois and black composer William Grant Still were both directors for Black Swan, which sought to appeal to the black middle class by rejecting racial stereotypes of African Americans. With the support of Du Bois, Black Swan became loosely aligned with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and benefitted from the political sway of Du Bois and the NAACP. 179 In an article published in 1921 titled, “Phonograph Records,” Du Bois claimed, “we must now develop a business organization to preserve and record our best voices, [in order to] reveal the best music, not only of [our] race but of all races and ages.” 180

Black Swan, named after African-American operatic singer, Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, favored music which espoused middle-class tenets of respectability, dignity, and refinement, exemplified in formally-arranged music, such as concert spirituals. According to David Suisman, blues artists, such as Bessie Smith, were considered too rough and sounded “blacker” than the lyrical singing that Black Swan preferred. Suisman contests that Black Swan preferred singers with “controlled, trained voices, in contrast to the muscular, roughhewn singing style ascribed to African Americans.” 181 In other words, Black Swan aspired to the cultural aesthetics of white society and the black middle-class. Although they also recorded and marketed the syncopated secular and religious music practiced by lower-class blacks, Black Swan kept their distance from

179 Suisman, “Co-Workers in the Kingdom of Culture,” 1297.


181 Suisman, “Co-Workers in the Kingdom of Culture,” 1310.
the rougher, “hot” jazz and blues groups.\textsuperscript{182} The blues that they did record, such as blues artist Ethel Waters, was “dignified,” “respectable,” and even “fashionable.”\textsuperscript{183}

As a result, Black Swan Records demonstrated what Suisman calls “internalized racism,” which essentially favors one domain while rejecting the other. Angela Davis explains:

During the Harlem Renaissance, even as black artists and intellectuals attempted to articulate—in often divergent ways—a uniquely black aesthetic, they almost entirely ignored the musical heart of African-American culture, the blues. There were two notable exceptions. Zora Neale Hurston, in both her scholarly and her creative work, affirmed the vitality and integrity of black folk culture, of which the blues was an integral part, and Langston Hughes used the blues as the very foundation of his poetics. Both artists tended to be shunned by black intellectuals who assumed that the “primitive” ingredients of poor and working-class black culture needed to be transcended if “great art” was to be produced by people of African descent. When Black Swan, the first black recording company, lined up the artists it wished to record, its producers chose music that had more in common with the music of the dominant culture than with the popular musical expressions of the African-American people.\textsuperscript{185}

A press release for Black Swan states that “the first list of Black Swan records includes two selections by Miss Revelia Hughes, soprano, ‘At Dawning’ and ‘Thank God for a Garden,’ both of which are pleasingly rendered, with piano, violin, and cello accompaniment.” David Suisman explains:

The company that became known as Black Swan Records was an audacious didactic project designed to utilize the combined power of music and business as vehicles of uplift and racial justice. Musically, Pace sought to issue all kinds of records—not just blues, ragtime, and comic records, but also opera, spirituals, and classical music—in order to challenge stereotypes about African Americans, promote African Americans’ cultural development, and impugn racist arguments about African American barbarism. The company would also be a model of

\textsuperscript{182} Suisman, “Co-Workers in the Kingdom of Culture,” 1318.

\textsuperscript{183} Suisman, “Co-Workers in the Kingdom of Culture,” 1308.

\textsuperscript{184} Suisman, “Co-Workers in the Kingdom of Culture,” 1309-1310.

\textsuperscript{185} Davis, \textit{Blues Legacies and Black Feminism}, 123.
economic development, inspiring and instructing African Americans in capital accumulation and the potential for economic self-determination.\textsuperscript{186}

Despite Black Swan’s aspirations to promote black music by black artists,

the music was oriented around middle-class standards of dignity, refinement, and self-restrain—standards that lay at the core of the idea of uplift. In religious music, Black Swan favored formal arrangements of concert spirituals over syncopated gospel music, which was still associated with the Pentecostal, ‘holiness,’ and ‘sanctified’ churches frequented by the poorer, less educated African Americans.\textsuperscript{187}

Black Swan thus demonstrated class conflicts and internalized racism through its preference of “civilized” musical representations over those of the folk (Figure 5-10).\textsuperscript{188}

Their ideologies aligned with Victorian values of dignity and refinement as an attempt to change the image of blacks.

\textsuperscript{186} Suisman, “Co-Workers in the Kingdom of Culture,” 1297.

\textsuperscript{187} Suisman, “Co-Workers in the Kingdom of Culture,” 1309-1310.

Modernizing the Folk Tradition

Although many educated and elite African Americans aspired towards modernity, advancement, and progress through the assimilation of Europeanized vocal aesthetics, a new modernized tradition developed that favored voices and sounds associated with the African-American past. The sounds of black vocal traditions, including recorded sermons, blues, and jazz, were recorded on phonographs and disseminated to African-American mass audiences, becoming commercially successful in the 1920s. These new forms were hybrid expressions that combined black vocal traditions with modern technology, and emphasized oral traditions more so than written arrangements. The success of race records signals a second stage for African Americans into the modern era.

Phonograph Recordings

Although African American musicians were not featured on radio in the 1920s, phonograph recordings by these artists sold regularly to southern blacks. According to Kenney, in the 1920s, nineteen percent of African Americans owned a phonograph, and many of these were in sharecropper homes.189 The November 1925 edition of Phonograph & Talking Machine Weekly states that Vocalion records sold their records for seventy-five cents apiece.190 African Americans were also frequent consumers of records and, according to one retailer, “outbought whites in record consumption 50 to 1.”191 Regardless of the economic hardships of many African Americans in the 1920s, phonographs were apparently important commodities and highly valued.

189 Kenney, Recorded Music in American Life, 129.
191 Kenney, Recorded Music in American Life, 129.
Despite the market of race records to African Americans, black artists were paid nominally for their voices and talents. Filzen contests that the difference in pay between white and black recording artists displayed the racial tenor of the era, with Al Jolson, a white artist, receiving $10,000 per record, and Bessie Smith, one of the most successful black artists, receiving $200 per record. Filzen, “The ‘race’ market for which these records were produced,” as Eastman contests, “was considerably smaller than the mainstream market for popular-song material, and bluesmen were generally paid very little—usually no more than a flat rate of $25 to $50 per recorded side with no provision for royalty payments.” J. Mayo Williams, the African-American talent scout and executive for Paramount Records, kept informal ledgers of the sessions and reportedly paid his artists between $25 and $50 per side. Therefore, if a record sold 10,000 copies, as did Mamie Smith’s “Crazy Blues,” the label would earn $7,500, while the performer would earn $50 or less per side. Despite these inequalities, recordings of African-American voices flourished in the 1920s.

**Phonograph Recordings as Oral Tradition**

Phonograph recordings of sermons, the blues, and other folk voices functioned as more than just entertainment; they were “bearers and preservers” of folk traditions, as Levine posits. Phonograph recordings propelled previously silenced voices, such as those of immigrant, African Americans, and rural American folk performances, into the wider public arena. As explained by Kenney, “In being exactly repeated upon command, the musical grammar, syntax, and

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195 Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 231.
vocabulary of these styles or structures of recorded sound took on the characteristics of musical, cultural, and psychological habit, and, as such, of forms of culturally constructed and coded aural knowledge.” 196 The necessity of repetition is key in cultures which rely on oral traditions to connect the past with the present and maintain their communal identity. 197 As Levine explains, “the modern recording industry acted not only as a force for cultural amalgamation but also served to preserve important elements of group tradition.” 198 Kenney explains that recorded music had to mix “familiar musical patterns and sequences” with new innovations in order to touch on listeners’ emotional sensitivities.

In order to sell, records had to present musical patterns that corresponded enough to widely shared expectations so that they could be at least within the realm of what the public would consider ‘authentic,’ while at the same time introducing and blending ‘unauthentic’ surprises. . . . Music, in this case recorded music, also stimulates strong emotions attached to related past experiences and thereby makes those past experiences more accessible to the listener’s consciousness. We feel, and therefore remember, past experience through, among other things, musical repetition. 199

We can consider “past experiences” as musical traditions, perpetuated via phonographs. Through the process of repetition, a listener can relive the emotional connections of these traditions. African-American vocal traditions had previously been perpetuated through the physical process of oral transmission, in which culture bearers passed a tradition on to the next generation. For example, singers would voice a song and it was learned by others by listening and repeating. In the same way, phonographs created new opportunities by functioning as a medium that allowed for the continuation of oral traditions through repetition.

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196 Kenney, Recorded Music in American Life, xvii.
197 Kenney, Recorded Music in American Life, xviii.
199 Kenney, Recorded Music in American Life, xvi-xvii.
Thus, phonographs were a modern technology put into the service of disseminating oral traditions. Rather than live, physical voices repeating vocal sounds, these voices could now be reproduced and repeated via phonographs. While oral traditions had previously depended on a culture-bearer to physically hand down the traditions to the next generation, phonograph recordings allowed listeners to repeatedly listen to traditions, at will, by the simple process of playing a record. Phonographs also disseminated vocal traditions to a wider audience outside of one’s immediate enclave. Traditions that had previously been isolated in the rural South, for example, were disseminated to northern metropolises and elsewhere. Also, phonographs displaced the written score of the arranged spiritual as a marker of advancement and modernity. As Guthrie Ramsey states,

On the one hand, science in the form of recording technology served similar functions as a notation did for instrumental Western European music and for the spirituals: it allowed a musical experience to be engaged outside of the circumstances of its original social and historical contexts. On the other hand, the orality of sound recordings, indeed their decidedly non-literary quality, undermines many modernist ideals that privilege the written as the sole signs of progress, history and consciousness.\(^{200}\)

The recorded sermon, as a planned and rehearsed performance outside of its original context, thus transformed from an “authentic” folk form into a modern, hybrid form that combined traditional elements with new technology and reflected the voices of the past in a commercially viable product that was planned, marketed, and sold to consumers. Recorded sermons diminish the element of spontaneity and improvisation (although Nix may have improvised as he recorded them) due to the fact that once they are recorded, they present exactly the same material and performance on subsequent listenings. Thus, they become a representation of the original presentation of traditional voices.

**Brunswick/Vocalion Records and Reverend Nix**

The recorded sermons by Reverend Nix were representations of the expressive traditions of southern, rural, black folk and were commercially successful. The Vocalion label recorded fifty-four sermons by Nix between 1927-1931 in Chicago. The Brunswick-Balke-Collender Company, which owned Vocalion, was formed in 1845 as a products manufacturer, including the production of furniture, and began production of phonograph cabinets and phonograph machines in 1913, becoming a producer of records by 1916.\(^{201}\) Brunswick purchased the Vocalion label from Aeolian on November 29, 1924, and by 1925 began distributing their records through jobbers, i.e. wholesalers, achieving success that rivaled the larger labels, such as Victor.\(^{202}\) The Vocalion offices were initially located in the Brunswick headquarters on 799 Seventh Avenue in New York City.\(^{203}\) Vocalion began its “race” record series in 1926 under the direction of Jack Kapp, a former Columbia Phonograph Co. sales executive. The May 1926 issue of *Talking Machine World*, reported Brunswick/Vocalion’s new race series:

> In issuing the race records the Brunswick company stated that the main purpose of its plan is to give the colored people records made by artists of their own race which are absolutely above reproach insofar as the theme and manner of presentation are concerned. . . . Jack Kapp, who heads the Vocalion race record division, is combing the country to secure the services of prominent colored artists and no effort will be spared to give the race the type of music that is most appealing.\(^{204}\)

The records initially released under Kapp’s supervision included jazz (King Oliver and His Dixie Syncopators, Duke Ellington), blues (Alberta Hunter, Ada Brown), and spirituals (The Cotton

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\(^{203}\) Laird, *Brunswick Records*, vol. 1, 7.

Plantation Quartet). The impression from the 1926 article cited above is that Vocalion realized the potential of marketing music by African-Americans to African-Americans and were willing and able to send out representatives in search of the “most appealing” artists, including ministers.

Brunswick released their first electric recordings on April 8, 1925, followed by Vocalion releases in May 1925. Thus, the entire period of Reverend Nix’s recording sessions were all recorded electrically. Electric recordings were themselves symbols of modernity and were frequently advertised, emphasizing the improved sound quality electric recording provided. Prior to Brunswick’s acquisition of physical recording studios in Chicago in late 1928, recordings earlier than this date were most likely done with portable equipment in hotel rooms or other locations. Nix’s first twenty-five recordings, which date from April 23, 1927, to January 18, 1928, were probably “road recordings,” as they were known, recorded with portable equipment. Two new studios were in existence by October 1929, with Jack Kapp serving as director.

The Brunswick recording studios in Chicago were located on the twenty-first floor of the Furniture Mart Building at 666 N. Lake Shore Drive. The Vocalion Record Department, as of 1928, was located at 623 S. Wabash Avenue. Both of these locations were relatively close to Nix’s Chicago address at 2075 Ogden Avenue, at 4.2 miles and 3.1 miles respectively. Possibly Nix moved his family to a proximity close to the Brunswick/Vocalion resources to ensure his easy access to the studios.

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207 Ross Laird, email message to author, June 9, 2017.

Recorded Sermons

Phonograph recordings by African-American ministers such as Nix publicly disseminated sounds that had been segregated in the private performances of the black church, serving as a bridge that blurred the lines between the demarcation zones of race, class, and geography. Recorded sermons brought the vocal traditions associated with southern, black Baptist ministers, such as Nix, into the public sphere.

Record labels began recording sermons by African-American ministers, beginning in February of 1925, when Columbia released the first recorded sermon by Calvin Dixon, “As An Eagle Stirreth Up Her Nest.” Dixon’s recording was followed by Reverend J. M. Gates’ “Death’s Black Train Is Coming” and “I’m Gonna Die with the Staff in My Hand.” Gates’ two recordings, which essentially consisted of singing, not sermonizing, sold substantially better than anticipated. Gates’s success led to the recording of other ministers, including “The Downfall of Nebuchadnezzar” by Reverend J. C. Burnett, which again, stressed more singing than actual sermonizing, and sold over 86,000 copies. In Burnett’s recording, a spiritual melody is hummed throughout once he begins his chanted and shouted sermon, which is interjected with shouts from the female congregants. Gates’ and Burnett’s recorded sermons differed from Dixon’s in that they were more realistic to the actual folk church experience, with chanted sermons, familiar Biblical themes, the singing of spirituals, and interjections by studio-congregants, usually females. The vocal tendencies of Burnett were also more closely aligned with the traditions of the folk church, including strained and gravelly timbres executed in the speech-song style of the chanted sermon. On the other hand, Dixon employed carefully-executed vocality on sermons that contain only preaching with no musical additions. This may account for

209 Paul Oliver, Songsters and Saints (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 140.
the relatively unsuccessful sales of Dixon’s recordings in contrast to the lucrative results of Gates and Burnett.

Recorded sermons allowed their listeners to repeatedly re-live the church experience in the privacy of their own homes and at their own leisure. Elwood and Genester Nix claim that African Americans purchased recorded sermons “because they enjoyed what they heard” and because “they wanted to listen to [them] all the time.” Elwood added, “People get down and they want to hear the word. Something the minister said [on the records] really struck them.”

By the end of the 1930s, recording companies, including Brunswick, had released over 750 sermons by seventy preachers. The success of these recorded sermons catapulted black preachers from the relative obscurity to celebrity status, rivaling some of the era’s biggest stars. As explained by religion and politics scholar, Lerone A. Martin, recorded sermons on race records were popular for a number of reasons: first, they granted African Americans the ability to participate in the consumer market, which was considered an aspect of freedom. As we discussed previously, African Americans had expendable income for the first time, which they freely used to purchase material goods and entertainment, such as phonograph records. Second, recorded sermons and the dissemination of the spiritual message transferred the place of worship and sacred practices of the public church to the privacy of the home, similar to, as previously mentioned, the modern era transferred the group experience to the individual. Recorded sermons took the communal activity of the church and transferred it to the privacy of the home, which allowed for a one-on-one experience between an individual and the message on a recording.

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211 Oliver, Songsters and Saints, 145.

addition, recorded sermons allowed black ministers to enter into the consumer market, serving as competition to popular entertainment of secular recordings.\textsuperscript{213} Black ministers served as the catalysts for progress in both the spiritual realm and the material world.\textsuperscript{214} On recordings, they functioned as performers, competing with secular performers and urban forms of entertainment. Urban amusements, such as dancing, live music, and movies in the theaters and dance halls, caused a decrease in church membership and de-centered the black church as the center of social and religious life.\textsuperscript{215} As a result, black ministers who recorded sermons “created another commercial commodity that helped to expand and sacralize black consumer culture.”\textsuperscript{216} In response to secular forms of entertainment, as Martin suggests, “The rural preacher confronted his urban world by using contemporary technology to express his rural cultural and religious practices,”\textsuperscript{217} essentially bringing tradition into the modern world.

Newspaper articles that describe the recording process detail the importance of multiple rehearsals required to ensure the timing to be conducive to the limit of three-minutes on 78-rpm recordings.\textsuperscript{218} These rehearsals would naturally have some effect on the element of spontaneity and improvisation typical in recorded sermons. In the process of recording, it is feasible that a minister could maintain this format if he adhered to a basic guideline and did not veer too far from his outline. He most likely instructed his female congregants on some of the specifics of what he expected from their participation. Nix provided a remedy for the time limitations of the

\textsuperscript{213} Martin, “Selling to the Souls of Black Folk,” 90-92.
\textsuperscript{214} Martin, “Selling to the Souls of Black Folk,” 106.
\textsuperscript{215} Martin, “Selling to the Souls of Black Folk,” 34.
\textsuperscript{216} Martin, “Selling to the Souls of Black Folk,” 106.
\textsuperscript{217} Martin, “Selling to the Souls of Black Folk,” 212.
\textsuperscript{218} Laird, 22.
recording medium by creating the multi-part recording, as in his six-part “Black Diamond Express to Hell.” In a sense, Nix recorded what could be conceived of, in modern terms, as a “concept album,” because of the continuity between the different parts of the sermon.  

Reverend Sutton Griggs

We have previously mentioned that Reverend Nix served on the committee at the 1921 National Baptist Convention that distributed one of Reverend Sutton Griggs’ books. Ironically, Griggs also recorded sermons on race records. Although Griggs and Nix appear to have known each other, Griggs delivered his vocals in a manner that may suggest his alignment with the Talented Tenth, vocal sophistication, and assimilation, in opposition to Nix’s vocal aesthetics. Thus, Griggs’ recordings and vocal tendencies serve to highlight the differences in the vocal aesthetics present in the recordings by Nix.

For too long, according to Griggs, blacks had depended upon oral traditions because of the disenfranchisement of African Americans who were prohibited from education and thus, literacy. Illiteracy was also problematic in that it created roadblocks to black leadership. He believed,

To succeed as a race we must move up out of the age of the voice, the age of the direct personal appeal, and live in an age where an idea can influence to action by whatever route it drifts one’s way. When the time arrives that the Negroes are capable of being moved to action on a large scale by what they read, a marked change in the condition of the race will begin instantly and will be marvelous in its proportions.

Despite Griggs’ contempt for the “age of the voice,” he recorded six sermons for the Victor label, on September 18-19, 1928 (See Appendix D).
Griggs’ oratorical style and musical practices emphasized Victorian sound aesthetics, and lack the improvisatory and musical elements associated with the “emotionalism” of working-class black church preachers, such as Rev. Nix. Griggs’ even and consistent rhythmic pace and tempo suggest that he was reading his text, rather than improvising from topic headings as did Nix and other folk preachers. In his delivery style, Griggs orated in a monotone voice with little differentiation in pitch, had a narrow range, consistent vocal timbre, and precise enunciation. Although he presented elements drawn from the folk vernacular in some of his novels, Griggs’ recorded sermons present meticulous attention to Standard English.

All of Griggs’ sermons are structured to cleanly separate speech from music. Hymns or spirituals are sung by themselves at the end of the recordings, and lack the layered techniques common in African-American traditions. The sung portions of the sermons are in a formally arranged style, without improvisation, presenting a rehearsed and well-prepared performance in four-part harmony, similar to the style of the Fisk Jubilee Singers’ four-part arrangements. Modern voices were juxtaposed against shouting voices that were conceptualized as “rough” and “vulgar” and most often associated with the Negro voice, and black (and white) working-class aesthetics. In the musical selections in Griggs’ recordings, there are no emotional exuberances or interjections from the congregants, but instead, feature smooth vocal timbres, four-part arrangements of hymns, and the performances are relatively even-mannered. In addition, the solo soprano voice present on Griggs’ recordings gives the impression of a formally-trained or semi-trained voice, consistent with Victorian ideals of a “good” singing tone (Object 5-1).

Object 5-1. Rev. Sutton Griggs hymn. (.mp3 file 160 KB)

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Griggs only recorded six sermons, with two unissued, insinuating that their lack of popularity cost him any possibility for future recordings. Possibly his adherence to Europeanized vocal values diminished his chances for success as a recording preacher.

**Hallelujah**

At the same time that Griggs and Nix were making recordings of their sermons, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) released the film *Hallelujah* on August 20, 1929, directed by King Vidor. The film featured actress Nina Mae McKinney (1912-1967) in the leading role and blues singer Victoria Spivey (1906-1976) in a supporting role. The film is significant for several reasons: first, it was the first all-black film produced by a major Hollywood studio; second, it featured a re-creation of Nix’s “Black Diamond Express to Hell;” third, like Nix’s phonograph recordings, it propelled black vocal traditions into the modern age via new technologies; and fourth, the film inspired Nina Mae McKinney to record on two of Nix’s sermons.

Nina Mae McKinney made a total of fifteen films between 1929-1950, *Hallelujah* being her first.223 She became “the first love goddess of color,” and a “trailblazer” through her depiction of “black-as-beautiful.”224 She was sometimes called the “Black Garbo” and the “Dusky Clara Bow,” both names include references to white sex symbols of the 1920s. Irving Berlin wrote two songs for *Hallelujah*: “Swanee Shuffle,” and “The End of the Road,” both of which were used in the nightclub scene of the film. McKinney was only sixteen when she starred in *Hallelujah*, achieving great success as a result of the film and her performance. McKinney travelled to Chicago to play the wanton female character on two of Nix’s sermons, the fifth and

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224 Donald Bogle, commentary on *Hallelujah*, directed by King Vidor (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1929), DVD (Warner Brothers Entertainment, 2013).
sixth parts of “Black Diamond Express to Hell,” just eight months after the release of *Hallelujah.* In the sermons, she portrays a similar character to her film character, that of the hardened sinner.

The film is truly a modern marvel in that *Hallelujah* was one of the first sound films that featured not only audio of spoken dialogue, but also featured traditional black voices in secular and sacred contexts. Director King Vidor filmed on location in Tennessee and Arkansas and featured African Americans, including the Dixie Jubilee Singers and Curtis Mosby’s band, the Blue Blowers, performing in scenes in nightclubs, river-side baptisms, religious revivals, and in church services.

The praise-house scene from the film incorporates vocalizations in which the practitioners cry out in wails. If this scene was indeed a presentation of a 1920s-church service as it was typically orchestrated, then we have audio evidence of the vocalizations, including moans and wails, recreated in the film. The wails, as vocalized by the mother in the film, are high-pitched scoops with the range of a fifth or more. As shown in the transcription, some of the pitches scoop up to a short note, others are held longer and scoop back down (Example 5-1).

![Example 5-1. Wails as heard in *Hallelujah* (43:08-48:38), *Hallelujah,* directed by King Vidor (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1929), DVD (Warner Brothers Entertainment, 2013).](image)

According to film critic, Donald Bogle, the “wails are part of the symphony that King Vidor orchestrated”\(^225\) in that they were intentionally added to bring the element of authenticity to the film.

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\(^{225}\) Bogle, commentary on *Hallelujah.*
The film includes other examples of traditional black voices with the inclusion of Negro spirituals, such as “Git On Board, Little Chillen,” sung by the leader character, Zeke, and “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” and “Old-Time Religion,” sung by the group. According to Bogle, King Vidor consulted ordained black ministers for their advice on an accurate representation of African-American culture. Vidor consulted culture-bearers and attempted to re-created the songs and singing of black voices as they had been done in the black church service. In this sense, it is similar to the hybrid nature of Nix’s recordings that carried forth the voices of tradition into the modern era via technology.

According to author Judith Weisenfeld, sound films “would finally allow black actors to appear on the screen in dignified ways,” shifting the focus from the physical body, which was often portrayed as the comedic “fool,” to the voice and sound. She adds, “Those critics who focused on the ability of the talking pictures to provide a showcase for African American culture also hoped that the new technology would necessitate the end of blackface performances in film, imagining that ‘black voices’ would require actual black people.”

Black audiences received the film with mixed reviews. Some appreciated the attention to black actors being featured in leading roles in a major Hollywood film, while others felt Vidor had portrayed stereotypical images that continued racist myths, such as Uncle Tom figures. The “shouting” in the praisehouse scene was also criticized. However, the film’s musical director, Eva Jessye, defended the expressions in the “shouting” scene:

There has been a lot of bitter comment on the part of Negroes concerning this “shouting” scene. Many foolishly contend that it was exaggerated. Many say that it is a reflection upon the race. Opinions may differ, but facts are facts. That shouting scene is a mild duplication of what takes place nightly in many Negro churches. I was raised up among shouters and have seen that very thing in my hometown, Coffeyville, Kansas, with my own relatives leading the gyrations. You can see

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shouting equally uncontrolled in certain churches in New York city—so why pretend?²²⁷

Du Bois reviewed the film in *The Crisis*, praising it for its depiction of black life, yet stated, “The music was lovely and while I would have preferred more spirituals instead of the theme-song [by Irving Berlin], yet the world is not as crazy about Negro folk songs as I am.”²²⁸

The film featured the struggle between rural/urban life and sacred/secular activities that Nix often depicted in his sermons. Nix portrayed city life as one of sin, which included sinful women and jazz music. *Hallelujah* features exactly that: McKinney as the sinful, city woman who takes advantage, both sexually and financially, of the rural farmer. The jazz scene in the film is portrayed as a den of transgressions with live music, gambling, dancing, singing, and sexuality. McKinney sings and dances and swindles Zeke out of his family’s earnings for the entire year of toiling the fields. Blues singer Victoria Spivey (Figure 5-11)²²⁹ plays, ironically, the pious female to which Zeke returns.

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The two female stars represent two sides of a coin: McKinney as the sinner, Chick, an urbanite who participates in gambling and the reckless lifestyle in jazz bars; Spivey as the religious woman, Missy Rose, a rural country girl, who is faithful to both her religion and to love. The symbolism is overt. Nix utilized these themes repeatedly in his sermons.

Numerous scholars have debated if the preaching scene in the film was based on Nix’s recorded sermon “Black Diamond Express to Hell” or on a similar train-themed sermon by Reverend J. M. Gates, “Death’s Black Train Is Coming.” An article from The California Eagle (1930) reliably confirms that Reverend Nix was indeed the inspiration to the revival scene of Hallelujah, and that McKinney’s familiarity with the sermon influenced her portrayal of a
“wanton woman” in Nix’s two sermons: “Through her familiarity with the ‘Black Diamond Express,’ as used in the revival scene from her recent picture ‘Hallelujah,’ Miss McKinney was able to inject into the recording a degree of realism which, according to Harry Kruse a Vocalion sales manager, is going to make of it the outstanding record of the year.”^230 Apparently, McKinney was familiar with “Black Diamond Express to Hell” prior to her role in *Hallelujah.* An accompanying photograph of Nix presenting a bible to McKinney at the Brunswick/Vocalion studios in Chicago (Figure 5-12)^231_ presumably from their recording session on April 8, 1930, presents further evidence of their professional relationship.

Figure 5-12. “The Reverend Nix, Creator of the ‘Black Diamond Express,’ presents Nina Mae McKinney With a Bible on Her Revent [sic] Visit to the Brunswick Recording Laboratory”

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^231 Ibid.
The revival scene in which the film adaptation of “Black Diamond Express to Hell” is featured, shows the lead character, Zeke, performing a soft-shoe dance, emulating the sounds of the train in his sermon about the “Cannonball Express.” This type of dance, called “sand tap-dancing,” was made popular by Bill Bojangles Robinson, and according to Bogle, was representative of the rhythmic aspect of 1920s preaching. Zeke “travels” through several stops of the train and announces to the rural people at the revival to “get onboard” to have their souls saved. Zeke urges “some of you bootleggers, and some of you gamblers,” to “take hold of Faith,” the first city on the Cannonball Express’ stop to hell. Chick, McKinney’s character, responds tearfully with “don’t leave me.” The references to bootleggers and gamblers, as well as Chick’s pleas of “don’t leave me,” all refer to exact textual references in Reverend Nix’s sermons, implying that Nix’s sermon may have influenced both McKinney in her future recordings with Nix, and King Vidor’s screenplay of this scene. Ironically, Daniel Haynes, who played the character of Zeke, “was for a short time an itinerant preacher and revivalist, tramping from one town to another throughout the Southern States.” Another character, Parson Johnson, played by Harry Gray, was an eighty-six year old former slave who did not learn to read or write until he was thirty-five. Haynes’ experience as a travelling minister and Gray’s life in slavery both brought authority to the film’s portrayal of authentic, traditional voices.

Nina Mae McKinney became so popular in Hallelujah and subsequent films that she was featured in skin-lightening advertisements and in gossip columns. In the June 29, 1929 issue of

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232 Bogle, commentary on *Hallelujah*.


234 Ibid.

235 *Plaindealer* 32, no. 11 (March 15, 1930): 5.
Chicago World, Nina Mae reportedly “wouldn’t have Stepin Fetchit, no sir. She wants a man that gives a fifty-fifty break, must shovel it home and not always use the rake. Must not always want the best go and ‘sweetbacks’ haven’t even got a show Hot Ziggety!”236 She became the glamorized ideal woman for her light skin, her beauty, and her sexualized persona, as represented in Hallelujah, and presumably, her vocal presence would have been a huge asset to the popularity of Nix’s recordings. McKinney’s spoken dialogue in Nix’s sermons created a physicalized embodiment of the sinful, urban woman that he often condemned. In the sermons, Nix successfully converted her from a sinful existence to one of salvation. The characterizations of McKinney in Hallelujah and in Nix’s sermons are almost identical.

In Ace’s column in the Chicago Defender, he interviewed black audience members who suggested that they would have preferred to have “seen a picture wherein the dark actors were garbed in fine clothes and drove big cars, and made love in lavish settings, or, in other words, conducted themselves much as their fairer brothers.” He asks, “Why should that be? Has the American of color no individuality? Is not this ‘Hallelujah’ picture an important contribution to American art? It certainly records faithfully a small drama of Race life which all of us know is highly plausible, and it does it in a sympathetic, yet vivid, manner.”237 The comments by the audience members suggest that they would have preferred to not be reminded of the visual and aural past, including Negro spirituals, but rather to be represented as sophisticated and wealthy, similar to whites and elite blacks. Their desires harken back to the New Negro’s desires for equality via a re-branding of the image of black lives (and black voices).

236 George D. Tyler, “All in a Week,” Chicago World 11, no. 19 (June 29, 1929): 8. A “sweetback” may have been a term for someone who worked for a crime boss and earned easy but illegal money.

According to Ace, Vidor specifically did not “show how much progress the Race was making, or how well they imitated the white man,” so as not to offend “The South, the hypocritical, Race-conscious South.” Instead, as Ace claims, Vidor attempted to portray “Race folk doing things that are generally conceded to be indigenous to them: such as . . . singing spirituals . . . [and] seeking God in churches with much loud shouting,” without the presence of a white person in a single scene. Ace explains that while the film did not do well in the South due to the racist mindset there, “A series of scenes unroll without once aping anything that the white man does, except, perhaps, the very poor ‘cracker’ down South, and even the upper class whites in ‘Bam [Alabama] scarcely consider him in the human category.”238 In other words, Vidor avoided portraying blacks as racial caricatures of white life, as was done regularly in blackface minstrelsy. Although not entirely successful in his musical representations of “authentic” blackness—Vidor did include two songs written by white Tin Pan Alley composer Irving Berlin that were meant to emulate the folk “feel” of the film. Although there were various criticisms of Hallelujah’s representation of the black folk and their music, the film and its actors provided recreations of folk performances and displayed religious scenes to the public that would otherwise have remained segregated in private spaces.

Despite the lukewarm reception of Hallelujah by black audiences, the success of recorded sermons attest that African Americans of diverse class standings valued the sermons and their accompanying voices and music as modern incarnations of cultural heritage, and took pride in these traditions. In contrast to Griggs’ restrained and “proper” vocalities and the New Negro’s affinity for classical music, the marketing of race records of recorded sermons by black ministers demonstrated that the “rougher” folk vocalities disseminated via the phonograph were

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popular among African-American mass audiences. These recordings thus established traditional vocalities as counter to or the replacement of the New Negro’s vision for advancement and uplift. Reverend Nix’s vocalities also transformed notions of respectability by demonstrating race pride in folk traditions.

Additionally, I suggest that Nix’s use of voice spoke of pride for traditions that arose from the rural South, and may have resisted the pressure by elite African Americans to assimilate to white vocal aesthetic values. As Lawrence Schenbeck has argued,

> Popular genres are more apt to be engaged for expressing community pride, confronting social issues, calling for justice. For one thing, they are more deeply rooted in the communities that create them. For another . . . they do not as often seek to harmonize with the songs of the oppressor. Neither musically nor lyrically are they born asking to be let in, begging to become one with the great homogenizing forces of this ‘one nation, indivisible.’

Due to the community affiliation with the black church and its ministers and the popularity of recorded sermons, I argue that these recordings did not depend on being transformed or “lifted” into “higher,” more “sophisticated” expressions. The following chapter describes and analyzes these new, modernized traditions.

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CHAPTER 6
THE RECORDED SERMONS OF A. W. NIX

This chapter outlines the vocal characteristics of the traditional black vocalities found in the recorded sermons in which Reverend Nix and his congregation participated. I argue that the incorporation of these practices reflects Nix’s conscious decision to highlight traditional vocal expressions that were familiar to his congregation while simultaneously integrating ideologies of uplift and modernity in his sermon texts. Nix used the music and sounds of the African-American past to provide a place of familiarity for Southern migrants who had moved to Northern urban metropolises as he instructed them to confront the realities of modern, urban life.

Nix recorded a total of fifty-four sermons (plus three unissued re-takes). Seven of these recordings have not been located, thus the analysis presented here focuses on the remaining forty-seven recordings.1 This chapter will analyze the voices and vocal features that are found on Reverend Nix’s recordings. As Amanda Weidman asserts, the voice operates both as a physical part of the body with sonic qualities that can be adjusted to conform to cultural practices and is thus malleable to an extent, or allows for “giving voice,” as an opportunity to express opinion or agency to the vocalizer. The actual physical and sonic qualities of Nix’s voice, plus his use of particular vocal traits, spoke of rural, southern traditions and were perpetuated and propelled into the age of modernity by phonograph recordings. Reverend Nix employed tradition within his recorded sermons using various vocal practices, musical expressions, and repertoire, including vernacular dialect, folk spirituals, gravelly vocal timbres, shouts, moans, call-and-response, improvisation, and chanting/whooping. Nix’s voice represents the “new voice of modernity,” or “modernized tradition,” as I will call it, that was a hybrid of both the old and the new, the traditional and the modern.

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1 Appendix A includes the texts of all forty-seven sermons.
In the 1920s, recorded sermons and other race records served as overarching agents of voice for African-American musicians, ministers, and consumers who were still suffering under the hand of Jim Crow, mass lynchings, and other forms of racial discrimination. Nix’s first recordings correspond with the continued ridicule embodied in blackface minstrelsy. The first “talkie,” The Jazz Singer, starring Al Jolson in blackface, was released on October 6, 1927, six months after Nix’s first recording of his sermon “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. I.” Recorded sermons allowed for Nix’s voice to be disseminated nationwide in a country that continued to restrict the rights of African Americans.

**The Recorded Sermon**

Record companies started recording sermons by African-American ministers in 1925 when ten sermons by Calvin P. Dixon, a.k.a. Black Billy Sunday, were recorded by Columbia on its Race series. Phonograph recordings made in the 1920s could hold only up to approximately three minutes of recorded materials, requiring ministers to adjust their sermons to fit into this compact, time-limited space. According to Genester Nix, her father’s live sermons in the church setting were typically around forty-minutes long. Ten-inch, 78-rpm recordings required ministers to condense their sermons into mini-sermons, called sermonettes. Because of the condensed lengths, Nix arrived at the traditional climax portion of the sermon, called the celebration, earlier than in the longer sermons given during a church service.

The vocal intensity of Nix’s booming voice must have been spectacular for consumers who were only beginning to become familiar with sounds emanating from new phonograph technology. According to recording industry scholar Tim Brooks, recording engineers preferred

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male voices and other “strong, focused sound sources” due to the limitations of early recording equipment. The three-minute limit of the recordings would require tight planning or rehearsals on the part of the minister and his studio congregants. The female congregants in the background of Nix’s recordings often sound as if they are spontaneous and improvisatory reactions to his voice; however, he usually recorded two or three takes in an attempt to create the best recording. Some of his sermons were actually re-recorded at later dates, presumably to improve sub-standard initial releases. Because the recorded sermon could bring in substantial income to a minister, especially during the financial drought of the Great Depression, it is most likely that the minister would have taken the recording process very seriously to make sure that his sermon would not incur the excessive costs required for multiple takes.

Race recordings were also unique in that they were marketed to black consumers, rather than white audiences, as had been the Fisk Jubilee Singers’ concerts, which marketed arranged spirituals in book form to be sold to audience members. Nix’s voice embodied the vocal qualities of African-American tradition, and this adherence to tradition may have attracted many black consumers to purchase his recorded sermons.

Recordings by Reverend A. W. Nix

Table 6-1. Recording schedule.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day of the Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Recordings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>April 23</td>
<td>1927</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>June 29</td>
<td>1927</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>June 30</td>
<td>1927</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>October 12</td>
<td>1927</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>January 11</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>2 (unissued)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>January 18</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>9 (3 are substitutes for earlier recordings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>October 26</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 Tim Brooks, “‘Might Take One Disc of This Trash as a Novelty’: Early Recordings by the Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Popularization of ‘Negro Folk Music,’” *American Music* 18, no. 3 (Autumn, 2000): 284.
Table 6-1. Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day of the Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Recordings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>August 24</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>December 12</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Mid-January</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Friday</td>
<td>c. February 18</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>April 8</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Friday</td>
<td>c. June 20</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>November 1</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>March 28</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nix recorded primarily on Wednesdays and Saturdays, but also occasionally recorded on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. Because Sundays were a church day with five services, it is most likely that Mondays would have been a day of rest.

A survey of *Blues and Gospel Records: 1890-1943* and *Brunswick Records: A Discography of Recordings, 1916-1931, Vol. 3 (Chicago and Regional Sessions)* includes the matrix numbers, record label name and number, recording dates, accompaniment information, and number of takes for each recording. The recordings by Nix were usually completed in two or three takes, with an average of four recordings completed per session. Three recordings were recorded twice, thus totaling fifty-four titles. Seven of said titles have not been located, hence a total of forty-seven recordings were available for analysis. All of Nix’s recordings were made in Chicago.\(^5\) The following dates list the number of recordings done by year: The stock market crash in 1929 (October 24-29, 1929) does not seem to have impacted Vocalion’s financial ability to record Nix during 1929 or 1930.

Table 6-2. Recordings by year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Recordings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^5\) Ross Laird, email message to author, June 9, 2017.
Table 6-2. Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Recordings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>15 (2 unissued, 3 substitutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Nix’s Vocal Range**

Nix was a baritone and his most comfortable range was an octave between $E^3$-$E^4$ or $F^3$-$F^4$. His voice had a gravelly timbre no matter in which part of his range he was singing. He obviously knew the limits of what his voice was capable and knew that he was comfortable singing or chanting within an octave range and was probably aware that in the upper reaches of his range his voice took on a harsher vocal timbre. Although it does not appear that he had perfect pitch, he seems to have had an internal knowing as to what felt comfortable within his voice. Many of his sermons recorded in 1927 and 1928 are within the same range and he intuitively started either on $E^3$ or $F^3$ for the most part. Starting in 1929, Nix’s pitch center was higher, with most sermons centering around $A_b^3$, $A^3$, or $B^3$. Occasionally, especially if there was spoken dialogue in the sermon, Nix’s pitch center would rise to a minor third higher than the original pitch. For example, if he began his sermon on $A^3$ and fluctuated between the tonic of $A$ and the minor third of $C$ during the course of the sermon, after the spoken dialogue he would resume his chant with the $C$ pitch as the new tonic. He apparently knew he was pitched too high because he limited the range of his chant to a perfect fifth, rather than an octave as in the earlier sermons. As he got older, his voice probably dropped in pitch and became lower, causing him to stop reaching for the higher pitches by limiting his chant to the range of a perfect fifth. It is possible that inconsistencies in the recording process itself altered the pitch somewhat; therefore, it cannot be determined with absolute certainty that Nix sang or chanted consistently within a certain range.
Tempo and Measures

If Western music notation groups regularly-recurring beats with the same units of musical time into measures, then the chanted sermon can also be grouped into equivalent measures. Gerald L. Davis calls the overall sermon unit “a group of hemistich phrases shaped into an irrhythmic metrical unit when performed” (italics in original). In other words, the temporal lengths of the phrases of the sermons are contained within units of similar lengths but not with the same stresses or number of syllables, called metric “feet.” I have considered each phrase of text between pauses (breaths) to be a measure. Although Nix does not employ the same metric feet or syllables in each measure, the units of time in each phrase are similar enough to consider them measures. Nix builds intensity from the beginning of the sermon by increasing the number of words per measure, and regardless of the number of words he employs in each phrase, his measure lengths are relatively consistent.

James Kennard, Jr. discusses, in an 1845 article in The Knickerbocker, that consistency in metrical feet or measures had been practiced since the slavery era. He describes the singing by black oarsmen on an expedition down the St. Johns River in Florida: “Little regard was paid to rhyme, and hardly any to the number of syllables in a line: they condensed four or five into one foot or stretched out one to occupy the space that should have been filled with four or five; yet they never spoiled the tune. This elasticity of form is peculiar to the negro song.” The practice

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6 Davis, I Got the Word in Me and I can Sing it, You Know, 49.


of elongating and condensing phrases to adapt to the rhythm of the sermon is a common feature, as Walter F. Pitts, Jr. describes:

The sense of recurring meter is probably a result of squeezing and elongating syllables into the durational restrictions of a breath group. Although not metrical, poetic expression in West African and Afro-Baptist traditions of declaiming share rhythmicity, based on the breath group, which distinguishes declamation from normal, conversational speech.\(^9\)

Bruce A. Rosenberg also claims that “when a phrase is too short . . . [the preacher] lengthens it, and when the line is too long, he squeezes it musically to fit, or nearly fit, his meter.”\(^{10}\) As I have noted, Nix stretched and condensed syllables to fit within the space of a measure, demonstrating his adherence to this traditional practice. Using the Sonic Visualizer’s tempo feature, I have mapped out the tempo according to each measure in the beginning and ending of “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. I” in Sections A (Table 6-3) and C\(^6\) (Table 6-4). The columns in both tables (left to right) represent the measure numbers, the corresponding text, the time marking (at the end of the phrase), and the tempo marking in beats per minute (bpm).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure number</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Time marking</th>
<th>Tempo marking in bpm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>This train</td>
<td>0:15</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Is known as the Black Diamond Express</td>
<td>0:18</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>train to hell</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sin</td>
<td>0:19</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Is the engineer</td>
<td>0:20</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Pleasure</td>
<td>0:21</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Is the headlight</td>
<td>0:22</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>And the devil</td>
<td>0:23</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Is the conductor</td>
<td>0:24</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Section A, except for the second line, there are only one to three words per measure; however, in Section C\(^6\), there are five to ten words per measure. In Section A, Nix takes his time, speeding

\(^9\) Pitts, *Old Ship of Zion*, 61.

\(^{10}\) Rosenberg, *The Art of the American Folk Preacher*, 39.
up and slowing down his delivery, varying between 21 and 71 bpm per measure, averaging 50 bpm. In Section C<sup>6</sup>, the measures are more condensed, with not only more words per phrase, but also less time between measures, varying between 23-34 bpm, demonstrating a relatively steady tempo. The average tempo for section C<sup>6</sup> is 27 bpm, almost half of that in section A. Thus, the tempo slows down to accommodate for the increase in the word count; however, the increased word count dramatically increases the intensity in this last section of the sermon. In a sense, Nix goes into half time, doubling the word count to stimulate the emotional intensity of his text. As the evidence shows, Nix maintained consistency in the metrical tempo.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure number</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Time marking</th>
<th>Tempo marking in bpm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>I have a big crowd of church-fighters down there</td>
<td>2:25</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>They never go to a prayer meeting</td>
<td>2:27</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>They never go to Sunday school</td>
<td>2:29</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>They never go to morning service</td>
<td>2:31</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>They always stay away from the morning church</td>
<td>2:33</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>Until they hear about the business meeting</td>
<td>2:35</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>And they come running out of Brazos Bottom</td>
<td>2:37</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>To put up a big fight in God’s church</td>
<td>2:40</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>Well all you church fighters</td>
<td>2:42</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>You gotta go to hell on the Black Diamond Train</td>
<td>2:45</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sermon Themes**

A general comparison of Nix’s forty-seven sermons reveals that the recordings averaged three minutes and the sermon texts averaged five hundred words. The recordings made between April 23, 1927 to October 26, 1928, typically begin with a quote from Scripture followed by a

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11 See Appendix C for specific information on each sermon.
Biblical story or discussion. These themes are similar in nature and form to the chanted sermons by early folk preachers. However, after October 26, 1928, Nix dropped Scriptural and Biblical references and shifted to themes associated with the daily life of the common man.12 Although there is no definitive explanation for Nix’s shift, he apparently felt the need to address his congregants’ daily lives directly. According to blues scholar, Dr. David Evans, dwindling sales may have encouraged the Vocalion record company to impress upon Nix to change his strategy in his sermons, from Biblical themes to themes of everyday life.13 However, it is possible that this shift in consciousness from themes associated with the slavery-era focus of the Old Negro to a more modern focus was the result of Nix’s association with self-help.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6-5. Use of Scripture and dates.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old Testament or New Testament Scripture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Testament Scripture</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As is evident in Table 6-5 Nix used a combination of Old and New Testament Scripture to introduce his sermons through October 26, 1928.

12 Paul Oliver mentions that in the fall of 1927 Reverend J. M. Gates’ preaching style also changed from those that utilized Biblical texts to an “increasing directness to issues and the examples of the day.” (Oliver, 160–162). Possibly Nix was influenced by Gates, or perhaps both men made the decision to change their styles based on current events of the day, which included Marcus Garvey’s deportation and the Great Mississippi Flood, both in 1927. Alain Locke’s *The New Negro* was published in 1925, and possibly his theories were taking hold by 1927-1928.

Different approaches or “modes of persuasion” that ministers use to draw in their congregants, according to William H. Pipes, include emotional appeal, logical argument, or personal appeal. Emotional appeal uses “rhythm, sensationalism, rhetorical figures, imagery, suggestion, etc.,” to appeal to the emotions of the congregants. A minister might persuade his audience through his use of gestures and vocal tools, such as shouts and moans. A second means of persuasion is the logical argument, in which the minister presents evidence and reasons to support his main ideas, to appeal to the minds and reasoning of his congregants. A third type is personal appeal, in which “the preacher is usually an impressive person, has a dramatic bearing and a melodious voice.” Nix used all three of these methods, which might account for his success. For example, Elwood Nix believes that his father was gifted with his voice and his ability to preach. When he spoke,

you thought you was [sic] right there among all the Jews and Gentiles. You would walk out of the church, try to look at yourself and look at other people to see if there were Jews or Gentiles in the audience. I mean the man was superb. You just felt everything that he preached. . . . He was gifted and he felt it. Just like when he was preaching about Jesus on the cross. He would have a cross there. He would start from the pews carrying the cross to the pulpit. It was so beautiful. . . . You just thought you were right there. Some people would stand up to see what he was doing. He was like an actor too. But he felt it. The script was the story he was telling. . . . That made him famous. People clamored for him.

Elwood added, “He didn’t have anything false in his life as far as I am concerned. Everything was soulful, natural, and close to the truth.” Apparently Nix’s natural abilities included his voice.

In his sermons, Nix’s texts often reflected the daily lives of his congregants and the issues that were relevant to them. He combined logical arguments with vocal devices to create an

14 Pipes, Say Amen, Brother! 72, 128-129.
emotionally captivating sermon, rousing the sensibilities of his congregants. Nix’s dynamic oratory abilities and booming voice, combined with dramatic effects and logical reasoning, were his keys to success.

**Popularity of Nix’s “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. I”**

“Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. I,” recorded on April 23, 1927 and released on the Vocalion, Melotone, and Decca British labels (VO 1098, Me M12545, DeE F3850, F9720), was undisputedly Nix’s most popular recorded sermon and has been mentioned frequently in scholarly sources. Dixon and Godrich describe this sermon as “perhaps the best known sermon of any period.” Although no sales figures exist, the fact that Nix recorded six different versions of the sermon between 1927 and 1930 suggests that the sermon was popular enough to warrant multiple recordings. In 1927, an article in *The Pittsburgh Courier* titled, “‘The Black Diamond Express to Hell’ Is A Popular Record,” states that it was “one of the most popular phonograph records in years. . . [and] is literally taking the country by storm.” *Talking Machine World* reported that “both Brunswick and Vocalion record sales have been large [for June 1927], especially on the new Brunswick race series.” This report would most likely have been referring to sales after the April 1927 release of “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. I.” The article describes Rev. Nix as a “widely known evangelist,” adding, “Probably no race preacher has won as much national recognition as Rev. Nix. He is not only a powerful influence to the race as a whole, but he has won a host of white friends, who are helping the Reverend to further the cause of the race throughout the entire country.”

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recognized minister, but also as a race leader, similar to Booker T. Washington, who had the support of whites. The sermon was also the inspiration for the preaching scene in the 1929 film, *Hallelujah* discussed in Chapter 5. Newspapers frequently advertised “Black Diamond Express to Hell,” which Vocalion claimed was “the biggest selling record of today,” describing Nix as a “noted national evangelist and power in Jehovah’s quiver” (Figure 6-1).

Figure 6-1. “‘The Black Diamond Express to Hell’ Is A Popular Record” 21

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The *Chicago Defender* advertised Rev. Nix’s sermons a minimum of seventeen times between 1927-1929.22

Table 6-6. Advertisements of Rev. Nix’s sermons in *The Chicago Defender*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Featured Advertisement</th>
<th>Sermon Advertised</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 “Black Diamond Express to Hell”</td>
<td>“Black Diamond Express to Hell” Parts I and II</td>
<td>June 11, 1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 “Goin’ to Hell and Who Cares”</td>
<td>“Goin’ to Hell and Who Cares,” “Hiding Behind the Stuff”</td>
<td>July 30, 1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 “When the Saints Go Marching In”</td>
<td>“Black Diamond Express to Hell” Parts I and II</td>
<td>Aug. 27, 1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 “Black Diamond Express to Hell”</td>
<td>“Black Diamond Express to Hell” Parts I and II</td>
<td>Oct. 1, 1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 “The Prayer Meeting in Hell”</td>
<td>“The Prayer Meeting in Hell”</td>
<td>Oct. 22, 1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 “Sweet Papa Moan”</td>
<td>“Black Diamond Express to Hell” Parts I and II</td>
<td>Nov. 19, 1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 “John Henry”</td>
<td>“Black Diamond Express to Hell” Parts I and II</td>
<td>Nov. 26, 1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 “Death May Be Your Christmas Present”</td>
<td>“Death Might Be Your Christmas Gift”</td>
<td>Dec. 10, 1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 “Death May Be Your Christmas Present”</td>
<td>“Death Might Be Your Christmas Gift”</td>
<td>Dec. 17, 1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 “Jim Jackson’s Kansas City Blues”</td>
<td>“Black Diamond Express to Hell” Parts I and II</td>
<td>Dec. 31, 1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 “The Seven R’s”</td>
<td>“The Seven Rs”</td>
<td>Feb. 4, 1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 “White Flyer to Heaven”</td>
<td>“White Flyer to Heaven”</td>
<td>Apr. 28, 1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 “Mr. Jelly Lord”</td>
<td>“Watch Your Close Friend,” “Deep Down in My Heart”</td>
<td>May 5, 1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 “A Letter from Father”</td>
<td>“White Flyer to Heaven” Parts I and II</td>
<td>June 2, 1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 “Your Bed Is Too Short and Your Cover Too Narrow”</td>
<td>“Your Bed Is Too Short and Your Cover Too Narrow”</td>
<td>July 7, 1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 “Black Diamond Express to Hell” Parts 3 and 4</td>
<td>“Black Diamond Express to Hell” Parts 3 and 4</td>
<td>Nov. 23, 1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 “Love Is A Thing Of The Past”</td>
<td>“Love Is A Thing Of The Past”</td>
<td>Jan. 4, 1930</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown, the advertisements sometimes published the wrong titles of the recordings, such as “Death May Be Your Christmas Present,” rather than the actual title of “Death Might Be Your Christmas Gift.” In addition to newspaper advertisements, Genester Nix claims that the churches

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22 See Appendix B for the complete listing of advertisements.
in which Rev. Nix held revivals would distribute the newspaper advertisements in their churches.\textsuperscript{23} Obviously, a nationally-known minister could potentially attract large crowds to revival meetings.

Last, but of great importance is James Weldon Johnson’s mention of a Harlem preacher he had heard in the 1920s who called himself a “Son of Thunder” and who “phrased his subject, ‘The Black Diamond Express, running between here and hell, making thirteen stops and arriving in hell ahead of time.’”\textsuperscript{24} Whether this preacher was definitively Nix is uncertain; however, it is likely, considering that Nix was indeed a Harlem preacher in the 1920s and created the sermon titled “Black Diamond Express to Hell.” Johnson was so inspired by the “old-time preachers” that he wrote his own versions of folk sermons in his book, \textit{God’s Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse}.

By 1933, an article in the \textit{Spokesman} testified to Nix’s popularity: “Rev. A. W. Nix of Cleveland, Ohio, pastor Mt. Calvary Baptist Church, was in our city this week. Rev. Nix is our record preacher, who has aroused the world to much consideration of the world to come.”\textsuperscript{25} Although Nix was no longer recording by this date, his legacy as a “record preacher” had apparently followed him.

\textbf{Traditional Vocal Features in Nix’s Recorded Sermons}

The following section examines the traditional vocal features that Nix employed in his recorded sermons. These features represented rural, southern religious vocal styles that resonated with the lower class. These characteristics were identified in Chapter 4 as part of the folk tradition. The use of traditional forms of chanting and the chanted sermon not only ties Nix to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Genester Nix, interview by author, Philadelphia, May 25, 2017.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} G. W. Harts, “Church News,” \textit{The Spokeman} 1, no. 8 (January, 21, 1933): 8.
\end{itemize}
tradition through its history as a sacred folk expression, but also through the traditional vocal elements present within it. The vocal characteristics present in Nix’s chanted sermons, discussed in list form below, include the presence of non-articulated sounds, such as shouts and moans; loud vocal dynamics, the use of gravelly timbre; the use of chanting with half-spoken, half-sung, melodicized pitches; thematic organization, with sub-themes of textual similarities and differences, i.e. “verses,” creating a clearly delineated form; a building to a climax or celebration through the use of vocal elements; participatory performance with the congregation; and the use of vernacular dialect. The inclusion of folk hymns and spirituals in the recorded sermons is discussed in Chapter 7; the texts and Nix’s use of riffs and repetition, improvisation, and vocal layering are discussed in Chapter 8.

The overall melodic qualities of the chanted sermon and the formal arrangement of internal sections allow for analysis similar to that of other genres of music. Therefore, notational examples will include melody, rhythm, form, and so forth, to extract the data, vocal features, and musical features of the chanted sermon.

**Shouts**

Elwood Nix describes his father’s voice as a “preaching voice” that could change emphasis, “from real hoarse to a screaming voice. . . [to] make you think that you are right there.” The “screaming voice” was most likely the voice Nix used to shout. His changing inflections and timbres increased his ability to capture the mood of the sermon he was describing and to emotionally captivate the people to whom he was preaching. Elwood also claims that the “prayer band,”26 the female congregants who sit in the front two rows of the church called the

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26 Elwood Nix and Genester Nix, interview by author, Philadelphia, May 24, 2017. Elwood and Genester claim the prayer band was composed of women only who sat in the first two pews and always sang along. They met every Wednesday to “pray, hum, and sing, and have a good time.” Another term for the prayer band is the “Amen Corner.” See Burnim and Maultsby, *African American Music: An Introduction*, 197.
“hallelujah corner” and probably the female congregants on Nix’s recordings, would express themselves in melody and sometimes would “get happy and start shouting.”

In “The Black Diamond Express to Hell – Part 4” at (2:02-2:04) (Figure 6-2, marked with red line), Nix explodes on the word, “Oh,” stretching it out in a moan, while simultaneously using loud dynamics, as noted on the sound file (Object 6-1), and a harsh vocal timbre.

Later in the recording at 2:35, Nix shouts on the word “Brother,” pushing his voice to the extremes of pitch and volume. The high pitch in combination with loud volume could produce the “screaming” quality that Elwood described. Nix often pushed his voice to its limits, and in “Generosity” at 2:28, Nix shouts to the point that his voice cracks.

**Moans**

Elwood Nix defines moaning, which he remembered being utilized by his father and other ministers, as a vocal technique in which “they hold the syllables longer and hum.”

Elwood remembers the moan as having a humming quality, rather than being sung full-voiced. In

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30 Interview Elwood Nix, May 24, 2017.
other words, while the mouth must close to hum a consonant, moans on vowels (open-mouthed) are merely the extension of the vowel sound, such as “a-a-a-ah.” A moan is a vocal technique used to create emphasis, either for the meaning of the word, or simply for dramatic effect. Thus, in Nix’s case, a moan is a word, syllable, or hum that is extended in length on the same pitch. (If the pitch changes, it becomes a slide).

In “The Matchless King” (Vocalion VO 1158), recorded January 18, 1928, Nix incorporates moans. In order to discuss moans competently, an extended analysis is necessary that demonstrates the number of words, the number of phrases, and the length of phrases. I have used “The Matchless King” as the example, dividing the sermon into sections based on the textual themes.

Table 6-7. Textual themes in the sections of “The Matchless King.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sections</th>
<th>Textual Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section A</td>
<td>Introduction: The Biblical text, and the line from Scripture, followed by the title of the sermon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section B</td>
<td>Nix emphasizes his title by using famous leaders and rulers as examples from history of those who have “met his match,” as a juxtaposition to set up Jesus as “The Matchless King.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section C</td>
<td>Jesus as the Matchless King and Biblical quotes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section D</td>
<td>Nix uses the “everyday man” as the examples of one who puts his trust in Jesus. However, the “everyday man” is represented by several elite occupations: lawyer, doctor, botanist, astronomer. He also includes laymen occupations: farmer, baker, and carpenter. Thus, he includes men from both working-class and upper-middle-class society as examples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section E</td>
<td>Conclusion: Possibly Nix had extra time at the end and was cued to stretch it out, because at “Have I got a witness,” where he usually concludes with “Amen,” he extends the sermon by adding an additional phrase of text.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Words that are moaned are of a longer value than naturally-spoken words. The words in “The Matchless King” that are moaned occur only in sections C and D and are highlighted below in gray. Section C has seven elongated words; section D has eight.

C (1:19)

But **here**

*Is a King that has no match.*

*He is the King of Kings.*
And Lord of Lords.
He came all the way from glory.
He conquered every battle
He conquered his death in the grave,
Got up on Sunday morning,
And declared, “I am He that was dead,
But behold,
I’m alive evermore.”

(1:41)
And now He’s called the witnesses.
Jacob said,
“The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh come.”
Isaiah said,
“He’s the Prince of Peace.”
Jeremiah said,
“He’s a mighty hammer.”
Ezekiel said, “He’s a wheel in a wheel.”
Daniel said, “He’s chief cornerstone.”
John said, “He’s the Lamb of God.”

D (2:04-2:42)
The lawyer laid down his law books and said,
“He’s my counselor.”
The doctor said,
“He’s my Balm in Gilead.”
The botanist said,
“He’s my Rose of Sharon
And my lily of the valley.”
The carpenter says,
“He’s my sure foundation.”
The astronomer
laid down his microscope
and said, “He’s my bright morning star.”
The farmer
Came up out of the farm
And said, “He’s my well of water in a dry place.”
The baker tore up his baked bread,
And said, “He’s my grain of life.”
The old battle-scarred child of God
Said, “He’s my rock of in a weary land.
And, my children, the time has come.”

As Nix builds up the sermon’s intensity by incorporating moans, his phrases increase in length,
not as a result of more or longer pauses or breaths between the phrases, but as a result of an
increase in word length. Table 6-8 provides the length of each phrase and number of phrases per section.31

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sections</th>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Phrases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A section</td>
<td>(0:00-0:12)</td>
<td>12 seconds</td>
<td>5 phrases (1-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B section</td>
<td>(0:12-1:19)</td>
<td>1 minute, 7 seconds</td>
<td>40 phrases (6-45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C section</td>
<td>(1:19-2:04)</td>
<td>45 seconds</td>
<td>22 phrases (46-67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D section</td>
<td>(2:04-2:42)</td>
<td>38 seconds</td>
<td>20 phrases (68-87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E section</td>
<td>(2:42-2:48)</td>
<td>6 seconds</td>
<td>3 phrases (88-90)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now that the phrase length and number of phrases per section are notated, the phrase length in seconds and the average phrase length in each section can be determined.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th># of Words</th>
<th># of Phrases</th>
<th>Phrase Range in seconds</th>
<th>Average Phrase Length in seconds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.6-4.3</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0.9-2.6</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.0-2.8</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.3-3.3</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.9-3.4</td>
<td>2.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis shows that the introduction (section A) and conclusion (section E) have the longest phrase lengths. Nix begins slowly in Section A, introducing the Biblical text and his sermon title, and ends slowly in section E as he concludes. Once Nix begins the actual sermon dialogue (section B), he speaks quickly, probably because the largest number of phrases are in this section and he wants to make sure he gets all the text spoken and not run out of time at the end. His average phrase length of 1.65 is in inverted proportion to the number of words (195) and phrases per section (40). In other words, he has the largest number of phrases but the smallest phrase length, implying that both his words and the phrases are spoken quickly with quick breaths taken in between phrases. In sections B-D, the main sermon sections (not the

31 The phrase lengths are calculated to include both the text and the pause between the next phrase of text.
introduction or conclusion), section B has the most number of words and the shortest phrase length, while section D has fewer words and longer phrase lengths, implying that as the sermon proceeds to section D, he starts stretching out his words and phrases.

In sections C and D, his phrases increase in time and get longer, although the word count gets shorter. For example, section C has 112 words with an average phrase length of 1.94 seconds, while section D has fewer words, with 104 words, but an increase in phrase length with 2.00 seconds. This increase in phrase length is a result of the extension of certain words through the technique of moaning, not through the addition of more time or space between phrases. In other words, he does not slow down his pace; rather, he extends the word length, which in turn increases the total length of the phrase.

As shown in Figure 6-3, the space between the phrases does not increase in section A, in which the space is between approximately .37 seconds and .75 seconds, compared with section D, in which the spaces are relatively close together, measuring approximately .25 seconds each (Figures 6-3 and 6-4). Thus, the space between the phrases decreases as the sermon progresses, implying quicker breaths, yet the total length of each phrase increases. Therefore, the increase in phrase length directly corresponds to Nix’s use of moaning to extend the words, rather than an increase in space between the phrases.
In section C (Figure 6-5) in the phrase “He came all the way from glory,” the word “all” is extended 7/10ths of a second, representing a moan. Nix stretches out the vowel (“a-a-a-h”) part of “all” to create a forward momentum.
In section D, the phrase, “And said, He’s my well of water in a dry place,” consists of all one-syllable words except for “water,” so we could expect all of the words except “water” to be of similar length and value (Figure 6-6). In fact, most of the words are approximately $2/10$ths of a second in length, but the word “well” is $5/10$ths of a second, and “place” is $9/10$ths of a second in length.

The graphs demonstrate that Nix utilized moans through the stretching of words to create greater emphasis and build momentum in the sermon, climaxing in sections C and D. Often the moans are accompanied by an increase in both volume and gravelly timbres. Not only did Nix use
moans to emphasize words and create dramatic effect, he continued a tradition frequently addressed in historical documents as a common feature of African-American ministers. As I previously discussed in Chapter 4, the moan presented a sense of cultural ownership and identity, and functioned as a sign of spiritual conversion.

**Loudness**

As “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. I” proceeds, there is a clear increase in volume between section A (0:00-0:23) and section C² (0:52-1:24), where it maintains a consistent volume to the end of the sermon. In other words, Nix begins to implement an increase in dynamics to emotionally draw in the listeners. The sound file demonstrates more depth and height in section C², exemplifying the amplitude, or increase in volume. Regardless of the recording levels, the comparison of the two sections reveals an overall increase in dynamics within the sermon itself (Figure 6-7).

![Waveform Comparison](image)

**Figure 6-7.** Increase in volume in sections A and C² in “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. I”

Elwood Nix believes timbral and dynamic differences in voices can grant power (or not) to the orator. He states, “if you notice a high voice, it shakes, it trills, [you’re] not sure what’s coming out of the mouth. A somber voice sounds more authentic, and a loud voice is, I would say, boisterous voices have more truth to it. . . . A high voice sounds weak.”

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comments infer that he believes that loud and full voices are more commanding. As discussed in Chapter 4, loudness was not only a means to draw listeners in, but also was a standard performance practice in traditional black vocalities, aligning Nix to these practices. The chanted sermon utilizes not only an increase in word count, but also an increase in the volume of the dynamics to emotionally draw in the listeners.

**Timbre**

Reverend Nix’s voice had a unique, gravelly timbre, and according to Genester Nix, it was his “regular voice.” She claims he was never hoarse and that he did not need a microphone to carry his voice at revivals. “His voice was so different than anybody else’s. His voice was so powerful yet magnetic. It drew people, and every time he had the revivals, it was full, packed and he was all over the United States preaching. . . . People loved to hear him preach. I mean, people gathered there, everywhere he went.”\(^{33}\) Elwood Nix claims his father consciously changed his timbre to reflect the text that he was speaking and to connect with his audience, consciously using timbre as a means of communication. Nix travelled frequently, and “wherever he went [and] he heard people talk, he kind of related that to his voice when he preached to them. . . . so they could understand him more. Like if it was down South, he would preach, you know, the blues.”\(^{34}\) In other words, Rev. Nix consciously altered the timbre of his voice to “speak in the language” of his audience.

Genester’s and Elwood’s comments provide evidence that Reverend Nix’s voice was naturally gravelly in timbre, and that he was able to change his voice to suit the audience to whom he was speaking. As John Laver explains, “voice quality derives from two distinct factors

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in vocal performance. The first of these is to do with the nature of the individual speaker’s own vocal apparatus. . . . The second factor is not to do with the nature of the vocal apparatus at the speaker’s disposal but to the use to which he puts it.” Thus, there are two distinct voices or uses of the voice: the voice one is born with and its inherent timbre, and a second voice that can be adjusted to suit whatever situation or condition one chooses. In voices in general and Nix’s voice specifically, this could mean timbral adjustments to suit cultural expectations.

The voices associated with the black folk church, as established in Chapter 4, typically featured raspy, throaty, noisy, or gravelly timbres. As folklorist Harold Courlander claims, “Apparently valued in Negro folk music is the ‘throaty’ quality that has ‘body’ to it,” adding, “Sermons preached in this type of voice appear to create a special emotional tension.” The gravelly timbre of Nix’s voice was apparently one key source for his success and one he used frequently and consciously.

The spectrogram graph gives some indication to timbre, and shows frequency in the vertical axis, with loudness represented by color (dark green is the softest, red is the loudest). The fundamental pitch is shown as the lowest frequency (sounding pitch) with partials or overtones above. The fundamental and lower harmonics give “warmth” and richness to the sound, while harmonics higher up in frequency sound “bright” or shrill. Thus, the more compact the lower harmonics, the “warmer” the sound; harmonics that “stretch” into the higher regions sound more shrill. However, a “noisy,” “dirty,” or “gravelly” timbre will be displayed as a “snowstorm,” reaching into the higher frequencies. Figure 6-8 shows a “clean” timbre on the

37 Spectrogram settings: Scale dBV^2; Window 2048, 75%.
left, represented by solo piano, and “noisy” timbre on the right, represented by Nix’s gravelly voice. I have used a solo piano for the demonstration of a clean timbre because of the familiarity and consistency of the classical piano sound.

Figure 6-8. Comparison of clean and noisy timbre.

Object 6-2. Clean timbre in piano. Chopin’s “Nocturne No. 2 in E flat Major, Op. 9_2” (.mp3 file 83 KB)


The spectrogram graph of the solo piano clearly shows the higher harmonics as clean with specific pitch representations, while Nix’s gravelly timbre is demonstrated as snowstorm, with no clear delineation of the upper harmonics.

Although Rev. Sutton Griggs will be discussed in more detail later on in this study, here a comparison of his vocal timbre with that of Nix’s allows listeners to clearly discern the differences in Griggs’ clean timbre and Rev. Nix’s gravelly timbre. Griggs preached in a calm,
reserved manner, atypical of most black Baptist denominations of the time. There are no vocal interjections from the congregants and no musical accompaniment. Griggs only recorded six sermons and was not asked by his label to record future recordings, thus Griggs’ sermons were apparently not successful.

**Object 6-4. Clean timbre in Sutton Griggs’ voice. “A Hero Closes a War” (.mp3 file 151 KB)**

In addition, vocal timbre can be delineated between “dark” and “bright” tones according to the shape of the mouth. According to the CHARM tutorial for Sonic Visualizer,

Acoustically, vowels and consonants are patterns of relative loudness among the sounding frequencies across the spectrum. Vowels are made by changing the shape of one’s vocal cavity, and the effect of that is to change the balance of harmonics in the sound. That balance will remain the same whatever the pitches one may be singing. When singers want to change the colour of their voice they shift the vowels up and forward (brighter) or down and back (darker) in the mouth, and the spectrum changes as a result.  

Therefore, it is possible to change one’s vocal timbre by altering the shape of the mouth. It is possible that Nix focused his tone (probably unconsciously) in the back of his mouth to extract a darker timbre.

The differences between bright and dark timbres are easily apparent when we compare Nix’s dark timbre with the prayer band’s bright timbre as heard in the traditional spiritual, “My Sins Been Taken Away” found in “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. II.” The lines, “Well glory hallelujah to this land, all of my sins are taken away” are sung by Nix in a gravelly timbre, and contrast to the sisters’ clean timbre in their response, “taken away,” marked with a thick, red line in both the spectrogram and the sound file (Figure 6-9).

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Figure 6-9. Timbral differences in “My Sins Been Taken Away” (2:41-2:52)

Object 6-5. Timbre difference between Nix and female congregants. (.mp3 file 349 kb)

The overtones in Nix’s gravelly voice carry up into the higher parts of the graph as evidenced by the snowstorm effect, while the spectrogram demonstrates the lighter and brighter quality of the voices of the sisters. Thus, the timbres of Nix and the female congregants were noticeably different, with Nix employing dark, gravelly timbres and the sisters employing bright, nasal timbres. Both timbres would have been considered undesirable by those who chose assimilation to Western art standards.⁴⁰

Analysis of “Nowhere to Hide,” from his sermon, “Hiding Behind the Stuff,” demonstrates Nix’s singing voice, rather than his chanting or shouting voice. In the last line of

⁴⁰ Carter, “Forging a Sound Citizenry,” 21, 23.
the stanza, Nix demonstrates the gravelly timbre associated with his preaching style (Figure 6-10).

Figure 6-10. Volume and timbre in “Ain’t Nowhere to Hide,” (0:00-0:25)

Object 6-6. “Ain’t Nowhere to Hide” (.mp3 file 265 KB)

The sound file reveals that the dynamic volume in the second and fourth phrases are similar; however, in the fourth phrase, the spectrogram reveals the gravelly timbre of Nix’s voice as displayed by the overtones that carry upwards. The vertical reach of the overtones in the fourth phrase displays the vocal “noise” in Nix’s gravelly timbre on “Well, there ain’t nowhere to hide.” The evidence suggests that Nix’s use of gravelly timbres was not dependent on an increase in vocal volume.

The necessity and importance of sound to the folk preacher was essential in emotionally communicating with and drawing in his congregants. Nix’s voice was probably shocking to hear
on early phonograph machines because his voice, as Paul Oliver states, “roared in leonine tones.” The gravelly timbre of Nix’s voice was most likely not only part of his physical, vocal makeup, but also a tool he consciously employed to excite and entice his listeners.

**Chanting**

The chanted sermon is called “chanted” because of the repetition of pitches performed in a speech-like sung delivery, also called “intoning,” “speech-like song,” or “speech-song.” Because of the three-minute limitation of the recorded sermon, Nix segues into the chant almost immediately at the beginning of his recordings; whereas, in a live church setting, in which his sermons lasted approximately forty minutes, the formulaic quality of the chanted sermon would delay the chant to later in the sermon.

In “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. I,” Nix begins intoning in the sermon’s third phrase (0:06) centering around pitch E, establishing the tonic pitch. In Example 6-1 below, the third phrase centers (0:07) around the pitches of pitches of E, B, and C#, outlining a pentatonic scale. The rhythm is as marked, except for the word “broad,” in which Nix extends the rhythm slightly into a moan, indicated by a tenuto marking, and bends up to the pitch, indicated by the curved arrow up before the note.

![Example 6-1. Chanting in “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. I” (0:07-0:11), recorded April 23, 1927, on Vocalion VO1098, reissued on Document Records, DOCD-5328.](mp3 file 51 KB)

Object 6-7. Nix chanting in “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. I” (.mp3 file 51 KB)

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41 Oliver, *Songsters and Saints*, 151.

42 Genester Nix, email message to author, January 17, 2018.
Beginning with the fifth phrase (0:14) on “This train,” Nix begins intoning with scale pitches E and G, implying a minor pentatonic scale. He continues fluctuating between these two pitches as notated in the condensed transcription below.

Example 6-2. Implied minor pentatonic scale in “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. I” (0:14-0:19), recorded April 23, 1927, on Vocalion VO1098, reissued on Document Records, DOCD-5328.

Object 6-8. Minor pentatonic scale in “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. I” (.mp3 file 81 KB)

This fluctuation between major and minor thirds (pendular thirds) is typical in African-American musical genres. Nix predominately used pitches in the minor-pentatonic scale for many of his sermons.

In “The White Flyer to Heaven – Part II,” the chant is represented by the repetition of the tonic pitch. The rhythms displayed are an approximation, showing relative long and short durations. The arrows show Nix’s pitch bends upwards.

Example 6-3. Chant in “The White Flyer to Heaven – Part II” (0:00-0:09), recorded June 29, 1927, on Vocalion 1170, reissued on Document Records, DOCD-5328.

Object 6-9. Chant in “The White Flyer to Heaven – Part II” (.mp3 file 118 KB)

Again, in “The White Flyer to Heaven – Part II” Nix implies a minor pentatonic scale.

Celebration

As mentioned previously, the recorded sermon (as well as other recordings of the era) had to conform to a time limit of three minutes (per side), requiring the preacher of recorded sermons to advance quickly to the climax of the sermon. In “After the Ball is Over,” Nix slowly builds to his climax through the use of chanting/intoning on pitches, shouts on a pitch an octave above the starting pitch, moans, loud dynamics, and a gravelly timbre. The building to the climax includes: chanting at (0:04) on “when Herod’s birthday was kept;” moans on “all” at (0:29); shouts on a loud volume and chants an octave above the starting pitch on “turn on more lights!” at (0:39); and at (0:45) a combination of all of these techniques: a gravelly timbre, an octave higher pitch, moans, and shouts on a loud volume on the single word, “call.” At (1:49), Nix uses shouts, gravelly timbre, moans, and an octave-higher pitch on entire phrases: “Brother, just after the ball is over,” followed by a descending minor pentatonic scale on “so many bad promises are made.” This climatic “formula” is repeated at (2:13), in which Nix states, “After the ball is over, then you go into the midnight air.” At (2:30), Nix uses moans, a gravelly timbre, loud volume, and shouting, which climaxes on “Oh, mother’s son,” at (2:36) on “Oh, father’s daughter,” and at (2:40) on “If you don’t come off the ballroom floor, hell will be your home.” The entire sermon is included in Object 6-10.

Object 6-10. “After the Ball is Over” (.mp3 file 2.3 MB)

Nix’s use of vocal elements, including chanting, octave shouts, moans, loud dynamics, gravelly timbre, increase as the sermon proceeds, shown in Figure 6-11.
Figure 6-11. Increase in vocal gestures to build to a climax in “After the Ball is Over”

Because the recorded sermon had to be compacted into a three-minute time frame, Nix utilized multiple vocal tools to build to the climax. As in any type of performance or oratory when faced with the challenges of limited delivery time, the preacher or performer must use all of his or her abilities to make an impact quickly. In the case of Nix, he built up the intensity
throughout the sermon by using his voice to the utmost, exploiting the booming dynamics of his voice, his gravelly timbre, moans, and shouts in the upper registers of his voice.

**Participatory Performance Elements**

In “The Black Diamond Express to Hell – Part 3,” the sisters interject verbal and sung responses throughout most of the sermon and create the sonic illusion of a live church congregation with numerous voices overlaying one another, only pausing when Nix is shouting. They demonstrate call-and-response as they interject after Nix has spoken, often responding directly to his text. The process of call-and-response, according to Levine, is one in which multiple voices interacting together give voice to the community as a whole. In other words, the multiple voices function as one voice of the whole, giving agency to the community and giving voice as an emotional outlet, both individually and collectively.  

In “The Prayer Meeting in Hell,” the female congregants respond after Nix’s phrases (in the right column below):

| And the rich man opened up a prayer meetin’ in hell            | Alright, Yes |
| And cried out,                                                 | Yes          |
| “Oh Abraham,                                                  | Have mercy on us |
| Oh Abraham,                                                   | Yes!         |
| Have mercy on my soul!                                        | Have mercy   |
| And if I am tormented in these flames                         | Hallelujah   |
| Send the angels down here                                     |               |
| That he might dip his finger in cool water                    |               |
| And cool my scorching tongue                                  |               |
| Because I’m tormented in the flame.                           | Alright      |

As is apparent in the lyrics, the female congregants interject on nearly every phrase after Nix has spoken, creating a continual flow of participatory energy in the sermon.

**Vernacular Dialect**

Elwood Nix believes that his father’s frequent travels, by which he was introduced to a multitude of different people and dialects, allowed him to “paint a picture” through the use of his

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44 Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 33.
voice and to appeal to people of varying classes in different regions. This may account for Nix’s ability to style switch to appeal to the particular demographic of people to whom he was preaching. Black English (BE) emphasizes the importance of words over lyric content, in a stylized performance. As Thomas Brothers explains,

One historical reference for the linguistic concept [of the vernacular] is comparison between Latin and the vernacular languages of Europe. Two distinctions built into this usage of the term vernacular will be useful here: there is a distinction in a social class, between an elite idiom and a common idiom; and there is a distinction involving transmission, one language being associated with writing and the other having evolved mainly through aural practice [italics in original].

Nix’s inclusion of the vernacular implies the use of a “common” language, learned by aural practice, by those of “common” class status rather than the elite.

Beginning in January 1930, Nix started incorporating speaking roles by his female congregants into his recordings. “How Long - How Long” is one of the first of Nix’s sermons that includes spoken word by voices other than Nix’s voice. The female voices that are incorporated in the dialogue demonstrate contrasting characteristics of both lower-class and middle-class cultural standards. In Nix’s “How Long - How Long,” the first female speaker, “Miss Peaches,” uses slang expressions, such as “fussin’,” while the second speaker speaks slower, enunciating her words clearly, demonstrating a more nuanced approach. The dialogue sets up Miss Peaches as a petty woman who has lied about her relationship with the pastor, insinuating a more intimate relationship. She also accuses the second female of being jealous of the imagined relationship. The second speaker, the “old jealous thing,” is revealed to be not only older, but more mature and sophisticated. She has caught Miss Peaches in a lie, and emphasizes the word “riding.” All of her words except “riding” are pronounced clearly and within the same pitch range, but “riding” is almost grunted and in a much lower range. The word itself, which

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presumably demonstrates the disgust of the second speaker to the first, takes on an entirely
different timbre and pitch. Miss Peaches, who speaks in BE, is set up as being backward,
dishonest, and petty, while the second female appears mature, honest, and trustworthy. Nix uses
the voices of the two females to create a strong analogy between the lower class, associated with
folk traditions and vernacular dialect, and the middle class, associated with sophistication and
Standard English (SE). The juxtaposition between BE and SE and the actual texts spoken by the
two women clearly contrast class differences. Nix establishes Miss Peaches as associated with
unsavory habits, such as gossip and lying, while the second woman demonstrates higher moral
standards.

Miss Peaches:
Brother Pastor, she got mad.
And was fussin’ at me.
Because I showed her that sweet letter you wrote me.
She oughta know you don’t want her,
Old jealous thing.

Female Voice 2:
Yes, and you told me
You and the pastor went out driving last Saturday night.
And you didn’t get home until two a.m.
You must-a have done some riding.

Nix:
How long, how long, how long?
How long?

Object 6-11. Vocal representations by class in “How Long – How Long” (.mp3 file 309 KB)

Vernacular dialect was used by Nix on several other occasions, presumably to identify
with his lower-class congregants. In “It Was Tight Like That,” recorded in the midst of the Great
Depression, Nix initially references the problems associated with the economic crisis with the
line, “This seems to be a hard and tight world we’re living in these days,” and continues to
describe the troubles many down-trodden unemployed Americans faced at the time, such as
being “cold, hungry, and mad.” Nix clearly changes dialect and introduces many vernacular
words and phrases, possibly to relate to his working-class listeners who were suffering from the
economic crisis. For example, “And ain’t got no job,” “Your wife is fussin’,” and “You will feel like you in hell,” display Nix’s ability to style switch to identify with a particular group or class of listeners.

The female congregants also speak in the vernacular. One female congregant exclaims, “When I ain’t got no money, I got good religion.” As a commentary to the congregant’s justification of religion, as if having religion were enough to survive, Nix admonishes her and preaches the necessity of being fiscally responsible and taking precautions in preparation of disasters, such as the Great Depression.

His message spoke of practical solutions to impoverished African Americans. In this sense, we can notice a shift in Nix’s sermon themes from religion as the end-all, to practical advice for his working-class congregants. This emphasis on self-help and fiscal responsibility were themes associated with the “New Negro” and racial uplift. Through the inclusion of vernacular dialect on the recordings, Nix clearly identifies with the lower class and separates himself from educated ministers, such as Rev. Sutton Griggs, who tried to separate themselves from the lower classes through their predominant use of Standard English.

Nix also uses words associated with tradition, such as “gwine” (“going to”), which is found in numerous spirituals, folk songs, and minstrel songs, and evokes the vernacular speech of the uneducated and/or enslaved individual. In “Hiding Behind the Stuff,” Nix states,

And then we have another class of people always
Living in the future tense.
Talking about “what I’m gwine to be,
What I’m gwine to do,
How I’m going to give and serve,”
And never do anything.

Object 6-12. Use of vernacular in “Hiding Behind the Stuff” (.mp3 file 142 KB)

“Gwine” was used frequently in Negro spirituals, such as “I’m Gwine Up to Heab’n Anyhow,” “Gwine Up,” and “Gwinter Sing All Along de Way,” arranged by J. Rosamond Johnson. Thomas
Wentworth Higginson, who commandeered black Union soldiers during the Civil War, notated the lyrics to the songs of his troops which included spirituals. They sang,

O, de ole nigger-drive!
O, gwine away!
Fust ting my mammy tell me,
O, gwine away!
Tell me 'bout de nigger-driver,
O, gwine away!
Best ting for do he driver,
O, gwine away!
Knock he down and spoil he labor,
O, gwine away!\(^{46}\)

Numerous examples of the use of “gwine” appear in the spirituals, and this usage links Nix to the folk traditions associated with the slavery era.

As discussed in Chapter 4, another use of dialect in the folk tradition was the softening or blurring of the final consonant. In “Hiding Behind the Stuff,” Nix substitutes the final consonant with an “M” sound, resulting in “shim” for ship, “Jonam” for Jonah, and so on. This feature was possibly a type of effect meant to elongate the words, similar to the moan.

I saw the four-way wind:
One got on the right side of the shim [ship],
Another got on the left side of the shim [ship],
One got in the front of the ship,
And another got on
A-behind the shim [ship]

Object 6-13. Use of Softening of Final Consonant in “Hiding Behind the Stuff” (.mp3 file 137 KB)

**Formulaic Quality**

The formal structure of the folk sermon is consistent, and according to Pipes, consists of the Introduction (A), Statement of the Text (B), Body of the Sermon, which reaches an emotional

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climax (C), and Conclusion (D).47 In 1902, Rev. Moses Hester or “Uncle Mose,” a former slave, used a similar format in his sermon, demonstrating this use of simple structures: Introduction (A) consisting of a hymn, a prayer, followed by the announcement of the text; the (B) section which explicates upon the Scriptural passage, to which the minister refers as he brings the story and its lessons into the present day; section (C), which is the conclusion in which the minister ends his sermon with song and a benediction.48 Uncle Mose’s sermon, which is similar in form to Pipes’ sermon form, provides evidence of this form’s early use.

My analysis of form is based on lyrical elements of the texts, not the musical elements, except where the inclusion of songs functions as verses or transitions (bridge material). I designate a section as a verse if the subject matter differs from that which precedes or follows it. Nix typically commented on Biblical stories or characters, the issues that were relevant to his African-American congregants in the 1920s, and gave advice to his congregants. Therefore, the main sections which I have outlined include: the introduction, which in his earlier sermons through October, 1928 include a quote from Scripture and the sermon title; a Biblical story that centers on a scene or actors in the scene; issues of contemporary relevance (for the 1920s), often beginning with “many people . . .” or “some people . . .” followed by Nix explaining how this particular issue was affecting a large number of people; advice from Nix in which he specifically addresses his congregants with “you,” “sister,” or “brother,” such as “that bed is going to be too short for you,” or “sister, watch that woman.” The conclusion sections typically are a combination of advice from Nix and a general statement, followed by “Amen.”

Nix utilized a simple ABC form in two of his early sermons: “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. I,” and “The Prayer Meeting in Hell,” both recorded in 1927. Nix used many

47 Pipes, Say Amen, Brother! 143-146.
combinations of sections in his sermons, with no clear rule or template to the arrangement of the sections (see Appendix A and C for all forms). While some of the sermons have simple forms of ABC or ABCD, other sermons have much more complex arrangements. For example, “Death Might Be Your Christmas Gift” has the form of ABCBCBCDCEF, with the Death theme in the C section recurring regularly, similar to a rondo form. An example of an ABCD form is in Nix’s “After the Ball is Over” (Table 6-10).

Table 6-10. Sections in “After the Ball is Over.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Sub-Section</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Introduction (Quote from Scripture and title)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Biblical story of Salome after the ball.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Examples of what happens after the “ball.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C1</td>
<td>After the ball is when trouble starts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C2</td>
<td>Hell, that started on the ballroom floor, will come into the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C3</td>
<td>Bad things can come after the ball, which can lead to death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Pleads with “sons” and “daughters” to give up their frivolous ways before it’s too late</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nix begins in Section A with a standard introduction, announcing the sermon text, theme, and title; Section B describes the Biblical story; Section C gives examples of how these themes can happen in “real life,” that is, the contemporary relevance of the theme; Section D concludes with Nix pleading with sinners to change their ways and offering advice.

In the “White Flyer to Heaven – Part II,” five sections describe the journey of the White Flyer train as it is progressing on its journey. The White Flyer theme is derived from the Black Diamond Express theme; however, where the Black Diamond leads to hell, the White Flyer leads to Heaven. The “White Flyer” is a two-part sermon, thus the second part is a continuation of the first. Therefore, in “Part II,” the A section is omitted but is assumed from “White Flyer to Heaven – Part 1.” I am including it here as (A), with the total form comprising (A)BCDE.

Nix begins the A section of “The White Flyer to Heaven – Part 1” with the introduction of the Scripture, followed by the roles of God, the Holy Ghost, and Jesus.
A: I take my text in Matthew seventh chapter and fourteenth verse. “Straight is the gate and narrow is the way
Which leadeth into life
And few there be that find it.”

This train
Is known as the White Flyer to heaven.
God is the engineer,
The Holy Ghost is the headlight,
And Jesus is the conductor.

Nix begins intoning on F³ beginning in the very first line. He slides up to Ab³ on the word “God” on line 3, establishing the key of F minor. Section A describes what will happen and who the players are.

Section B in “The White Flyer to Heaven – Part II” continues the journey of the White Flyer, leaving behind the past with its “toil and snare,” begging its passengers to “wipe [their] weeping eyes” as they leave behind their loved ones. The first rendering of the spiritual melody is sung in entirety in Section B. Section B describes the journey to Heaven.

Section C confirms the arrival of the passengers in Heaven. The spiritual melody is only sung in spurts, as if the singer wanted to give Nix space to relate a personal story to his listeners, that of his promise to his mother on her deathbed. The tonic is located at F³ with occasional octave jumps up to F⁴, descending back down to F³ via notes of the pentatonic scale. At 1:19, Nix uses vernacular language in the phrase, “I just come from,” rather than using the formal language of “that I have just come from.” The climax of the sermon occurs at 1:26 on the words, “Home, home at last.” This phrase contains the highest pitches and longest held notes in the entire sermon, demonstrating the most emotional and intense lyrics associated with Nix finally reaching “home” and meeting his mother in heaven.⁴⁹ These lines are all in the high part of the range for a baritone, centering around the notes F⁴ and G⁴, signifying their urgency and intensity,

⁴⁹ Nix’s mother did not die until October 27, 1929.
thus implying section C as the climax or celebration portion of the sermon. Nix uses personal stories, vernacular dialect, extreme pitches, a gravelly timbre, shouts, and moans to emphasize the climax.

The hymn, “Look for Me” is sung in Section D. Nix easily transitions from intoning and shouting to singing, without pause. His vocal transition demands that he switch from a rhythmically-free, improvisatory, participatory style with vocal interjections from the congregants, to a monophonic style sung in unison in a somewhat strict rhythmic tempo. The hymn is centered around a tonic of F, as is the earlier portion of the sermon. The transition from F minor to F major is an example of “pendular thirds,” in which both major and minor keys are employed in a single setting, which Floyd has noted as an African-American musical trait of the ringshout.50

Section C² is the conclusion of the sermon, but unlike the endings of other sermons, he continues shouting, the female congregants continue with interjections, and the spiritual melody continues. This section functions as a second climax or reprise of the earlier C section before the hymn. Thus the total form is as follows:

| (A) (Intro) | B | C | D (Hymn) | C² (reprise) ||

The sermon’s form is thus similar to that of many popular music songs given below:

| (Intro) | Verse | Chorus | Bridge | Chorus ||

The simplicity of the form now takes shape and demonstrates one possible reason why Nix’s sermons were so popular. Popular music forms, such as those found in blues, jazz, and Tin Pan Alley, were familiar to black music listeners, and subconsciously could have been associated to these forms.

Transcription of “The White Flyer to Heaven – Part II”

I have transcribed the entirety of “The White Flyer to Heaven – Part II” so that the reader may see Nix’s use of various vocal techniques throughout one sermon. My key for the techniques are listed as symbols:

Table 6-11. Symbols for Vocal Gestures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocal Gesture</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gravelly Timbre</td>
<td>✦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shout</td>
<td>▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moan</td>
<td>➤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scoop up</td>
<td>✧</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scoop down</td>
<td>✦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide</td>
<td>✦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystery Spiritual</td>
<td>✫</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interjections from</td>
<td>✖</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>congregants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An arrow follows the symbol for the length the technique is extended. Because I am focusing on the vocal gestures, the notes are stemless and do not denote rhythm. I have notated both shouts and loud dynamics because, as mentioned previously, in historical documents shouts were not only uttered in a loud volume, but were also accompanied by a “shrill tone” and a “screaming” voice in the upper register of the voice with higher pitches. Thus the shout is a combination of loud vocal volume, “shrill tone,” and higher pitches and thus requires a symbol separate from dynamics. I have notated the dynamics as \(mf\) and \(ff\) due to the fact that the exact dynamic level is impossible to discern from a recording. However, I am able to view differences, including increases and decreases of volume, within the sound file.
B1: 

\textit{mf}

And now the white flyer

will continue its trip to heaven

God

Is the engineer

The Holy Ghost

Is the headlight

And Jesus
is the conductor

And as the White Flyer

Starts on

Up from the high-rocks of ages

On higher and higher

Up beyond the sun moon and stars
Back behind God's eternal word

Someone will cry out

Amazing Grace how sweet the sound

That saved a wretch like me

I once was lost but now I'm found

Was blind but now I see
And then look back over the distance over which we have come.

And then cry out.

Through many dangers.

Toil and snare.

I have already come.

Twas Grace that brought me safe thus far.
And Grace will lead me on home

And then go higher and higher

Higher and higher

sung “Well, well, well”

Until we

will bid farewell to every tear

“Have mercy”

And wipe our weeping eyes
And then

we'll go dashing through the pearly white gates

On into God's eternal Kingdom

And when we get there

I'm gonna sit down

And chat with the Father
And chat with the Son

And talk about the world I just come from

And then some one will cry out

Trouble will be no more

Home

Home at last
And then when I get there
Some mother's child will cry out
The reason why
I've made up my mind
To go to Heaven
I've
Got a mother up there

I promised her

I'd meet her in glory

Yes

I told her on her dying bed

Before she left this world
(1:53)  \( \frac{d}{d} = 55 \)

D:

You may look for me but I'll be there I'll be there I'll be there

there I'll be there You may look for me but I'll be there I'll be there Glory

to _________ His _________ name

(2:19)

Child dren

are you going?

Have you got the tic - ket?
Well if you don't go

I'm goin' on any how

And when I get there

I'm goin' to sit down

And meet my mother in Heaven

I'm gonna help her

Object 6-14. “The White Flyer to Heaven – Part II” (.mp3 file 2.3 MB)

In the transcription, Section A, the introduction, is not shown because, as I mentioned, it is included in “The White Flyer to Heaven – Part 1.” Beginning with “The White Flyer to Heaven – Part II,” in Section B¹, Nix begins in a natural speaking voice without gravelly timbres or loud dynamics. The interjections by the congregants begin just before Section B². Nix begins speaking with a gravelly timbre at 0:24 and continues thereafter. His first shout, moan, and loud dynamic occur on the word “I” at 0:31, after which he returns to his original volume level. The female congregant begins singing the mystery spiritual at 0:36. In Section B³ at 0:42, Nix again reaches a climax but returns to a moderate volume at 0:52 through the end of this section.

At C¹ (1:05), Nix’s shouts, loud dynamics, and high pitches fluctuate between moderate volume and lower pitches. In other words, between 1:05-1:34, Nix fluctuates between highs and lows in this section as he builds tension to keep the attention of his listeners. At 1:34 in Section
\(C^2\), the celebration section begins, which includes high pitches, shouts, loud dynamics, and interjections from the congregants. The celebration continues to the beginning of Section D (1:53), where “Look for Me” is sung by the group. As mentioned previously, the spiritual functions as a bridge between the celebration and its recap. The second celebration at 2:19 includes moans, shouts, high pitches, loud dynamics, interjections from the congregants, and the mystery spiritual. The energy continues until 2:41, when the last two phrases return to a moderate dynamic on “When I get in glory, Amen.”

I have notated the number of occurrences of the elements that contribute to a heightened intensity: gravelly timbre, shouts, loud dynamics, moans, high pitches, the inclusion of the mystery spiritual, and interjections by the congregants. The following table (Table 6-12) lists the vocal gestures according to the intensity level of each section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timing</th>
<th># of Phrases</th>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0:00-0:12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Moan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interjections</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:12-0:24</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Interjections</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:24-0:31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Interjections</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gravelly timbre</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:31-0:42</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>High pitches</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mystery spiritual</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gravelly timbre</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>2.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:42-0:52</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>High pitches</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Loud dynamics</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shouts</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mystery spiritual</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gravelly timbre</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moans</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>5.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6-12. Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timing</th>
<th># of Phrases</th>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0:52-1:05</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mystery spiritual</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gravelly timbre</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moans</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interjections</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:05-1:07</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Loud dynamic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shouts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moans</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gravelly timbre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High pitches</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:07-1:12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gravelly timbre</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mystery spiritual</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interjections</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:12-1:19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Loud dynamics</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moans</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shouts</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High pitches</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mystery spiritual</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interjections</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gravelly timbre</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>5.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:19-1:22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gravelly timbre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interjections</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:22-1:30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Loud dynamics</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moans</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shouts</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High pitches</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mystery spiritual</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interjections</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gravelly timbre</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>5.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30-1:34</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gravelly timbre</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:34-1:53</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Loud dynamics</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moans</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shouts</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A linear graph displays the tension within the sermon and provides a view of the number of vocal gestures in each time occurrence. The highs and lows of the graph provides evidence of Nix’s use of gestures for dramatic effect. He consistently alters his use of gestures to provide tension and release throughout the sermon. However, before and after the singing of the spiritual in Section D (1:53-2:19), Nix climaxes in the celebration. Although Nix has six climaxes within the sermon, in Section C his phrases are much longer than earlier in the sermon. Thus, he keeps up the intensity for a longer period in Section C and in the recap of Section C after the spiritual. For example, the first climax at 0:42-0:52 lasts ten seconds, while the first Section C (1:34-1:53) lasts twenty-one seconds and the recap of Section C (2:19-2:41) lasts twenty-two seconds. Plus, Nix sings the highest notes of the sermon in Section C with the most intensity. Therefore, I conclude that Section C is indeed the celebration section.
Through Nix’s use of shouts, moans, loud vocal dynamics, gravelly timbre, high pitches, as shown above, as well as vernacular dialect, words and phrases directly associated with folk spirituals, and moan-type adjustments to words, Nix demonstrates his attention to both sound and African-American folk vocal traditions. In addition, Nix employed traditional hymns and folk spirituals, which I will discuss in Chapter 7. As Henry H. Mitchells explains, identity is closely linked to sound, more so than appearance, and communication through sound is highly regarded for black ministers. 51 Therefore, as the evidence provides, Nix utilized sound through vocal gestures to communicate with and draw in his listeners.

Reverend Andrew Nix was probably familiar not only with the folk spiritual, but also with the chanted sermon due to the fact that his father, William Nix, Sr. had been a former slave, living in both South Carolina and Georgia prior to Emancipation. As discussed previously, the chanted sermon’s history correlates with the emerging spirituals during the slavery era. Andrew Nix probably experienced both the folk spiritual and chanted sermon from a young age, influenced by his father’s experience with slavery in the deep South and his preaching history in Texas.¹ In addition, the qualities of Andrew Nix’s voice were probably influenced more by the singing of folk spirituals than the blues, for the reason that blues and jazz were deemed “of the world,” and were not allowed in the Nix household. Andrew’s familiarity with the folk spiritual is evidenced by his inclusion of several spirituals on his recordings. Apparently, Andrew Nix made little or no effort to assimilate to white-influenced singing styles or repertoires, but rather, incorporated black oral traditions including folk spirituals into the modern recordings of his sermons.

**Repertoire Choice**

As previously mentioned, the folk spirituals differed from the arranged spirituals in that the folk spirituals were spontaneous creations that were orally transmitted, while the arranged spirituals were concertized versions published in written arrangements. Andrew Nix chose to incorporate folk spirituals into his recorded sermons rather than the “modern” arranged spirituals, such as those found in *Gospel Pearls* and *The Baptist Standard Hymnal*. Andrew’s brother, William, was not only a committee member of the Sunday School Publishing board that

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¹ I retrieved genealogical evidence from the Rusk County, Texas county clerk’s office in which William Nix is listed as officiating a wedding in 1890.
published both *Gospel Pearls* and *The Baptist Standard Hymnal* in 1921 and 1924 respectively, but was also a renowned singer who marketed the songs of *Gospel Pearls* at the 1921 National Baptist Convention. However, Andrew did not use songs from either of these hymnals on his recorded sermons. One reason could be that Andrew chose instead to use spirituals that were part of the tradition of which the mass audiences were the most familiar, rather than the written arrangements in the two hymnals. Possibly Rev. Nix preferred to teach his congregants (including his studio congregation) music via the oral tradition, or perhaps the spirituals and hymns he included were so well known by his congregants that they did not require instruction in melody, rhythm, or lyrics. On recordings, Nix’s studio congregants typically sing with him in unison rather than in four-part harmony—the arrangements in both *Gospel Pearls* and *The Baptist Standard Hymnal* are for the most part set in four-part, homophonic arrangements. Such arrangements would have suppressed the spontaneity that was a fundamental part of the folk tradition that Nix preferred.

The use of familiar tunes and especially well-known folk spirituals would have resonated with many of the congregants from a wide array of backgrounds. Nix repeatedly used folk spirituals or hymns rather than the songs used in white churches or elite black churches. Many northern black churches, of which Nix was officially a participant, typically shied away from folk spirituals and instead depended on hymns sung in the white churches, and classical music.²

Perhaps Nix’s decision to include on his recordings vocal traditions linked to the African-American past gives evidence of his pride in his race’s history. Perhaps his decision was a protest statement against assimilation to European cultural aesthetics. Perhaps this was a sign of his love of black traditional musical expressions. Perhaps it was all of the above. Likewise, his audiences may have identified with his sermons because they heard themselves and their

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experiences in the moans and timbres of Nix’s voice and showed that they valued these traditions by purchasing his recordings. As stated previously, tradition reflects the practices and customs that are valued within a community. By purchasing Nix’s sermons, African Americans in the 1920s, many of whom were financially strapped, made a conscious decision to use their financial resources to support and own that which they considered of value. Although many churches chose to assimilate to white aesthetic values, the popularity of the recorded sermons by Nix demonstrates that the economic support of black folk traditions provided evidence of the cultural values of many African Americans in the 1920s. Nix gave a literal voice to the black folk through his support of folk spirituals and hymns.

**Traditional Spirituals and Hymns**

In his live preaching, Reverend Nix used singing as an introduction to his sermons. As Genester Nix explains, “my dad would sing before every sermon. . . . Just the part of one song. He wouldn’t sing a whole song or anything like that. Something that pertained to the sermon.”

In his recorded sermons, Nix continued his practice of including music and singing. Of the forty-seven extant sermons recorded by Nix, fourteen (29.7%), include folk spirituals or hymns that have been identified in repertory and hymn books published in the first decades of the twentieth century, which clearly establishes the early history of these melodies. Knowing that Nix made a conscious decision in the songs he chose, and understanding the correlation of these songs to folk traditions helps to understand the sense of pride he must have felt, his passion for the music, and his musical heritage. Each of the songs he chose for his recordings will be discussed briefly.

The songs Nix chose are included in sources released prior to 1927 when Reverend Nix initially started recording. Most of these songs were written or arranged by revered specialists in the field of African-American folk music, such as John W. Work, J. Rosamond Johnson, and

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James Weldon Johnson or had been collected by noted collectors during or just after the slavery era. I have also included songs from Songs of Zion, edited by J. Jefferson Cleveland and Verolga Nix, Reverend Nix’s daughter, because of her first-hand experience with his choice of songs.4 Her hymnal is considered one of greatest in importance in the African-American sacred music tradition.5 As shown in Table 7-1, Nix included spirituals, hymns, and songs of unknown origin.

Table 7-1. Hymns and folk spirituals in Nix’s recorded sermons.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order</th>
<th>Recording Date</th>
<th>Sermon Title</th>
<th>Song Title</th>
<th>Spiritual or Hymn</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>4/23/27</td>
<td>“Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. II”</td>
<td>“My Sins Been Taken Away”</td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>1, 2, 5, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>4/23/27</td>
<td>“Goin’ to Hell and Who Cares”</td>
<td>“I Got Mah Swaad in Mah Han”</td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>4/23/27</td>
<td>“Hiding Behind the Stuff”</td>
<td>“Nowhere to Hide” [?]7</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>6/29/27</td>
<td>“The White Flyer to Heaven – Part I”</td>
<td>“The Blood Done Signed My Name”</td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>6/29/27</td>
<td>“The White Flyer to Heaven – Part II”</td>
<td>“Look for Me”</td>
<td>Hymn</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>6/29/27</td>
<td>“The Seven Rs”</td>
<td>“When the Saints Go Marching In”</td>
<td>Hymn</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>6/29/27</td>
<td>“It is a Strange Thing to Me”</td>
<td>“Hush, Somebody’s Callin’ My Name”</td>
<td>Hymn</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


7 I have assigned the title “Nowhere to Hide” to this song but the song is not included in any written source I have discovered.
Table 7-1. Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order</th>
<th>Recording Date</th>
<th>Sermon Title</th>
<th>Song Title</th>
<th>Spiritual or Hymn</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>10/12/27 and 1/18/28</td>
<td>“Deep Down in My Heart”</td>
<td>“Deep Down in My Heart”</td>
<td>Unknown [spiritual ?]</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>1/18/28</td>
<td>“Done Found My Lost Sheep”</td>
<td>“Done Found My Lost Sheep”</td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>10/26/28</td>
<td>“Begin A New Life On Christmas Day – Part II”</td>
<td>“What a Great Change Since I’ve Been Born”</td>
<td>Unknown [Hymn ?]</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>8/24/29</td>
<td>“Black Diamond – Part 4”</td>
<td>“Rock of Ages”</td>
<td>Hymn</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>4/8/30</td>
<td>“Black Diamond – Part 5”</td>
<td>“Free at Last”</td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>2, 3, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>4/8/30</td>
<td>“Black Diamond – Part 6”</td>
<td>“Come and Go With Me To That Land”</td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>6/20/1930</td>
<td>“Too Much Religion”</td>
<td>“I Want Jesus to Walk With Me”</td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nix included hymns or spirituals consistently on his first recordings in 1927 (seven out of the first eight), then only sporadically in recordings from end of 1927 to 1930. Almost thirty percent of his extant sermons either have a spiritual or hymn, but most are in his first year of recording.

After October 26, 1928, when Nix stopped using Scriptural references and started giving practical advice, he only included musical selections on five more sermons, and those were in his themed sermons, such as his Christmas message or the Black Diamond train themes. Four of the six parts of “Black Diamond Express to Hell” include either a spiritual or hymn, as noted below:

“Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. II”: “My Sins Been Taken Away”
“The Black Diamond Express to Hell – Part 4”: “Rock of Ages”
“The Black Diamond Express to Hell – Part 5”: “Free at Last”
“The Black Diamond Express to Hell – Part 6”: “Come and Go With Me To That Land”

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8 The Black Diamond recordings were titled differently on the Vocalion label. The first two use Roman numerals and abbreviate the word “part,” for example, “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. I.” Parts two through six use Arabic numerals, include the word “the,” and write out the word “part,” for example, “The Black Diamond Express to Hell – Part 3.”
“My Sins Been Taken Away,” “Rock of Ages,” and “Free at Last” are all included in collections of spirituals and folk songs by noted collectors and arrangers, such as James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson, John W. Work, and others such as E. A. McIlhenny’s *Befo’ de War Spirituals* (1933). All of the spirituals or hymns are in printed sources except the songs “Nowhere to Hide,” “Done Found My Lost Sheep,” “What a Great Change Since I’ve Been Born,” and “Come and Go With Me To That Land,” which I could not locate. A brief discussion of each spiritual follows.

**“My Sins Been Taken Away”**

The spiritual, “My Sins Been Taken Away,” recorded on the sermon, “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. II,” is mentioned in several sources, thus inferring its extended history in African-American vocal traditions.\(^9\) Howard W. Odum, in 1909, eighteen years prior to Nix’s recording, describes it as a “very popular song,” confirming its longevity in the folk repertory.\(^10\) In Nix’s recorded version of the spiritual, the nasal vocal timbres of the female congregant singers contrasts with the full and round timbres of European-trained singers. Thus, it is apparent that Nix was not aspiring to European vocal standards.

According to Odum, the chorus can be varied in text from “all of my sins been taken away,” to “all my sins” or “all o’ my sins,” and “done taken away,” or “bin taken away” due to

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\(^{10}\) Howard Odum, “Religious Folk-Songs of the Southern Negroes, *Journal of Religious Psychology and Education* 3, no. 3 (July 1909): 38. Odum remarks on the multiple titles and chorus lines for this song, including “All My Sins Done Taken Away,” and “All My Sins Taken Away.”
the flexibility and interchangeability of texts and tunes in Negro spirituals.\textsuperscript{11} An example of this interchangeability is exemplified in John W. Work’s book of folk songs and spirituals, in which he titles the song, “My Sins Been Taken Away.” In contrast, in A. E. Perkins’ article, “Negro Spirituals from the Far South,” the song is titled, “All Er My Sins Are Taken Erway,” and in McIlhenny’s \textit{Befo’ De War Spirituals} it is titled, “All-er Ma Sins are Taken Away.”

In “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. II,” Nix exclaims, “aren’t you glad you got off the Black Diamond Express train a long time ago,” which he follows by leading the group into singing “My Sins Been Taken Away.” The spiritual’s lyrical message is one of living a life without sin, which is exemplified in the stops of the train.

\textbf{“I Got Mah Swoad in Mah Han’”}

In “Goin’ to Hell and Who Cares,” Nix incorporates the spiritual, “I Got Mah Swoad in Mah Han’,” also found in Mary Allen Grissom’s \textit{The Negro Sings a New Heaven}.\textsuperscript{12} Grissom claims, “Many of the tunes are led by the older Negroes who are able to add modern verses to the old tunes, making them fit present-day needs, yet losing none of their former setting of dignity and beauty. Herein, lies much of their charm. Others are left just as they were sung years ago. The wonder is that they are handed down from generation to generation with such accuracy.” She explains, “Most of the songs included in this volume have been taken directly from the Negroes in their present-day worship, and have been selected from those sung in the neighborhood of Louisville, Kentucky, and certain rural sections in Adair County.”\textsuperscript{13} Her book was published in 1930, thus she probably collected the songs for many years prior to this date.

As described in Chapter 2, Reverend Nix was a student of State University in Louisville,

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Howard W. Odum, \textit{Religious Folk-Songs of the Southern Negroes}, (Worchester, Mass.: s.n., 1909?), 31-33.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Mary Allen Grissom, \textit{The Negro Sings a New Heaven} (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1930), 64.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Grissom, foreword to \textit{The Negro Sings a New Heaven}, n.p.
\end{itemize}
graduating in 1915, and while serving as a minister in Georgetown, Kentucky, (seventy miles east of Louisville) from 1914-1918, presumably living there until his first position took him elsewhere in 1919. It is thus possible that he was exposed to the same songs as Grissom and may have heard this particular version of “I Got Mah Swoad in Mah Han’.”

The lyrics of the spiritual in this sermon speak from the perspective of the slave: “My mother’s in one place an’ I in another; Jedgmun’ Day’s a-gonna bring us all together.” It goes through the cycle of identifying all of the loved ones kept apart—“my mother,” “my sister,” “my father,” and “my friends”—who would all be joined together in the afterlife on “Jedgmun’ Day.” The connection to slavery is explicit. Nix presents the spiritual as an introduction to his sermon, which encourages sinners to “get in touch with Jesus.”

“Nowhere to Hide”

In “Hiding Behind the Stuff,” Nix and his congregants sing “Nowhere to Hide” using call-and-response in a participatory performance. I could not find this song in any printed source. Nix begins the recording singing this song before introducing his sermon. The text reflects Nix’s theme of “hiding from God,” using the story of Jonah as his reference. In the sermon, Jonah hides on the ship but is discovered, thrown into the sea, and eaten by the whale. Nix’s use of gravelly timbre in this sermon was discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

“The Blood Done Signed My Name”

Howard Odum claims that “the negro [sic] singers have exhibited a characteristic specimen of their word combinations, concrete pictures, and theological principles” (italics in original) in this spiritual.14 The song lyrics present visual images of where sins have been “washed in the blood of the Lamb,” including “in de Kingdom,” “in de Lamb’s book,” “on de mountain,” and “in the valley.” The song confirms that the blood will sign “my name” because

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14 Howard W. Odum, Religious Folk-Songs of the Southern Negroes, (PhD diss., Clark University, 1909?), 81-82.
“Jesus said so,” and “God he tole me.” Nix recounts Jesus’ time on the cross where He “signed every man’s bond with my own blood.” Nix and his female congregants sing the spiritual in unison and place it in the middle of the sermon.

“Look for Me”

The hymn, “Look for Me!” (also titled, “You May Look For Me For I’ll Be There), was arranged in 1905 by Charles Austin Miles, and the first known publication of this hymn is in the 1906 New Songs of the Gospel No. 2: For Use in Religious Meetings. The lyrics in the first verse state, “When you get to Heaven, as you surely will, if the Savior’s name you own, after you have greeted those you love the best, who are standing round the throne.” Nix describes the White Flyer’s journey to Heaven and only includes the chorus of the hymn which states, “You may look for me, for I’ll be there.” In other words, the hymn focuses on the life-after-death experience of Heaven. This hymn is one instance of Nix including a hymn written by a well-known white composer.

“When the Saints Go Marching In”

This hymn is well known in both white and African-American churches. In Nix’ sermon, “The Seven Rs,” Nix and the congregants sing “When the Saints Go Marching In” as a response to those who are “calling with their robe washed in the blood of the Lamb.” Nix leads the hymn in call-and-response, with some of the female congregants singing along with Nix.

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“Hush, Hush, Somebody’s Callin’ My Name”

In Nix’s sermon, “It is a Strange Thing to Me,” Nix begins with the fourth verse of “Hush, Hush, Somebody’s Callin’ My Name” (Example 7-1).\(^{17}\) Howard W. Odum describes this song as a “favorite of the younger generation;”\(^{18}\) therefore, by 1909 when Odum’s book was published, the song had already been established as a “favorite” in the folk repertory.

Example 7-1. “Hush, Somebody’s Callin’ My Name” in “It is a Strange Thing to Me,” (2:54-3:02), recorded June 29, 1927, on Vocalion, VO-1125, reissued on Document Records, DOCD-5328.

In the sermon, Nix describes the “strange” and amazing miracles of Jesus and how one must be born again to understand these miracles. Nix shouts the word “born” with a gravelly timbre, but is able to immediately transition into singing the spiritual, demonstrating the flexibility of his voice. Throughout the spiritual, he continues singing with a gravelly timbre. The transcription in Example 7-1 provides evidence that Nix only sang the basic melody and did not include melismas or other vocal embellishments in his singing. As I have previously mentioned, his lack of melismas could be due to the inability of his heavy, gravelly voice to sing fast-moving passages. Also, because he is singing with his congregants, the group would probably favor singing the basic melody without extensive embellishments.


\(^{18}\) Howard W. Odum, Religious Folk-Songs of the Southern Negroes, (PhD diss., Clark University, 1909?), 39.
“Deep Down in My Heart”

Although I could not find any written or oral record of “Deep Down in My Heart,” and thus have no knowledge of its origins, I wanted to include this song in this discussion because of its stylistic qualities that contrast with the other traditional songs used by Nix on his recorded sermons. It is one of only two songs that includes piano accompaniment (the other being “Done Found My Lost Sheep”), and includes an unnamed solo soprano singing. Her voice is clear, she uses Standard English, vibrato, strict rhythm, and she rolls her Rs on certain words, clearly demonstrating an affinity towards trained, Western-classical aesthetics. At times, the chorus sings in harmony, which is rare for Nix’s singers.

However, regardless of the elements indexing “sophistication” in this rendering, the traditional black folk elements are also present. For example, the solo singer alters with the chorus, creating a call-and-response effect; the chorus is in a heterophonic texture, with certain voices entering at slightly different rhythmic increments; and Nix’s gravelly voice contrasts with the soprano’s clear timbre. In this regard, Nix was emulating the Fisks’ straddling of both the Western classical world and the folk world, keeping some semblance of “blackness” while experimenting with modernity. This example demonstrates the gray area in which Nix included both traditional and Western classical aesthetics and that he did not restrict himself within strict boundaries of style.

In the sermon, Nix describes that “religion is a love deep down in your heart.” This sermon consists of only two verses of sermonizing and the song sung in its entirety by a solo female singer—a rarity for Nix. The recording label states “with Sister Ida W. Nix” but it is uncertain if she is indeed the solo singer. For unknown reasons, the original recording, recorded on October 12, 1927, was re-recorded on January 18, 1928, and then substituted for the original
recording. Possibly Nix was not satisfied with the original recording and sought to perfect it in this later recording.

**“Done Found My Lost Sheep”**

“Done Found My Lost Sheep” is featured in the sermon with the same name.19 Nix uses J. Rosamond Johnson’s arrangement of the song, which Johnson published in 1925 with his brother James Weldon Johnson in the anthology titled, *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*. Nix’s version was released in January of 1928, just three years after the published anthology. Either Nix or the pianist on the recording purchased the anthology, or possibly Nix knew the Johnson brothers and received the arrangement directly. “Done Found My Lost Sheep” is unique for two reasons: it is the only song in which Nix sings the verses entirely by himself (the congregants sing with him in unison only on the choruses), and it is one of only two songs that includes piano accompaniment (the other, “Deep Down in My Heart”). Again, Nix only sermonizes for two verses and the spiritual is sung in its entirety for the majority of the sermon. Although Nix may have used the Johnsons’ arrangement, the pianist alters and develops the chords somewhat, creating a descending chromatic line in the verses.

**“What a Great Change Since I’ve Been Born”**

In “Begin A New Life On Christmas Day – Part II,” Nix encourages his listeners to change from their ways of sin and “turn over a new leaf” as they begin a new year. This allows for a “great change” and the singing of the song. I could not find this song in any source. Nix leads his congregants in four verses of the song in which the female congregants’ sing with a particularly nasal timbre.

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“Rock of Ages”

In “The Black Diamond Express to Hell – Part 4,” Nix sings the hymn, “Rock of Ages.” Nix’s “Rock of Ages” is different from the well known “Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me,” that is considered a standard in the white hymn tradition. I include both versions for the sake of comparison (Example 7-2).

Example 7-2. “Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me” and “Rock of Ages.”

The version of “Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me,” as presented in the Baptist Hymnal (on the left), has a different melody and different lyrics than Nix’s version (on the right). The version Nix used is identical to John Work’s version except for the first line of the lyrics: “Well the awful sinner, when the world is on fire” (Nix), versus “My loving brother/sister, when the world is on fire” (Work). Also, Nix and his congregation sing the hymn in unison rather than in four-part harmony, showing his affinity for folk practices rather than arranged hymns. In Nix’s sermon, he

20 Work, American Negro Songs, 60.

describes more “stops” on the Black Diamond Express to Hell and Nix exclaims, “Ever since I got off the Black Diamond Train, my soul has been singing,” a line leading directly into the singing of “Rock of Ages.”

“Free at Last”

“The Black Diamond Express to Hell – Part 5” includes a spoken word segment by the famous African-American actress, Nina Mae McKinney, who played the leading role in Hallelujah. McKinney was already a well-known actress by the time of the recording in Chicago in April of 1930; thus, the inclusion of her voice on Nix’s recordings could have garnered a substantial amount of sales for the two sermons on which she recorded. Nix sets this sermon as the first of a two-part story that is continued in “The Black Diamond Express to Hell – Part 6.” Because McKinney’s character, “Miz Hard-Boiled,” has not been converted by the end of “The Black Diamond Express to Hell Part – 5,” listeners are enticed to listen to Part 6, in which she finally converts.

Upon the conversion of one anonymous female congregant, Nix exclaims, “another soul born in the kingdom of God,” which leads to the singing of the spiritual, “Free at Last,” which is included in John W. Work’s American Negro Songs and other sources. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Work brothers, along with Andrew’s brother, William (W. M.) Nix, all served as committee members of the Sunday School Publishing Board for the National Baptist Convention, which published Gospel Pearls. James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson also released a version of the same spiritual in their anthology. The Work version is titled, “Free at Last,” while the Johnson version is titled “I Thank God I’m Free at Las’.” Nix may have

22 Work, American Negro Songs, 197; Johnson and Johnson, The Books of American Negro Spirituals, ii. 158; McIlhenny, Befo’ de War Spirituals, 95-97.

included this spiritual, whose lyrics repeat the theme of being “free at last,” as part of his audio “movie” used as incentive to convince Miz Hard-Boiled to join the expedition to heaven.

“Come and Go With Me To That Land”

In “The Black Diamond Express to Hell – Part 6,” Miz Hard-Boiled portrays a stubborn sinner who won’t convert until she realizes she is about to be left behind. The correspondence between Nix and McKinney at times sounds over-dramatic and could easily be confused with the expression of carnal desires. However, Nix, who was fifty years old at the time of the recording, was evidently playing the father-figure to McKinney, only eighteen years old at the time. In a sense, McKinney is playing the same character she played in Hallelujah: the hardened sinner who becomes converted after witnessing a church service and hearing the minister preach. In the recording, Nix states that sinners will encounter “hell-hounds howling [and] the hobgobs of hell” and other horrors. In contrast, those who get off the train and go to heaven will find joy, emphasized by singing the spiritual, “Come and Go With Me To That Land.”

There is a joy in that land
There is a joy in that land
There is a joy in that land
Where I’m bound, where I’m bound.

Well, there is a joy in that land
There is a joy in that land
There is a joy in that land
Where I’m bound.

24 A version of the song is was recorded by Blind Willie Johnson on April 20, 1930, titled “Come and Go with Me to that Land,” (Columbia 14556-D) accessed July 27, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnTN1ev84yU. Nix recorded his version on April 8, 1930, two weeks prior to Blind Willie Johnson’s version.

25 Lyrics in the later verses refer to the experience of slavery: “There’ll be no slavery in that land, I’ll throw my shackles to the ground, and lay my burdens all around, waiting for my Lord to set me free.” I cannot guarantee if these lyrics were in the original version or later added by the arranger. See J.W. Pepper, “Come and Go with Me to That Land,” accessed July 27, 2018, https://www.jwpepper.com/ Come-and-Go-with-Me-to-That-Land/10514617.item#/submit.
By the end of the sermon, Miz Hard-Boiled has indeed converted and joined Nix on a heavenly journey.

“I Want Jesus to Walk with Me”

This song is included in the anthology *Songs of Zion*, co-edited by Nix’s daughter Verolga Nix.26 In the recorded sermon, “Too Much Religion,” Rev. Nix describes hypocritical people who talk about religion but don’t actually practice it. He claims, “A real child of God is humble and submissive as they go through this world, amid howling wolves and tempting devils.” The spiritual “I Want Jesus to Walk with Me” allows a “real child of God” to call on Jesus in times of trouble, including “all along my pilgrim journey,” “when my heart is almost breaking,” and “when my head is bowed in sorrow.” The spiritual is in a minor key and is plaintive both musically and lyrically.

**Lyrical References**

In addition to sung spirituals and hymns, Nix also included references to other spirituals and hymns within his sermon texts. For example, “The Matchless King,” is partly based on the spiritual, “He’s the Lily of the Valley,”27 which includes the lyrics “He’s the lily of the valley . . . He’s the white Rose of Sharon . . . He’s the Great Physician.” “The Matchless King” includes the following text, which shows the possible influence of the spiritual:

The doctor said,
“He’s my Balm in Gilead.”
The botanist said,
“He’s my Rose of Sharon
And my lily of the valley.”

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Nix also uses Biblical themes drawn from spirituals. The theme in “Your Bed Is Too Short and Your Cover Too Narrow” is shared with a spiritual, “Oh Sinner,” and both Nix’s sermon and the spiritual take their theme from the Biblical verse of Isaiah 28:20.

Nix’s text:

I take my text in Isaiah twentieth-eighth chapter and twentieth verse.
For the bed is short and the man
Can place himself on it.
And the cover is narrow
And he can wrap himself up in it.

Spiritual, “Oh Sinner”28:

Oh sinnuh
Yo’ bed’s too short
Oh sinnuh
Yo’ bed’s too short
Oh sinnuh
Yo’ bed’s too short
Um, my Lawd.

Nix clearly refers to songs that are in the repertoire of the African-American folk tradition, either in use of the actual songs or through his texts.

**Mystery Spiritual**29

On forty-one of his forty-seven extant sermons, Nix includes a spiritual melody that I have not located in any anthology of spirituals or in any hymn book; hence, I am calling the melody the “mystery spiritual.” The fact that Reverend Nix included performances of the same spiritual on multiple recordings for almost the entirety of his recording history begs the following questions: Why would he include folk traditions, which contradicted the efforts by black intellectuals and ministers to uplift the race? Why would black consumers want to hear and

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28 Grissom, *The Negro Sings a New Heaven*, 44.

29 Parts of this section were taken from my unpublished paper, presented at the Society for Ethnomusicology conference, 2016.
purchase recordings of folk oralities when the pressure for assimilating to dominant aesthetic values abounded?

The female congregant singers, in the background behind Nix’s preaching, sing the spiritual melody. The transcription in Example 7-3 reveals its use of the minor pentatonic scale, slides between notes (notated with the glissando symbol), and bends up to notes (notated with the up-arrow symbol). The lyrics for this particular performance of the mystery spiritual are based on Psalm XXIII.30


Object 7-1. Mystery Spiritual (.mp3 file 295 KB)

30 I used “Begin A New Life On Christmas Day – Part I” (0:21-0:44) for the example because the female vocal was clear and up-front and the lyrics were discernable.
Throughout multiple recordings, this spiritual melody functions as an obbligato, providing a contrapuntal response to Nix’s preaching, creating a layering effect. It is not harmonized and is sung a cappella. The lyrics of each rendering of the spiritual are based either on *Psalm XXIII*, as in the above rendering, or are not clearly articulated enough to understand thoroughly. The mournful quality of the melody adheres to historical descriptions of spirituals from the era of slavery.

For example, an account from 1863 describes the qualities of a folk song, presumably a spiritual, in the black church, “It was a strange song, with seemingly very little rhythm, and was what is termed in music a minor; it was not a psalm, nor a real song, as we understand these words; for there was nothing that approached the jubilant in it. It seemed more like a wail, a mournful, dirge-like expression of sorrow.”\(^\text{31}\) In another example from 1870, Elizabeth Kilham, states, “The most beautiful melody the negroes have . . . [is] a chant, carried by full, deep bass voices; the liquid soprano of the melody wandering through and above it, now rising in triumphant swell, now falling in softened cadence.”\(^\text{32}\) Kilham’s description of a male voice with a soprano “wandering” melody is similar to the mystery spiritual, which is contrapuntal in texture, with the female-sung melody weaving above the chant of Nix’s voice. More than sixty years after the 1863 article, the same qualities are present in the mystery spiritual on Nix’s recordings. In addition, the song presents qualities that have been identified with those of the folk spiritual: slow, sustained melodic lines; the use of the pentatonic scale; a clear tonal center; a monophonic performance (of the spiritual melody itself, not including Nix’s voice); performances featuring the human voice as the primary instrument; the inclusion of slides and

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bends; the use of improvisation (from one rendering to the next); and texts taken from the Bible, such as *Psalm XXIII*. Except for the accompaniment of body movement, which of course is not discernable from a recording, the characteristics all correspond with the characteristics of the folk spiritual discussed earlier.

In addition, in several of the recorded performances, the female voices repeat the melody sometimes several times within a single sermon. Their entrances often appear spontaneous and impromptu, creating an element of unpredictability and excitement, despite the numerous repetitions of the melody. Because different voices sing the melody, either alone or as a group, the melody is never repeated identically. Based on the characteristics formulated from historical documents and by respected scholars in the field of black music, I have concluded that the mystery spiritual is most likely a folk spiritual.

Nix’s daughter, Genester, and another (anonymous) family member remember hearing the female congregants sing this particular melody during Reverend Nix’s church services. Unfortunately, they were not able to definitively identify it. During Nix’s recorded sermons, the prayer band sings the melody as part of their improvisational responses to his sermons, which provide opportunities to express their feelings through song by making up words or humming spontaneously. Through repetitive renderings of the melody, it serves as an overarching, binding factor that ties together the sermons into one cohesive unit, again revealing the theme of intertextuality between his sermons.

The rendering of the mystery spiritual in “The White Flyer to Heaven – Part II,” reveals different lyrics (with some indecipherable) and a looser rhythmic structure than the rendering in “Begin A New Life On Christmas Day – Part I,” (Example 7-4).33

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33 Example 7-4 was transposed to start on the same pitch as 7-3.
Example 7-4. “The White Flyer to Heaven – Part II” (0:36-1:02), mystery spiritual melody, recorded June 29, 1927, on Vocalion, VO 1170, reissued on Document Records, DOCD-5328.

A comparison with the mystery spiritual in Example 7-4 reveals similarities in the melody but with slight variations. As mentioned before, the upwards arrows in the transcription signify scoops up to the notes and the glissando symbol signifies downward slides.

Nix’s recording sessions featured female members of his congregation, including his wife Ida, whom he brought to the recording sessions in Chicago. Certainly he was familiar with their musical repertoire and either allowed them to choose their pieces or instructed the singers on what to sing. The repeated singing of the mystery spiritual on 87% of Nix’s recorded sermons demonstrates his affinity for not only the melody itself, but also the performance of it by the sisters. The presence of the spiritual on Nix’s recordings also highlights his preference for including oral traditions of the folk on the recordings. Despite the climate of the emerging middle class who aspired to uplift the race, Nix and his congregants clearly resisted the belief
that they needed to change their traditions and adopt “civilized” vocal aesthetics and repertoire to conform to uplift ideologies.  

In Reverend Nix’s era, the ability to preach, sing and record black folk songs and melodies must have been empowering in the face of discrimination, oppression, and intracultural pressures. In the midst of segregated society and in an era in which lynchings were still prevalent, recordings that could be played in the privacy of one’s home allowed for a re-enactment of the black working-class church experience without the threat of persecution or judgment by either members of the dominant white society or by middle- and elite-class blacks.

Black consumers consciously purchased recorded sermons on which they heard distinctly black oral traditions, despite the pressure from black elites to uplift the race via Europeanized vocal sounds.

**Signifyin(g) Tropes**

Signifyin(g) practices are prevalent throughout Nix’s sermons, both between the sermons and other external works, and within the compass of the sermons themselves. Nix uses the Signifyin(g) practice of intertextuality quite often, borrowing lines and subject themes from other sources, including blues songs and sermons from other ministers. Musicians and composers, including Thomas A. Dorsey, also borrowed themes from Nix. The practice of borrowing and recirculating melodies and texts was common in the era of the folk spirituals, described as a

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34 It is important to note that 1927, the year of Nix’s recording of “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. II,” is also the year the first “talkie,” *The Jazz Singer*, was released in which Al Jolson sang (or belted) in black face. Jolson attempted “authentic” renderings of “blackness” through his burnt-cork makeup. This presents even more dilemmas when we consider that some middle-class blacks were assimilating to white culture, and here Jolson was appropriating black culture.

“communal re-creation,” in which lyrics and melodies were interchanged freely among sources. Lawrence Levine explains, “Identical or slightly varied stanzas appear in song after song; identical tunes are made to accommodate completely different sets of lyrics; the same song appears in different collections in widely varied forms.”

We have seen how a song, such as “My Sins Been Taken Away,” may have multiple titles and different lyrics from version to version, common in hymnals generally. According to Floyd, this re-creational process from genre to genre or song to song is essential and integral to black music:

the Signifiers we observed in the ring – call-and-response, blue notes and elisions, pendular thirds, etc. – became part of the black-idiom-informed musical genres that emerged from the shout, so that all Afro-American musical products become models to be revised through a continuing Signifyin(g) process, as also do some European genres. It is through this musical troping and Signifyin(g) that the more profound meanings of black music are expressed and communicated.”

In other words, the traditions of black music are continually perpetuated, albeit in different forms through continuous revisions. The following discussion focuses on lyrical tropes and figurative tropes used by Nix on his recordings.

**Lyrical Tropes**

In “Watch Your Close Friend,” Nix borrows the theme of distrust as expressed in a recording by blues evangelist, Rev. Edward W. Clayborn (The Guitar Evangelist) titled, “Your Enemy Cannot Harm You (But Watch Your Close Friend)” recorded December 8, 1926. Although he frequently demonized the blues, Nix’s “Watch Your Close Friend,” recorded on October 28, 1927, is based on the same theme. A comparison of the lyrics used by Clayborn and Nix on their two versions is given below.

Clayborn “Your Enemy Cannot Harm You (But Watch Your Close Friend)”:

Your close friend

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Your enemies cannot harm you
But watch your close friend.

Nix “Watch Your Close Friend”:
Your enemy
Cannot harm you,
But you must watch your friend.

Nix borrows the lyrics of Clayborn’s song almost word-for-word in “Watch Your Close Friend.” Because the song was quite popular, Nix must have come across either the title or the complete recording of Clayborn’s song, suggesting that Nix paid attention to what was popular in the field of race records and capitalized on popular themes. The popularity of some songs led many early recording artists to re-record cover versions of songs made popular by other artists. For example, Blind Willie Davis, a guitar evangelist, also recorded “Your Enemy Cannot Harm You,” (Paramount Pm12726, c. Dec. 1928) as a cover version of Clayborn’s original song. In “Watch Your Close Friend,” Nix uses the personal pronoun, I, in the text to establish a personal relationship with Jesus, stating, “I thank God that there are some true friends in the world today,” such as Jesus. The personalization of the vocalist’s relationship with Jesus in the here-and-now is a departure from the lyrics of slavery-era spirituals in which heaven was in the hereafter, not in the present. Michael Harris opines that Thomas A. Dorsey borrowed Nix’s personal-relationship-with-Jesus theme, which he claims was cutting edge at the time due to their “profound simplification—almost transparency—of doctrinal concepts . . . to speak to virtually anyone who would listen.” 38 Dorsey, in his song, “If You See My Savior” writes, “If you see my Savior tell Him that you saw me.” In this way, both Nix and Dorsey describe Jesus as a friend or close acquaintance, which differed from the earlier emphasis on the hereafter. The commonality between Nix’s chanted sermons and Dorsey’s gospel blues has led Harris to claim, “As did Nix,

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Dorsey went to a well of shared experiences to find a message for his listener – but while Nix drew from the Bible, Dorsey dipped from everyday life.” As explained by Henry Louis Gates, in the process of intertextuality, “black texts ‘talk’ to other black texts.” Here, Dorsey comments on a previous text by Nix, and as we will see, Nix also comments on other examples by blues artists.

Nix’s sermons, “It Was Tight Like That” and “How Long - How Long” (Vocalion VO 1505), both recorded in 1930, serve as reminders of two extremely popular blues songs that were recorded in 1928: the first, “It’s Tight Like That” (Vocalion VO 1216), recorded by pianist and future gospel composer, Georgia Tom (Thomas A. Dorsey) and guitarist Tampa Red; the second, “How Long, How Long Blues” (Vocalion VO 1191), a hit by LeRoy Carr and Scapper Blackwell. Ministers and blues artists commonly borrowed titles and themes from each other, for example, the “how long” theme was first heard in Ida Cox’s 1925 song titled, “How Long, Daddy, How Long?” Reverend J. M. Gates also recorded a sermon on the “Tight Like That” theme, titled, “These Hard Times Are Tight Like That” (Okeh 8850) on December 12, 1930, ten months after Nix’s recording.

Nix describes the title, “It Was Tight Like That,” as a “famous subject,” implying that he had knowledge of both the song and its popularity. The song title has an overt sexual reference,
so it is surprising that Reverend Nix would have borrowed the title for his own sermon.

According to Genester, the Nix children were not allowed to listen to blues or jazz because these musics were considered “part of the world – what sinners were doing out there in the world. . . . And blues music, and all of that, the world did. And you didn’t do things that the world did.”

However, because the Dorsey/Tampa Red song was so well known, several preachers and artists obviously tried to capitalize on its popularity. Nix’s version of “It Was Tight Like That” comments on the hardships brought on by the Great Depression; however, some of Nix’s lyrics imply sexual themes, similar to the original blues song:

> But I remember
> When she was a wheel-horse in this town
> Painting the town red.
> She had all you women’s husbands running to her house,
> And you were afraid to open your mouths.
> She would take any woman’s husband,
> When she was tight like that.

Nix used the “Tight Like That” theme to refer to both economic hardships and risqué sexual behavior.

Nix’s “How Long - How Long” may have been inspired by the first words of Psalm 13:1, with its introductory words, “How long?” However, Nix usually announces a quote from Scripture from which his sermon is taken at the beginning of each sermon. Not only did he not announce his text with Scripture, but he used the double-phrase format of “how long, how long,” similar to the double-phrase in the Carr/Blackwell blues song. The blues song, “How Long,

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“It Was Tight Like That,” with the verse: “My dear brothers and sisters, I’m going to speak to you this morning from this famous subject: It was tight like that.”


How Long Blues,” was so popular that six different versions of were recorded.\(^4\) Because of its popularity, it is quite plausible that Nix heard the song and used the title as his inspiration, also eventually recording his own six versions of “Black Diamond Express to Hell.”\(^5\) Possibly the multi-record format was a tactic by the record company to maximize their profits for well-received recordings.

In an interview, Genester Nix explained that African-American slaves cried to God, “How long!” for their suffering at the hand of white slave owners. In addition, ministers had also been expressing the “how long” theme prior to blues artists’ recordings. An article in a 1902 edition of *Broad Ax* states,

> How long! Oh, how long! will the Negro continue to erect costly and expensive temples unto the Gods, while his children are growing up in rags, and tatters and in ignorance, and while poverty and squalor surrounds him on every hand. How long! Oh, how long! will the Negro continue to prostrate himself before an imaginary God, who cannot nor will not harken unto him nor answer his prayers. How long! Oh, how long! will the Negro continue to sing that ‘old familiar song that others can have all the wealth of this world if they will only give me Jesus!’\(^6\)

The article reprimands African Americans for their belief in religion alone, without action against the obvious injustices of racism. Nix also reprimanded his congregants in “It Was Tight Like That,” demanding that they take action in their lives, in essence, switching the emphasis from religion alone to practical solutions, demonstrating a shift from the slavery-era dependence on religion as the only way out, to the modern, uplift theme of self-help. William H. Pipes suggests that the black minister was able to initiate the release of the pent-up emotions of his


congregants through the use the words “how long,” which referred to the unending trials and tribulations faced by African Americans. Congregants would shout in response to these words to release their frustration at having suffered for so long in the world. Thus, the “how long” theme itself comments on an earlier era.

**Figurative Tropes**

The “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. I” recounts the various “stops” the “train” makes on its way to hell, carrying all kinds of sinners: drinkers, liars, deceivers, conjurers, confusion-makers, and fighters. The train theme functions as a Signifyin(g) trope, which Floyd explains is a continuation of the “chariot” theme in the spirituals, with both exemplified as vehicles of freedom. The chariot theme in the spirituals and the train theme in the blues have been repeated, revised, and recirculated in numerous African-American musical genres, and thus exemplify the intertextual interplay common in Signifyin(g) practices. Nix may have gotten the idea for the train-theme from either Reverend J. M. Gates’ July 1926 recording, “Death’s Black Train is Coming” (CO 14145D) on the Columbia label, or from an earlier Christian hymn. An article from 1898 mentions the train theme as being associated with a hymn written by a Negro slave:

> There was current, not many years since, a hymn in which the Christian was likened to a traveler on a railway train. The conductor was the Lord Jesus, the brakemen were eminent servants of the Church, and stoppages were made at Gospel depôts to take up waiting converts or replenish the engine with the water of life or the fuel of holy zeal. The allegory was developed with as much accuracy and verisimilitude as though the author of the hymn had carefully studied the Pilgrim’s Progress; yet it was imagined and composed by Oscar Buckner, an illiterate and ignorant negro slave.  

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48 Pipes, Say Amen, Brother! 118.

The train stops in this early Christian hymn are reminiscent of the Black Diamond’s stops en route to hell. Regardless of the source of Nix’s inspiration, he demonstrates the train-as-trope theme and how it applied to not only hymns, spirituals, and the blues, but also to recorded sermons. As Floyd explains, “in the African-American musical tradition, intergenre and cross-genre troping is widespread, with lines and phrases of songs being borrowed and used as needs and desires arise. Such troping, as momentary as it sometimes is, is nevertheless frequent.” The variations of parts three through six of “Black Diamond Express to Hell” not only repeat the main train theme, but also vary the details in each individual sermon, creating a Signifyin(g) trope within the extended parts of the sermon.

The “White Flyer to Heaven” is another version of the train-as-trope theme, but rather than descending to hell as the Black Diamond does, the White Flyer ascends to heaven. The theme of traveling to the upper stratosphere to reach heaven is fully explicated in Nix’s sermon, “The White Flyer to Heaven - Part 1,” in which he describes:

The starry big heaven
And view the flying stars
And dashing meteors,
And then pass on by Mars and Mercury
And Jupiter and Venus
And Saturn and Uranus and Neptune
With her full-glittering moons.

In 1912, James Weldon Johnson discussed a minister’s sermon in which “the preacher described the beauties of that celestial body. . . . [which reached] the evening star . . . past the sun and the moon – the intensity of religious emotion all the time increasing – along the milky way, on up to

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the gates of heaven.” The similarity of the themes of Johnson’s heard sermon and Nix’s spoken sermon are close enough to assume an intertextual relationship.

Riffs

As discussed previously, repetition is a common feature in African-American music and sermons. Floyd explains that “constant repetition of rhythmic and melodic figures and phrases (from which riffs and vamps would be derived)” is a feature that “converged in the Negro spiritual and in other African-American musical forms and genres.” Nix’s use of repetitive phrases, or riffs, presents material that is altered with each iteration and increases the dramatic tension with each passing.

In Nix’s sermon, “How Long - How Long” he uses the title phrase as a riff, creating an AAAB-type form in which the B line functions as a refrain that concludes each stanza, very similar to the LeRoy Carr/Scrapper Blackwell blues song form of “How Long, How Long Blues” (Example 7-5). Each of Nix’s hook lines increases in intensity as the sermon progresses, including the addition of extra “how long” phrases to the text, along with an increase in vocal range. He melodicizes the words to the pitches of 1, b3, 5, and b7, implying a minor-pentatonic scale. A transcription of the chorus statements is given below, showing the progression of intensity through the increased range of Nix’s vocal line:


Not only does Nix repeat the “how long” phrase throughout the sermon, but he alters each rendering melodically. He also builds momentum by increasing the range, climaxing in the fifth phrase (2:47-2:51), extending the high Bb pitch into a moan in a gravelly timbre on “How.” His underlying rhythmic structure is a pattern of sixteenth notes and dotted eighths (Example 7-6).
The repetition of this pattern, the repetition of the words, “how long,” the use of improvisation to alter each repetition, the melodic expansion climbing to the high Bb, and Nix’s use of moans and gravelly timbre effectively builds the tension in the sermon.

**Repetition**

In addition to the repetition of phrases such as “how long,” the repetition of individual musical “cells” unifies Nix’s sermons together as a larger, cohesive group, functioning as a motive figure. David Brackett, in his analyses of James Brown’s vocals in “Superbad,” explains that musical cells are “bits of text, [or] a syllable.” According to Brackett, “recycling many vocal cells at identical pitch levels from song to song” is another form of intertextuality.\(^{54}\) For example, the words “well, well, well” are the last words sung in the mystery spiritual that itself functions as an ostinato or Signifyin(g) motive that links most of Nix’s sermons together. The “well, well, well” phrase is also present as a stand-alone interjection to Nix’s preaching in various sermons as the response to his call (Example 7-7).

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“Well, well, well” is often used as a melodic and lyrical cell, with or without the full rendering of the mystery spiritual melody. The cell is often used to anticipate the singing of the spiritual melody, functioning as a precursor to its onset, as in “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. I” (Section A). However, in “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. II” the cell is random, neither preceding nor following the spiritual melody. In this case, it serves as a reminder of the spiritual. “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. II” is one of the few sermons in which the melody I have identified as the mystery spiritual is not sung. However, the repetition of the “well, well, well” cell, eight times within the sermon, reminds the listener of the mystery spiritual. Brackett explains that “the repetition of fragments with discrete variations . . . alternately create expectations and thwart them.”55 Similarly, the musical cell in Nix’s sermons creates expectations of the singing of the mystery spiritual, which is sometimes fulfilled and other times not. The repetition of the cells also provides contrast to Nix’s rap-like, rhythmic declamations, creating balance between his fast-paced utterances on the one hand and the melodic and rhythmic regularity of the musical cell on the other.

**Improvisation**

One of Nix’s most important sermons, which was not recorded, was his “Baseball Sermon.” Nix was an avid baseball fan, even naming his son Elwood after a Chicago Cubs’ baseball player, Elwood English. Genester and Elwood claim that the “Baseball” sermon was one of Nix’s most popular and he used it frequently at revivals and would preach it every Friday at church during baseball season.56 Nix would “act out” the parts and could draw a large crowd due to his descriptive abilities, keeping his audience in suspense. Part of his success, according to

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Elwood, was his ability to paint a vivid picture in his sermons, and captivate the audience with his emphasis. Elwood emphasized that other ministers would try to imitate his father.

Genester remembers her father preparing for his sermons with typed notes that consisted of bullet points rather than a fully written narrative. Loosely structuring his sermons around bullet points allowed Nix to improvise in his sermons and to make adjustments as he proceeded. Genester claims, “When he preached, he didn’t write them out like that. He just outlined them. And when he would get to certain . . . he would write little notes, ‘Watch out,’ or ‘end here,’ or things like that.”57 The typed text, which Nix typed himself (one finger at a time), demonstrates his preference for general headings, rather than a fully scripted sermon. Ministers who improvised their talks were considered more “spiritual” than the ministers of the educated class who merely read from scripts.58 The manuscript for the “Baseball” sermon (Figure 7-1) demonstrates Nix’s use of bullet points from which he would improvise. The handwriting and typed words are Nix’s own.

58 Rosenberg, The Art of the American Folk Preacher, 30.
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If the Pitcher is losing the Game, He is taken out of the Game.

Sometimes the Runner is called out at First Base, etc.
Second Base, etc.
Third Base, etc.
Home plate, etc.
IN THE GAME OF LIFE ETC

Every man that is born in the world is called on to get in the Game.
And Jesus Christ is the Umpire, etc.
He watches every man's actions, etc.
While the world is looking on with:

The Umpire is calling men out:
Every day, and at every Base.
When a Batter hits the Ball, 101 day
Every man moves.
We have Home, Run, Fitters, etc.
And we have Pinch Hitters, etc.
When a Player starts around the 93 Diamonds, etc.
ON THE CHRISTIAN GAME OF LIFE,

1. God is the Manager, etc.
2. Jesus is the Umpire, etc.
3. The Holy Ghost is the Coach, etc.

The Rules for playing in this game, is laid down in the Bible, etc.

Love, etc. Faith, etc. Obedience, etc.

Sin, is the Pitcher, etc.
He is Throwing Curve Balls, etc.
He is Throwing Fast Balls, etc.
He is Throwing Slow Balls, etc.

At every man, trying to strike you out, etc.

The Devil is the Catcher, etc.
He is calling on Sin, to strike you out, etc.

While the World is looking on, etc.

Batters, etc. etc. etc.
Faith leads off, etc.
1. Base: Regeneration, etc.
2. Base: Belief, Baptism, etc.
3. Base: Obedience: Church, etc.

Home Plate: Heaven, etc.
While we have evidence that Nix used typed bullet points for his church sermons, it is unknown if he read from a script or from bullet points for his recorded sermons. The three-minute time limit of recordings would most likely necessitate a rehearsal in advance of the recording to ensure its ability to fit within these time constraints. Based on Genester’s commentary, Nix most likely typed a guideline in bullet points, which created allowance for improvisation during the recordings.

**Vocal Layering**

The female congregants used on the recordings not only present the impression of a live sermon in the church, but they also keep up the excitement and energy of the sermon performance, interjecting regularly after Nix’s phrases. Despite Nix’s raw vocal passion, the vocal interjections keep up the intensity throughout the sermon by never allowing for a silent moment. For example, when Nix pauses to breathe between phrases, the female voices prevent the silence by interjecting their responses, serving as call-and-response throughout the sermon. Call-and-response is thus a back-and-forth pattern in which one “calls” and is answered with a “response.” If call-and-response works as a horizontal or linear pattern, moving in a forward trajectory, it can also function as a vertically stacked or layered pattern. The process of layering is one in which different patterns, riffs, or statements are uttered simultaneously with the primary statement. As some congregants shout, another congregant sings the mystery spiritual, while Nix chants. In this case, the spoken, shouted, and sung words of the congregants serve the function of providing layering to the sermon, creating a cohesive whole (Example 7-8).
Example 7-8. Layering in “The White Flyer to Heaven – Part II” (0:59-1:05), recorded on June 29, 1927, on Vocalion, VO1170, reissued on Document Records, DOCD-5328.

Object 7-2. Layering in “The White Flyer to Heaven – Part II” (0:59-1:05) (.mp3 file 108 KB)

In “The White Flyer to Heaven – Part II,” Nix chants and shouts, the solo singer sings the spiritual melody, and the females interject with speaking, singing and shouts. This layering effect creates a sense of flow, allowing for the multiple voices to function as a single voice, creating a sense of spiritual harmony and unity with all of the voices in tune with each other, literally and figuratively.

Nix’s use of traditional folk spirituals and hymns, as well as Signifyin(g) tropes, riffs, repetition, improvisation, and vocal layering again demonstrate his alignment with traditional African-American vocal practices and repertoires. In this sense, he is highlighting his affiliation with the black folk, rather than the elite class. Despite pressure from many African-American elites to reform or neglect the folk spiritual and adopt the vocal aesthetics and repertoire of
dominant culture, Nix held his ground, continuing the traditions of the folk. But this was not an absolute rejection of reformist or uplift tendencies. Chapters 6 and 7 present numerous examples of Nix’s preference for folk vocal traditions; however, in the sermon texts presented Chapter 8, Nix reveals middle-class ideologies in alignment with racial uplift theories.
CHAPTER 8
THE TEXTS

Throughout this study I have emphasized the various influences on Nix that reflected uplift principles, including his work with the General Association of Colored Baptists of Kentucky, State University’s faculty and protocols, the Chicago Defender’s guidelines for recent migrants, Sutton Griggs’ black nationalist literature, along with Nix’s own ideals for the advancement of his congregants. While the vocal components of his sermons reflect affinity towards black vocal traditions, his texts are meant to empower his listeners to take responsibility for their lives and to become prosperous, respectable, and moral people. For the most part, Nix preached about general Christian themes such as sin, repentance, and being saved. The uplift values Nix stressed include chastity, the patriarchal family, temperance, and the dangers of gambling for example. These texts provide valuable insights into his ideology and complete the picture of Nix’s life as a whole. A brief discussion follows which addresses Nix’s attention to specific uplift principles in his sermons.¹

While all of Nix’s sermons have an overall Christian theme, those that specifically discuss scriptural stories and other Christian themes for the majority of the sermon are marked (CH). Themes related to daily life, marked (D), can be considered a part of uplift, in that Nix’s recommendations for how to conduct oneself are in line with Du Bois’ Talented Tenth theory. Fire-and-brimstone themes are considered part of black folk tradition and are marked (T).² Other aspects of tradition include the mention of folk spirituals or hymn lyrics (not the actual songs). Sermons that address the multifarious themes aligned with uplift and modernity are marked (M).

¹ Because we have already discussed the use of folk spirituals and hymns as a part of black vocal traditions, only the sermon texts will be considered here.

² Pitts, Old Ship of Zion, 65.
Many sermons have more than one theme; thus, the total number of themes listed here exceeds the actual number of sermons. I address the main theme of the sermon, not the individual parts.

Of the forty-seven extant sermons, only five (10%) include themes of tradition (excluding the use of folk spirituals and hymns); twenty-two (46%) are primarily Christian themes or Scriptural stories; four (8%) address aspects of daily life and give practical advice; and twenty-seven (57%) address themes associated with uplift and modernity. Therefore, while Nix used vocal traits associated with tradition in his recorded sermons, the majority of his texts relied on themes associated with uplift and modernity. Through October 26, 1928, Nix’s sermons incorporated a combination of Christian, traditional and modern themes; however, after this date and for reasons unknown, Nix’s topics shifted to those aligned more with the ideas of uplift and modernity.

**Tradition**

Other than the use of traditional spirituals and hymns, themes relating to tradition were only present in five out of the forty-seven extant sermons. For example, in “Robbing God,” Nix condemns talent that is used in the service of the devil, i.e. in the realms of jazz and blues, and suggests an antidote of “old-time religion” instead. Nix defended old-time religion as the remedy for the ills affecting African Americans of the day. In the sermon he states, “Brother, what men and women need today is that old-time religion. That religion that will make you stay off the ballroom floor. That religion that will keep your feet off the gambling den.”

Fire-and-brimstone sermons typically used fear of God, God’s wrath, or eternal damnation as themes. For example, Reverend Moses Hester (a.k.a. Uncle Mose) described that “at de judgment all de sinners will be anni-hi-lated with fire.”

While Nix did not typically use

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fire-and-brimstone themes to create fear in the minds of his congregants, his sermons “After the Ball is Over,” “Your Time is Out,” and “The Black Diamond Express to Hell – Part 5” contain imagery that is used to strike fear in the minds of the listeners. For example, in “After the Ball is Over,” Nix uses the fear of illness to persuade his listeners: “After the ball is over, then you go out in the midnight air, you take bad cold, and then deep cough, and then pneumonia will set in, and then consumption, and end in an early grave.” In “Your Time is Out,” in which Nix recounts the story of Noah’s ark, Nix refers to death and destruction as the outcome for non-believers. In “The Black Diamond Express to Hell – Part 5,” Nix warns sinners that “You got to go to hell on the Black Diamond reduced-rate excursion train, where you will burn in hell-fire and brimstone, forever and forever. . . . The downward road leads to eternal damnation.” While Nix’s version of fire-and-brimstone themes may be mild compared to those by other ministers, he did utilize the element of fear to encourage his congregants to change their ways.

**Christian Themes**

Nix used Biblical stories and characters frequently in his sermons. While Christian themes are expected for a Baptist minister, Nix often used the form typical of the chanted sermon, which begins with a quote from Scripture, the story from the Bible that relates to the Scriptural quote, followed by an explanation of how the story applies to the common man. Christian themes and Bible stories are present in Nix’s sermons recorded between April 23, 1927 – October 26, 1928, i.e. sermons 4-29. Many of the Christian-based sermons use exempla or anecdotes for “clinching a sermonly point.”4 For example, in “After the Ball,” Nix relates the story of Herod and Salome to make his point.

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Daily Life

Nix occasionally offered practical advice to his listeners. While ministers are typically considered patriarchal figures responsible for their congregations, Nix mentioned topics that specifically applied to new migrants. In “Sleeping In A Dangerous Time,” Nix advises his listeners to be alert because someone may be stealing one’s belongings or significant other, suggesting that a roomer in one’s house could be the source of bad intent. Renting rooms in one’s home to roomers was common for many migrant families due to the shortage of livable homes in Chicago. Nix’s advice served as a warning to new migrants, but also provides evidence that Nix himself was aware of the problems affecting migrants.

Nix also took the position as an elite citizen offering advice to new migrants who did not know the rules of urban life, similar to the twenty-seven points of advice given in the Chicago Defender. In “Who Dressed You Up for Easter,” Nix advises his listeners to “clean up, shine up, and take a hot bath, and dress up and come out on Easter Sunday.” As discussed previously, personal hygiene was a recommendation by both State University and the Chicago Defender for newly arrived migrants.

Nix also reprimanded those of the lower class who adhered to traditional practices that were considered “backwards.” For example, in “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. I,” Nix mentions “Louisiana conjurers” and their practices, as a reference to Vodou (or voodoo), which was deemed as superstition, “black magic,” and the like, and antithetical and harmful to Baptist beliefs.

I have a big crowd of Louisiana conjurers down there.  
They got to go to hell on the Black Diamond Train.  
They always taking brick dust and brass pins and matchheads  
And making little hands⁵ to sell to one another.

But you got to go to hell on the Black Diamond Train.

The phrase “making little hands” refers to the “Voodoo hand” that Muddy Waters sings about in “I Got My Mojo Working.” Apparently a “hand” is a small satchel or bag in which the Voodoo “supplies” or magical items were inserted. A mojo hand could be for good luck, as in Waters’ case, but Nix was referring to sellable hands or bags that conjurers were using. Superstition was attributed to the storefront churches, and some upper-class Chicagoans looked down upon the those who attended these churches for their preferences for superstition.6

**Uplift and Modernity**

While Nix’s sermons may have offered practical solutions of daily life for new migrants, he also discussed many themes that reflected uplift theories as a means for practical solutions and moral “improvement” to the problems they faced: chastity, the patriarchal family, thrift, temperance, personal responsibility, patriarchal authority, and education. He also frequently addressed the perceived evils that affected migrants’ lives, including alcohol consumption, gambling, and “loose” women. As is evident from his condemnation of the modern woman, he evoked the patriarchal standard of the male as the head of the household with women as subordinate and chaste. Nix frequently admonished those who did not value (or seem to value) the sanctity of marriage. In addition, Nix also stressed the need for personal and financial responsibility and offered practical solutions to his congregants through his sermons.

**Chastity**

While members of the prayer band in Nix’s recorded sermons were, for the most part, church-going women, he openly and repeatedly condemned the behavior of the modern woman. City women were closely associated with sin and being “of the world.” Blues and jazz were part of city life, especially in Chicago in the 1920s, with classic blues singers such as Ma Rainey and

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Bessie Smith challenging the notions of female sexuality and their alleged roles in the home. According to Angela Davis, “They [the classic female blues singers] also challenged the notion that women’s ‘place’ was in the domestic sphere. Such notions were based on the social realities of middle-class white women’s lives, but were incongruously applied to all women, regardless of race or class.”

Nix adhered to old-fashioned sensibilities that stressed the home and family and asserted that the modern woman would be the downfall of marriage and the ruin of stability in the home.

Nix apparently believed in the domesticity of women, and commented on the sinfulness of modern dress of the 1920s in several sermons. The majority of Nix’s condemnation of the modern woman on record comes on and after his October 26, 1928 recordings. Beginning with “Hang Out Your Sign,” he describes “modern dress . . . [as] a disgrace to the society.” He adds, “you will see women, walking down the streets with the red-painted lips and powdered faces, or short tight skirts, window-pane stockings, walking on their shame.” According to Nix, women’s modern apparel and makeup were the downfall of good men and women because of men’s weakness to women’s sexual appeal. In “Black Diamond – Part 4,” the twentieth-century style shop provides women with modern dresses that are so thin “you can see clear through them,” and have “low necks and low backs . . . short, tight skirts . . . [and] peep shoes.” Modern dresses, according to Nix, changed women from demure and chaste to women who “will charm you and then talk to you with their eyes.” Modern dress even corrupted the older, church-going women, as Nix describes in “Slow This Year For The Danger Signal”: “a lot of these old women these days, that used to sing and pray and lead prayer meetings in the church, have cut their dresses off above their knees, and taken the sleeves out of their dresses, and painting and powdering up their

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7 Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, 11.
lips and faces, trying to run with a young crowd and trying to flirt with the young men, while aches and pains are darting all through your old body.”

Modern dresses, according to Nix in “The Black Diamond Express to Hell – Part 4,” were worn by women in many major cities, such as Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, New York, Memphis, New Orleans, and Atlanta. Nix makes the point that modern, “sinful” women were from the city, not from rural communities. He makes clear that city life was a bad influence on the thousands of migrants who left their rural communities. Nix references Forty-Seventh Street and South Parkway in Chicago—the hub of the black entertainment district in Bronzeville—as the demoralizing place where loose women often socialized. Thus, it is apparent that Nix also associated immoral women, wearing modern dress, with the jazz and blues and its social environment.

**Patriarchal Family**

As Gaines contests, “the home and family [were] sites of racial progress and respectability,” and were highly regarded as symbols of uplift. Although Nix condemned loose women as the downfall of man, he contends that in these modern times, neither men nor women valued the sanctity of marriage or the value of home and family. In “Love Is A Thing Of The Past,” Nix remarks that marriage is not the outcome of a loving relationship, but is instead a tool that both men and women use on each other “just to get by easy . . . for convenience . . . for a meal ticket.” The traditional family, for Nix, was a bygone thing that was replaced with a marriage in which love was not present. One problem identified by Nix, as noted in his sermon titled “Generosity,” was that “too many men and women are living together without being married. You’re living on the installment plan. You’re trying them out by living by the week, trying to shun the real manly responsibility.” In this sermon, Nix holds men responsible;

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8 Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 45.
however, in “You Got The Wrong Man,” Nix remarks, “some of you husbands are going around here with your mouths all puffed out, wondering why all of your children don’t favor you.”

Apparently, Nix did not hold men completely responsible for marital indiscretions. The importance and downright singular obsession with the patriarchal family, according to Gaines, became problematic as it

came to displace a broader vision of uplift as group struggle for citizenship and material advancement. At worst, this misplaced equation of race progress with the status of the family blamed black men and women for “failing” to measure up to the dominant society’s bourgeois gender morality, and seemed to forget that it was the state and constant threat of violence, not some innate racial trait, that prevented the realization of black homes and families.⁹

Gaines’ analysis helps us understand Nix’s emphasis on the family. Rather than focus on racism as a cause for the downfall of African-American family life, Nix chose to promote marriage and family stability. Although he may have had the best interest of his Christian congregants in mind, it is possible that Nix may have been trying to promote the patriarchal family as guidance to newly-relocated migrants who were adjusting to the chaos and inequalities in post-riot Chicago.

**Immoral Women**

Women were cited as partially to blame for the decline in marriage, as Nix states in “The Dirty Dozen – No. 2,” because “a woman don’t care so much about a man these days, it’s his money she’s crazy about.” This type of woman serves as a reminder of Nina Mae McKinney’s character in *Hallelujah*, who used men and their money for her personal benefit. In *Hallelujah*, it was the city woman who took advantage of the rural, country man. Similarly, in the sermon “A Country Man In Town,” released in 1929, just four months after the release of *Hallelujah*, Nix recounts the same theme, claiming that a city women will take advantage of a country man, “filling him up with a lot of hot air and sweet promises, making him believe that there will be a

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big time for him on Saturday night after he’s paid off. And just as soon as she gets all of his money, she will call him sweet names and hitch him with a sweet promise.” Women of all colors, “chocolate brown, some high brown, some compromising brown, some tantalizing brown, some teasing brown,” as described in “You Got The Wrong Man,” had the ability to “almost make the preacher to lay his Bible down.” Hence, in Nix’s sermon, women of all ages and skin color became corrupt with the temptations of modernity and its sins. Infidelity, in Nix’s mind, is primarily the fault of immoral women, not men. In “How Long – How Long,” he preaches “when your husband is at home, you’re always mad and fussing and complaining that you are sick. And just as soon as he goes away, you are either in the streets running, or you got some man running to your house, and all the time laying around. And sometimes, when your husband comes home, and knocks on the front door, you are letting your old sweetheart out the back door.” In Nix’s sermon, this scene is played-out exactly as in the movie Hallelujah, in which Nina Mae McKinney sneaks out of the back window in order to run off with her former lover while her husband sleeps in the other room. As suggested earlier, it is quite likely that the film inspired Nix.

Nix sometimes used humor to get his point across. In “There’s Something Rotten in Denmark,” Nix asks a female congregant why her children do not favor (look like) her husband:

Nix:
Why, howdy do Sister Betty!
Is this your baby?
It hasn’t been six months ago
Since I married you and Brother Joe.
And you have a baby this quick?
This baby
Don’t favor your husband.

Sister Betty:
Well, Brother Pastor,
I’ve been trying to explain to my husband
Why the baby was born so soon.
We’ve only been married five months, so I guess it must be a five-month baby.
And the reason why he don’t favor my husband,
He takes after his great-great-great-grandfather!

Although stability in marriage was a serious topic for Nix, he used any means possible to get his message across.

**Thrift and Financial Responsibility**

Financial responsibility, as a tenet of racial uplift, included thrift and the accumulation of wealth as markers of advancement. Booker T. Washington, for example, supported property ownership as a means for economic self-sufficiency. In “It Was Tight Like That,” Nix’s response to the female who says she “just lets the bills go” because she “got good religion,” demonstrates his affinity for upward mobility, financial responsibility, and self-help. He insists that religion alone is not enough, that one must have faith plus action, referencing James 2:14-17, which states, “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? . . . Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” In response to the female congregant, Nix claims, “religion is alright, but I want to tell you all aloud, when your bills are due, starvation’s at your door, and your friends are all gone, and everything is tight like that, you better have some money in your pocket to pay your bills when it’s tight like that.” “It Was Tight Like That,” released in February 1930, was not only a response to the Georgia Tom/Tampa Red song with the similar title, but also a response to the beginning of Great Depression, which shook the world in 1929. In “How Will You Spend Christmas?” (1930), Nix blames the men and women who “had good jobs but you wouldn’t keep them. You were making good money, but you wouldn’t save it. You spent it all on what you call a ‘big time.’ Don’t blame anybody because you are broke. Just blame yourself. You should have saved

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11 James 2:14-17 (New King James Version).
up for these hard times.” He does not offer sympathy nor does he blame the larger society. Instead, he suggests personal and financial responsibility. The “big time” of which Nix speaks may be a reference to jazz and blues entertainment and their links with alcohol consumption and loose women.

Nix encouraged African Americans, already with limited resources for financial advancement, to be diligent with their money and admonishes those who would waste it frivolously. In “You Have Played The Fool,” he criticizes new migrants who became disillusioned with city life and were taken advantage of: “some of you men, when you come to this town, you had good money saved up in the bank. But you got with a fast crowd and you got played out when you got plenty money.” He also encouraged financial responsibility in “Pay Your Honest Debts,” by instructing his congregants to live within their means.

**Conspicuous Consumption**

During World War I, many in the African-American lower classes were able to earn cash wages through regular employment, rather than through credit, which had been associated with the earlier system of sharecropping. Cash wages allowed earners extra money to spend on recreation rather than merely on survival needs.\(^\text{12}\) Conspicuous consumption, as it was called, involved publicly spending money on extraneous activities or items for the appearance of seeming wealthier than one actually was. Even during the Depression years, the pursuit of worldly pleasure was an activity that many associated with the lower classes who spent their money on movies, music, alcohol, sports, and so on.\(^\text{13}\) Conversely and in opposition to conspicuous consumption, the middle class was linked to thrift and financial responsibility, as

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\(^{13}\) Drake and Cayton, Black Metropolis, 608.
one aspect of racial uplift. The public display of drinking, playing cards, and dancing were also primed as evidence of low-class lifestyles. Drake and Cayton explain that

They will “dance on the dime” and “grind” around the juke-box in taverns and joints, or “cut a rug” at the larger public dance halls. . . . It is this public behavior that outrages the sensibilities of Bronzeville’s “dicties.” “It gives The Race a bad name,” they are quick to announce.[italics in original].14

In the sermon “Robbing God,” Nix condemns people who spend their time and money at the theater, equating this with giving time and money to the devil. Such leisure activities, as Lerone A. Martin argues, were antithetical to the black church’s “notions of cultural propriety and morality.”15

Class Associations

While Nix’s admonitions to new migrants to Chicago encouraged financial responsibility, they were also clearly class-based. For example, in “A Country Man In Town,” he advises migrants from the “backwoods” of Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama, Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana to “Stay in your class! Don’t let your head run away with your feet! That city fast life will soon carry you to the grave.” Nix occasionally used humor to get his point across in a language that his lower-class congregants could understand: “Say old man, you’re going crazy about your pig meat [i.e. a city woman]. But before that pig meat gets through with you you’ll wish you had had hog meat [i.e. a country woman].” The implication that male migrants were easily disillusioned with and taken advantage of by city women is almost identical to the film, Hallelujah. In the film, a country man goes into the city and is swindled by a fast-living, loose, city woman who then turns around and gives all of his money to her lover, a city man. As previously mentioned, “A Country Man In Town” was released just four months after

14 Drake and Cayton, Black Metropolis, 610.
Hallelujah’s release, thus Nix may have taken his theme from the film. Regardless, it is apparent that Nix believed that rural southerners were different from their northern counterparts.

In addition to commenting on the general behavior of southern migrants, Nix also referred specifically to the behavior of those who attended the churches affiliated with the lower-class. Spiritualist churches were typically storefront churches attended by lower-class congregants and offered “healing, advice, and ‘good luck’ for a prayer and the price of a candle or holy flower” with services conducted by preachers and mediums. Drake and Cayton suggest that “the Spiritualist church in Bronzeville [had] no unkind words for card-playing, dancing, policy [gambling], ward politics, or the ‘sporting life.’”\(^\text{16}\) The Work’s Progress Association’s (WPA) study of Chicago states, “The elder teacher one Sunday deplored the irregular practice of a majority of his colleagues: ‘Ninety-eight percent of all spiritualists are making a regular gambling, voodoo, witchcraft, backbiting, policy number game of it. . . . All of these things are done under the name of spiritualism!’”\(^\text{17}\) Nix addressed his listeners, in “Begin A New Life On Christmas Day – Parts I and II,” who were known to play “policy wheels,” host “moonshine parties” (parties given to earn money by charging for use of one’s apartment or room), and those who were “backbiters,” “conjurers,” “trick-workers,” “card-players,” “dice-rollers,” and “whiskey-drinkers,” and even “Sunday-school teachers” and “choir members,” as the people who had lost their way. Storefront churches included the Independent Church of God and Power Center, led by Father Morris, and the Church of All Nations, led by Elder Lucy Smith.\(^\text{18}\) Elder Smith’s congregation consisted of “largely new arrivals from the South and those Negroes who have not and probably never will become urbanized. They are persons of little or no formal

\(^{16}\) Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 642.


education, mostly day laborers, domestic servants, WPA workers, and relief clients.” Elder Smith became so popular that she had a regularly-broadcast radio program, despite the negative feelings towards her by the higher-class of the community. Probably the listeners of Nix’s records would have recognized the references.

Class affiliations were also evident in the black churches of Chicago, as discussed in Chapter 3. In “Mind Your Own Business (A New Year’s Sermon),” Nix mentions people who criticize the various denominations in black Chicago, revealing the various viewpoints people had of 1920s churches in Chicago: “You can hear them say, ‘the Presbyterians are too cold, the Methodists are too warm, the Episcopalians have too much ceremony, the Baptists are too tight, the Congregationalists too free, the Salvation Army’s too noisy, and the Quakers are too quiet.” Nix, in essence, gives voice to class stereotypes and divisions by describing the class dynamics between upper-class and lower-class black churches.

**Gambling**

While Elder Smith’s church may have turned a blind eye to illicit behavior such as gambling, Nix demonized it in his recorded sermons, becoming one of his most frequent topics. Gambling by playing lottery numbers, known as “policy,” was popular in Bronzeville as a chance opportunity to make extra money. But, as in all forms of gambling, some players chose playing policy over “real” work, or became addicted to gambling. Drake and Cayton state that there were some 500 “policy stations” in Bronzeville at the time of their writing in the 1930s.²⁰

Nix adds the gambler to his list of sinners in “The Dirty Dozen – No. 1,” asserting that the gambler “will take a chance on losing anybody’s money. He’ll gamble away his wife’s money. He’ll gamble the clothes off his back. Gambling is a game of hit or miss.”

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encouraged card-players, in “Begin A New Life On Christmas Day – Part II.” to “throw away your cards. You dice-rollers, got to get off of your knees.” However, he also realized that people were attempting to earn money by any means possible. He preached, in “Pay Your Honest Debts,” “Some of you are selling moonshine, some of you playing the cards or wheels, some of you are giving house parties, trying to live in these high-priced flats, and you know you’re not able to pay for them.” Instead, he preached honest work for honest pay, rather than illicit behavior and activities, such as gambling.

**Temperance**

Another of Nix’s “hot topics” was the sin of alcohol consumption. Temperance was a goal for not only Victorian-era society, but also for leaders of uplift. In “The Dirty Dozen – No. 1,” the “drunkard” is the first “lowdown person” that Nix admonishes. He claims, “A drunken man feels like he owns the world. And a drunken woman is a disgrace to the world. And what they will do and say is mighty lowdown.” He mentions drunkenness as a “disgrace” in “How Will You Spend Christmas,” and in “That Little Thing May Kill You Yet (Christmas Sermon).” According to Genester Nix, neither of her parents ever drank alcohol.

The Victorian quest for temperance created singing societies and choral singing groups as a means for moral uplift and dissuasion from alcohol consumption. The practice of choral singing as a means for uplift applied to African-American choral groups as well. As stated in *The Negro Music Journal*, the [Harry T.] Burleigh Choral Society sought to “lift every member of the race in its community who will put himself under its protection. This society has at heart the real upbuilding of the race and believes that choral singing is one of the strongest means by which we may hope to do so.”

Although Nix did not create social diversions such as singing clubs to

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dissuade congregants from consuming alcohol, he did preach about alcohol as a habit “that will kill you yet.”

**Personal Responsibility**

Although Nix often blamed women as the cause of the downfall of men, he held both men and women responsible for their lives. In “You Got The Wrong Man,” he states, “some of you girls are so lazy, you don’t want to do anything but keep looking in the looking glass and a powder puff and a lipstick in your hand, primping all the time.” However, women were not the only ones to blame. In “The Dirty Dozen – No. 1,” Nix describes “a jellybean. He has a sweetback. This man is always dressed up. He never works.” In the same sermon, he describes “another member of the Dirty Dozen,” who is a man who says, “‘Let the women do the work.’ That man is countin’ on always got some fool woman working for him. While he walks the streets, sitting around the pool room and barbershop telling lies, while his wife is out doing the working. He’s mighty lowdown.”

In “The Dirty Dozen – No. 2,” Nix continues to accuse people who he considers “dirty,” including those who “have no principles. They have no self-respect. They will do anything when things are too low for anybody else to do. It’s just right for them. They are the ones who will do the dirty work.” The purpose of personal responsibility was, of course, to acquire dignity and a positive self-identity.

**Patriarchal Authority**

Women were often condemned in Nix’s sermons as the source of immorality. However, as Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham contests, “women have traditionally constituted the majority of
every black denomination” and were the primary voices heard in the background on Nix’s sermons. Attendance at lower-class churches was dominated by women, with less than one third comprised of men. Elite black women often focused their attention on raising funds for church, school and social welfare services, believing that racial self-help would aid in fostering respect and equality from white society. Despite their lofty goals and achievements, the women in Nix’s church were treated as his “children,” as he sometimes called them. Sandra Jean Graham claims that former slaves were also paternalistically identified as children in folk spirituals. The women in Nix’s congregation treated him as the patriarchal head of the congregation and supported him as members of the prayer band, through the singing of the mystery spiritual on numerous recorded sermons, and through their call-and-response interjections.

Nix acted as a father-figure to not only his congregants, but to his larger community as well. Elwood Nix stated that his father would “sit out on the porch of our house and when people walked by - white, black, drunkards - he would invite them in the house for breakfast. . . . [Elwood] would come down a lot of times and see different people at the breakfast table.” Reverend Nix assumed the role of “father” to his congregants, the community, and even to strangers. According to his children, he treated all people with kindness regardless of their gender, race, or religious affiliation.

23 Drake and Cayton, Black Metropolis, 612.
24 Higginbotham, “The Black Church,” 193, 199.
Lodges and Clubs

Social clubs for African-American elites were numerous in Chicago starting in the latter part of the nineteenth century. According to Dolinar, “Sororities, fraternities, trade unions, church groups, adult, and youth organizations, with their bazaars, formal and sport dances, picnics, parties and meetings, carry on the tradition of ‘having a good time.’” Social clubs were an important aspect for uplifting the race because they created opportunities for African Americans—who were otherwise not treated as equal members in white society—to serve important community roles such as holding positions as officers in these clubs. “These numerous organizations,” as explained by Drake and Cayton, “express the middle-class standards of disciplined and ordered behavior as contrasted with the general disorganization at the lower-class level.” Social clubs included recreational activities, such as card-playing and dancing, and were a substantial part of middle-class life in Bronzeville.

Genester Nix claims that her father was a member of the 33rd Degree Masons (although her brother Elwood disputed this). Whether or not Nix was a member of this particular social club, he was obviously well aware of social organizations, and spoke often of the “lodge.” Social clubs expressed middle-class ideals, as did women’s groups as previously mentioned, which included “restrained public deportment and ‘respectability.’”

Several of Nix’s sermons mention affiliation with social organizations, such as the Masons, which required dutiful attendance and dues paid to the lodge. In his sermon, “How Long - How Long,” Nix admonishes men who make excuses and lie to their wives, claiming that they

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spend time at the lodge, when in fact they are having extra-marital affairs: “You all-night lodge men, you got so many lodge meetings that keeps you at the lodge all night. Two and three times a week. You have been telling your wife that same old lodge lie all these years.” Nix expresses the same theme in “Your Bed Is Too Short and Your Cover Too Narrow.” Not only does Nix claim that lodge meetings serve as a convenient alibi for wrongful affairs outside of marriage, he claims the lodge takes money away from the church. In “It Was Tight Like That,” Nix states, “We have so many tight members of the church. They are liberal and generous in giving to the lodge, and giving to worldly pleasures and good-time sport, but they are tight when it comes, ah, to the church.” Although social clubs and lodge meetings were beneficial for uplift principles, Nix called out his congregants who used the lodge as an escape from marital and financial responsibilities.

**Education**

During the Reconstruction era, as Gaines explains, education was one of the first aspirations of racial uplift, and was regarded as “the key to liberation.”\(^3^1\) Nix, as an educated man, never specifically mentioned education in his sermons or used his own education as a means for condescension to those of less educational achievement. As discussed previously, Nix often adjusted the dialect of his language to suit his listeners, often speaking in the vernacular. However, at times, he revealed his educated status through his use of certain words and topics. For example, in “The Prayer Meeting in Hell,” Nix uses multi-syllable words, such as “sumptuously” and “felicity.” In “There’s Something Rotten in Denmark,” Nix references Shakespeare’s play, *Hamlet*, in which the character Marcellus states, “Something is rotten in the

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state of Denmark.” Despite being a well-known line from one of Shakespeare’s most famous plays, it is unknown if his congregants would have understood its meaning. Although Nix did not specifically encourage education for his congregants, he encouraged and supported his children to become highly educated and set an example for others by being educated himself.

In summary, the texts of Nix’s sermons primarily reflected ideologies associated with uplifting the race. However, according to Wheeler, uplift meant more than accommodation to white society.

Uplift entailed moral, social, economic and educational development. It included a sound family life and pride in ownership of property; it involved the adoption of moral standards and behavioral patterns that conformed to the norm in American civilization. The norm was correct not because it was American or white, but because any civilized society operated on such principles. . . . These ministers wanted for themselves and their congregants to be included in American life, which they believed could be achieved through uplift. There was a balance between “accommodation and possibility” which ministers were in the role to achieve.

Wheeler explains that some ministers believed their uplift “was incomplete until they had uplifted others” as part of their view of “the Christian understanding of humanity and its relationship to God.” As previously mentioned, in his daily life Nix often invited strangers off of the street to join his family for breakfast and called everyone he met “Professor.” Even when dealing with issues of racism, he advised his children to treat everyone with respect. Therefore, Nix may have been operating primarily as a Christian (not merely as an uplift accommodationist) in trying best to help his flock and tend to their salvation.

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33 “There’s Something Rotten in Denmark” also references Reverend F. W. McGee’s recording, “Dead Cat on the Line,” Victor (V-38579-A), 1930.


Whether or not he was consciously supporting uplift ideologies or merely operating as a Christian minister tending to his congregants is unclear. Possibly his background and exposure to uplift philosophies, instilled in him at an early part of his life and career, became second-nature and remained unquestioned in his sermons. However, Nix’s care and concern for his congregation may have also been affected by his own exposure to racism. He surely was aware of the racial inequalities taking place in 1920s Chicago and elsewhere and sought to protect his congregants using whatever means possible. He must have been concerned for their basic survival in an era in which racial riots caused by discrimination and injustices led to the death and destruction of many in Chicago and in his hometown of Longview, Texas. The Great Depression also caused major suffering for thousands of people, but especially for African Americans who were already suffering economic injustices and limited opportunities due to racism. As a southern migrant himself, Nix saw the temptations of city life that other migrants pursued and saw too many become caught up in the lure of easy money, entertainment, and sexual activity. Nix’s admonitions in his recorded sermons were possibly his way of dealing with these frustrations and worked to protect his congregants from subjecting themselves to these temptations. But most important, his advice was meant as a tactic for surviving in a world that still subjected African Americans to ridicule in blackface minstrelsy, lynchings and violence, economic and employment injustices, Black Codes, Jim Crow segregation, and many other injustices. He wanted his congregants to not only survive, but to thrive, and encouraged them to take responsibility for their lives, knowing full well the odds against them.
Reverend A. W. Nix was an educated African-American minister from Texas who moved to Chicago in the 1920s, where he experienced a modern urban environment that was markedly different from that of his upbringing in the South. As a minister, he utilized the new medium of phonograph recordings to present sermons with messages urging his listeners to avoid the worldly lures of a sinful city life and lift themselves up. But he chose to present these messages on recordings that incorporated the rich and distinctive vocal traditions of preaching and singing that had been closely associated with African Americans in the rural South since the days of slavery.

The evolution of technology, specifically phonographs and sound film, provided opportunities for black ministers, such as Nix, to (re)present traditional folk voices and vocalities as modern twentieth-century options for African-American consumers. The popularity of recorded sermons on phonograph records and in sound films demonstrated the values that African Americans continued to place on these traditions. In addition, recorded sermons circulated the vocal styles of traditional black church services into the public sphere, creating a modern sonic space for African-American oral practices. The process of learning vocal traditions through live oral and aural repetition was replaced by the phonograph, which allowed for multiple repetitions at the listener’s leisure. In addition, recorded sermons presented new leisure options for African-American communities as they struggled to find a place of equality in a rapidly changing world. Recorded sermons by Nix and others created places for new, modern black voices, which were hybrid fusions of African-American folk vocal traditions and modern

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1 Similarly, the recordings of blues and jazz by African-American musicians also transformed important secular traditions.
technology. The success of Nix’s recorded sermons attests to the values of African Americans in the 1920s.

One of the main purposes of this study was to interrogate the strict binary modalities typically used to understand African-American experiences in the twentieth century. Many scholars describe the early twentieth century as a period of strict duality for African Americans with terms like black/white, the “Old Negro”/“New Negro,” South/North, rural/urban, working class/middle class, primitivism/progress, Du Bois/Washington, and so on. Du Bois himself coined the term “double consciousness” to signify the life of duality that many African Americans lived in the early part of the century. While these dualistic representations still exist, African-American culture is much more complex and diverse than these binaries suggest. While some intellectuals, such as Alain Locke, clearly distinguished between the noisy oral traditions of the “Old Negro” and the sophisticated art of the “New Negro,” in this dissertation I have presented evidence that these two spheres were not mutually exclusive and interacted in complex ways. Some leaders, like Nix, adhered to both. For example, Nix employed vocal traditions associated with the rural South and the Old Negro, yet aspired to uplift his congregation through his sermon texts, reflecting New Negro ideologies. In this way, Reverend Nix stood as a bridge between the conceptualized worlds of the Old Negro and the New Negro. His voice and vocal style suggest that he believed in a continuation of tradition, an expansion, an awareness, not to be shunned, hidden in shame, or expressed with self-loathing but rather embracing the past while looking to the future. Nix chose to express his own racial pride through these traditions while presenting them via technologies linked to scientific progress and modernity. In this sense, he was an example of hybridity and a “changing same.”2 He stood with one foot in each world.

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Some may argue that Nix was indeed the perfect representation of double consciousness because of his alignment with tradition, on the one hand, and uplift and modernity, on the other. However, Nix’s position is more nuanced than this. Du Bois’ original explanation of double consciousness as “two warring ideals in on dark body,”\(^3\) does not, I suggest, characterize Nix. Rather, he was being true to himself, his ideals, and beliefs, which were layered and multiple and certainly influenced by his environment and the time in which he lived. There are usually gray areas in the responses people have to real-life situations, and they do not always fit in neat little packages. Nix for the most part, adhered to southern, rural traditions, but on occasion included music or vocals that were outside of these traditions and were considered by some to be more sophisticated. Similarly, in his texts, he mostly adhered to subjects and themes that were intended to uplift African Americans through practical means. He occasionally would address his congregants by using sophisticated words and subjects, demonstrating his own alignment with the educated upper classes. At times though, Nix demonstrated his own “backwardness” through his judgements about women, their dress, and his use of vernacular language. However, as I stated previously, Nix was motivated as a Christian minister to help and care for his congregants, and may not have been consciously advocating simple accommodation to the dominant society.

Another purpose of this study was to contest the simple alignment of vocal expressions along class lines. As I have shown, in the 1920s, the lower class members in the African-American community were frequently associated with more boisterous forms of vocal worship and the preachers who ministered to them were known to shout, moan, and chant during their services. Those African Americans with higher social standing in the community were associated with more restrained forms of worship, with many completely disavowing their cultural heritage in favor of assimilation to white modes of expression. However, Nix broke these strict categories

and rules. He shouted and chanted despite his formal education, his middle-class economic standing, and his knowledge of racial uplift and advancement as intellectual ideas.

In addition, essentialist myths of a timeless and homogeneous black musical culture have all too often typified black music and black voices as singular expressions. Essentialist narratives have filtered through every aspect of musical and vocal blackness from the beginning of the enslavement of Africans to the present era. Certainly, common musical and vocal features exist in African-American communities, and it is these common features that I have focused on as a way to understand the enduring sameness of expressing cultural values. It is understood that cultural groups express common practices and traits; however, there must also be an understanding of a middle ground or gray area—that not everyone in that group expresses himself or herself in exactly the same manner. Black voices are not homogeneous expressions, but instead are multivalent expressions and this diversity has existed throughout history. While class hierarchies evolved in the aftermath of the Civil War, there are and were varying degrees of expression associated with classist and racial identities, creating, as Paul Gilroy claims, a “changing same.” The recorded sermons demonstrate how notions of tradition changed from one associated with slavery and the old ways, to one associated with technology, modernity, and advancement. In addition, notions of musical modernity and advancement expanded from those associated with Europeanized written forms and vocalities to the recorded sermons that presented African-American folk oralities via modern technology.

As mentioned, tradition itself is a cultural construct and is often reified as something that has always existed. However, tradition signifies choice in terms of what is valued and what best represents one’s or a community’s identity. Through the analysis of historical writings and the prolificacy in which they were discussed, I assert that certain specific vocal sounds were highly valued by members of African-American communities and repeated enough to forge a path that
came to be associated with racial identity. These sounds were the sounds with which many chose to identify at a particular time in history, eventually becoming associated with an ongoing tradition.

Nix took pride in these traditions. He did not shy away from his southern roots; he shouted with a voice that had more power than any other black minister of the era; he employed spirituals and hymns favored by the black church; and he did not assimilate to white aesthetic standards, such as vocal smoothness or sweetness. Despite the pressure from black leaders and the criticism from within 1920s black society, Nix did what he always did—he chanted, shouted, and sang—full of life and without restraint. While there were others who also supported black folk traditions, such as Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes, unfortunately, many black leaders from the 1920s eschewed these vocal traditions.

I introduced Sutton Griggs (a contemporary of Nix) as a vocal example epitomizing the idea of the New Negro. The sermons of Griggs did not achieve the same commercial success as Nix’s sermons, demonstrating that many African Americans valued black vocal traditions more than assimilated voices, such as that of Griggs. And while elite black leaders toiled to determine what the people “should” do according to their doctrines to assimilate into dominant society, many African Americans instead supported the traditions of the past that were disseminated by black ministers, such as Nix. Thus, in a sense, the African-American folk minister, who had previously been largely restricted to preaching in the context of the church, now was able to do so via phonograph recordings, essentially displacing the hegemony of many elite leaders, such as Griggs, and became a public voice of the people. And while Griggs sought to eschew oral traditions and move into the world of written words through literacy, the modern phonograph reinforced the “old ways” of oral traditions.
Although Nix was not particularly vocal about his political beliefs, he supported the advancement of his people, both individually and as a congregation, and even supported many of Griggs’ literary endeavors. Nix wanted to help his people become the best they could, despite his patriarchal standards about women. We must remember the times and environment in which Nix preached: men were the unquestioned heads of households, “good” church women dressed and behaved accordingly, and racism was rampant in the South and in the North. Despite these facts, Nix never focused on being a victim of racism, although he apparently was, but he chose to be a giving and loving person to his family and to his congregation. He never turned his back on anyone and always reached out a hand to help. Nothing was false about Nix, a point that his son Elwood expressed to me.

And last, but most important, this dissertation gives voice to a man described by his relatives as a “great man.” Everyone with whom I communicated spoke of Nix positively, and even majestically. He created a legacy within his own family, yet his name was often clouded with erroneous information. He had been portrayed in numerous discourses incorrectly with scholars misidentifying A. W. Nix and W. M. Nix. I hope I have clarified between the two brothers and their own unique contributions.

Although Nix did espouse racial pride, he also affiliated with uplift theories and continuously urged his practitioners to improve their lives economically, physically, and spiritually. He disapproved of alcohol consumption, gambling, loose women, laziness, lying, and deceit; however, aren’t those still the same things we in modern society fret about today? He may have been aligned with Victorian modes of conduct, but these moral views are still alive and well in today’s so-called post-post-modern society. Thus, his own life and the choices he made reflects another aspect of the changing same.
Nix’s success in the recording and film industries may have established him as one of the first, along with Reverend J. M. Gates, to broadcast religious thought via modern media. Lerone A. Martin contends that Gates modernized black Protestant religion through recorded phonograph sermons, which became established as sites of black emancipation and progress. Simultaneously, black ministers, such as Nix, used the modern phonograph, which allowed listeners to stay connected to their southern, rural traditions.  

**Future Research**

The qualities associated with black traditional voices have often been described in generalized terms but few transcriptions of these sounds and qualities exist. Although notation software is evolving, it is still difficult if not impossible to notate the subtleties of vocal timbre and other aspects of vocal interpretation. While the Sonic Visualizer software is able to visualize many of the features associated with these sounds, I doubt that many could simply “hear” a timbre merely by looking at its overtones on paper. More research is needed in this area.

Sales and distribution data for Nix’s records were not available. Many of the records from the past are simply disappearing due to modern record companies’ lack of storage space and/or their belief that these works are no longer of importance. While more research is needed, some sources are simply no longer available. Thus, I was not able to provide detailed data to quantify the sales figures for Nix’s recorded sermons or to characterize more specifically who purchased his records. My hope is that someday this data will be found.

While much of the historical scholarship on black music has focused on the Negro spirituals, blues, jazz, black gospel music, and eventually rock ‘n roll, little has been said of the

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importance of the African-American minister and his voice. His longstanding history as a progenitor of black vocal styles deserves attention. More research needs to be conducted that investigates the connections between the minister’s voice and the development of black vocal styles, such as those utilized by James Brown, who admitted to being influenced by his childhood preacher. Is it possible that the black minister’s voice influenced not only the creation of the spirituals, but also most of our popular American music, from blues to jazz to soul to funk to R&B to rap?

**Contemporary Influences**

Nix’s recorded sermons were not only influential on subsequent forms of modern media, such as the sound film, *Hallelujah*, but also on today’s music and musicians. Reverend Nix’s sermon “Black Diamond Express Train to Hell” was such an influence on an eight-piece rock band from Leith, Edinburgh, that they named their band after the sermon.⁶ Rev. Nix’s sermons have been on the playlist of Ketch Secor, member of Old Crow Medicine Show.⁷ Bob Dylan’s spiritual-soaked 1997 release *Time Out of Mind* includes references to the themes in old sermons, including Rev. Nix’s.⁸ Some scholars claim that rap music is also influenced by early preachers such as Nix.⁹ More research is needed on the influence of the voices of black ministers on subsequent music styles.

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Final Thought

Black leaders of the 1920s attempted to alleviate racism by whatever means possible. They truly wanted to help their people and were up against incredible odds. Racism was a huge wall that just would not (and has not) come down. Although the alleviation of racism has definitely progressed in positive directions in the last hundred years, there is still more work to do. Reverend A. W. Nix was an exemplar in expressing pride for black folk traditions, in resisting the pressure to assimilate, and in aiding his congregation to live fruitful lives.

Although focusing on the differences between racialized groups is often frowned upon for falling into an essentialist trap, Radano argues that the sound of black voices operated as powerful agency for African Americans during the slavery era. By emphasizing vocal difference, they established layered identities distinguishing themselves from their oppressors. And in the 1920s while racism continued, the sound of traditional black voices possibly served a measure of resistance to assimilation to dominant society’s values.

It is understandable that in the 1920s African Americans were frustrated, tired, angry, sad, and a host of other emotions. They had been promised the hope of a new future, freedom, equality, and a new beginning, and instead were victims of violence and murder, discriminated against, publicly scorned, humiliated, and ridiculed. Unfortunately, although there have been many advances in race relations since the 1920s, we still struggle with racism in the United States today. In addition, black music and the sound of black voices have been continually appropriated, disparaged, celebrated, demonized, and idealized. It is my belief that the more historical ethnomusicologists research the past, the more it will influence the present and bring light to cultural inequalities that continue to exist. Music resonates close to our hearts and can often express that which words cannot do, including our deepest values. For groups that have been the most silenced (or not listened to), their voices can reveal what matters most.
APPENDIX A

REVEREND NIX’S RECORDED SERMONS TRANSCRIPTIONS

1. “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. I”
April 23, 1927; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1098), Melotone (Me M12545), Decca British (DeE F3850, F9720)
Form: A (Introduction: Scripture), B (Black Diamond), C (stations)

A
I take my text this morning in Matthew seventh chapter and thirteenth verse.
“Enter ye in at the straight gate.
For wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction
And many there be that go in there at.”

B¹ (0:14)
This train
Is known as the Black Diamond Express Train to Hell.  
Well, well
Sin
Is the engineer,
Pleasure
Is the headlight,
And the Devil
Is the conductor.

B² (0:24)
I see the Black Diamond
As she starts off for hell.  
[Spiritual melody]
The bell is ringing,
Hell-bound, hell-bound.
The Devil cries out,
“All aboard for hell.”

C¹
First station
Is Drunkardsville.
Stop there and let all the drunkards get on board.

¹ Note on text transcriptions: Each sermon is transcribed with separate lines designating the places in which Nix pauses or breathes between phrases. I have also placed letters (A, B, C…) to represent separate “verses.” When I designate, “Nix’s advice,” I am referring to his advice to his congregation in which he speaks directly to them and gives personal advice, i.e. “Brother…” The designation of “contemporary relevance” is for generalizations that Nix uses, such as “Some people…” For the musical selections within the sermons, I designate these as “songs,” as a generalized term for sung music rather than the specifics of genre. The words in the right column are the responses by the “sisters.” If the responses are discernable, I transcribe them literally; if not, I write [speaking] to demonstrate that multiple voices are speaking simultaneously, or [indecipherable] if the text is either not discernable at all. If the one or more voices are singing, I write [singing]. However, if the “mystery spiritual” is being sung, I write [spiritual melody]. Singing may continue for multiple lines. All audio files are taken from reissues on Document Records (Rev. A. W. Nix, Vol. 1, 1927-1928, DOCD-5328; Rev. A. W. Nix & Rev. Emmett Dickinson, Vol. 2, 1928-1931, DOCD-5490; Black Religious Music 1930-1956, DOCD-5639), and the personal collection of Guido van Rijn. Nix recorded a total of fifty-four records; however, three were recorded twice but only issued once: “Generosity,” “Throwing Stones,” and “Deep Down in My Heart.”
I have a big crowd down there drinking jump steady,²
Some drinking Shinny,³
Some drinking moonshine,
Some drinking White Mule and Red Horse. [Singing (single note)]
All you drunkards
You gotta go to hell on the Black Diamond Train. Preach!

C² (0:52)
The Black Diamond starts off for hell now.
Next station is Liar’s Avenue. [Speaking]
Wait there,
And let all the liars get on board.
I have a big crowd of liars down there,
Have some smooth liars,
Some unreasonable liars,
Some professional liars,
Some bare-face liars,
Some un-Godly liars, [Spiritual melody] Alright!
Some big liars,
Some little liars,
Some go to bed lying,
get up lying, [Spiritual melody hummed]
Lie all day and lie on you and lie on me.
A big crowd of liars, [Spiritual melody]
You gotta go to hell on the Black Diamond Train.

C³ (1:24)
Next station
Is Deceiversville.
Wait there let all the deceivers get on board. [Speaking]
Some of you been deceiving one another since you been in the world.
Friends deceiving friends,
Husbands deceiving wives, [Spiritual melody hummed]
Wives deceiving husbands.
But they got to go to hell on the Black Diamond Train.

C⁴ (1:40)
Next station
Is Conjuration Station.
Wait there
And let all the conjurers get on board. [Speaking]
I have a big crowd of Louisiana conjurers down there.
They got to go to hell on the Black Diamond Train.


They always taking brick dust and brass pins and matchheads
And making little hands selling to one another.
But you got to go to hell on the Black Diamond Train.

Alright!

C5 (2:00)
Next station
Is Confusion Junction.
Wait there and let all the confusion-makers get on.
Some of you raise confusion in your home,
Confusion in the street,
Confusion in the church, confusion everywhere you go.
But you got to go to hell on the Black Diamond Train.

[Speaking]
[Singing]

C6 (2:15)
Next station
Is Fight’s Town.
Wait there,
And let all the church fighters get on board.
I have a big crowd of church-fighters down there.
They never go to the prayer meeting,
They never go to the Sunday school,
They never go to the morning service,
They always stay away from the morning church
Until they hear about the business meeting,
And they come running up out of Brazos Bottom
To pull off a big fight in God’s church.
Well, all you church fighters,
You gotta go to hell on the Black Diamond Train.

And now the Black Diamond Train will stop just a minute
To take on brimstone for hell.

2. Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. II
April 23, 1927; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1098), Melotone (B Me M12545), Decca British (DeE F3850, F9720)
Form: continuation of “Black Diamond Express to Hell – Pt. I”
(A) (implied Scripture from Pt. I), B (Black Diamond), C (stations and end of journey), D (Nix’s words to congregants), E (Song), D2 (reprise/conclusion)

B3 (continued)


5 See John Mason Brewer, The Word on the Brazos: Negro Preacher Tales from the Brazos Bottoms of Texas (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1953) 3-4. Brewer’s informants claimed that the ex-slaves who resided in the Brazos River Bottom area were considered by those residing in other parts of Texas as “the most illiterate, humble, and mistreated Negroes in the state” and were commonly referred to as ignorant with comments such as, “You mus’ be from de Brazos Bottoms,” or “You ack jes’ lack a Brazos Bottom Nigguh.”
Black Diamond has taken on a fresh supply
Of brimstone
And now she's ready to pull out for hell.
Sin
Is the engineer
Pleasure is the headlight
And the devil
Is the conductor.

Amen!

C⁶ (0:12)
Next station
Is Dancing Hall Depot.
Well alright!
Wait there.
I have a large crowd of church members to get on down there.
[Speaking]
Some of you think you can sing in the choir on Sunday
And Charleston on the ballroom floor on Monday.
Well, well, well
But you gotta go to hell on the Black Diamond Train.
[Speaking]
The Black Diamond pulls off now for hell.

C⁷ (0:31)
Next station
Is Gambler’s Tower.
[Speaking]
Wait there.
And let all the gamblers get on board.
[Speaking]
I have a big crowd of gamblers and crap shooters and card players
And bootleggers got to ride
[Speaking]
The Black Diamond Train to hell.
They all gets on the Black Diamond Train, she starts off for hell now.
[Speaking]
She’s almost into hell.

C⁸ (0:51)
Next station
Is Stealin’ Town.
Alright!
Wait there.
And let all the church thieves get on board.
Preach Elder!
I have a big crowd of members in the church always been stealin’
Well, well, well
Ever since they been in the church.
[Speaking]
Some always beggin’ money for their church and never turn it in.
Always givin’ church suppers
And then steal half the money.
Oh my goodness!
All you church thieves
Alright!
You got to go to hell on the Black Diamond Train.

C⁹ (1:15)
Next station
Is Plotter’s Gap.
[Speaking]
Stop there and let all the church plotters get on.
[Speaking]
Have a big crowd always plottin’ against the church,
[Speaking]
Always plottin’ against the preachem [preacher],
Elder Preach!
Always plottin’ against the deacon,
[Speaking]
Out plottin’ against the church program.
Well, well
Always be hid behind closed doors plottin’ against me.
All you church fighters,  
You got to go to hell on the Black Diamond Train.  
Alright!

C\textsuperscript{10} (1:37)  
Next station  
Is Little No Harm Park [?]  
I got a big crowd  
Always down at the park, parkin' all the time.  
They never can come to church on Sunday.  
Always parkin' all the time.  
[Speaking]  
Well, well, well  
[Speaking]  
Yeah!

C\textsuperscript{11} (1:49)  
And now,  
The Devil sends a dispatch to the engineer  
And tell him to pull his throttle wide open  
And hit [the] damnation switch in the black shades of midnight  
And make a fast run for Hell.  
[Speaking]  
Well, well, well

D\textsuperscript{1} (2:01)  
Oh gambler  
Get off the Black Diamond Train.  
Oh midnight rambler,  
Get off the Black Diamond Train.  
Oh, backslider,  
Get off the Black Diamond Train.  
[Speaking]  
Well, well, well  
[Speaking]  
Well, well, well

D\textsuperscript{2} (2:14)  
Children aren't you glad,  
You got off the Black Diamond Train  
A long time ago.  
I'm so glad I got off a long time ago.  
Ever since I got off  
My soul has been singing:  
[Speaking]  
Well, well, well  
[Speaking]  
Well, well, well

E (2:27)  
All of my sins been taken away.  
Well, all of my sins been taken away  
Well, all of my sins been taken away  
Well glory hallelujah to his name.  
All of my sins been taken away.

D\textsuperscript{2} (2:51)  
Children aren't you glad  
You got off a long time ago.  
Amen!  
I'm glad I got off a long time ago.  
Amen!  
Amen.

3. Goin' to Hell and Who Cares
April 23, 1927; Chicago  
Vocalion (VO1108), Supertone (Spt S2240)  
Form: A (Song), B (Intro: Scripture), C (Theme), D (Jesus), E (contemporary relevance), D, F (conclusion)
A [“I Got Mah Swoad in Mah Han’”]:⁶

I got my sword in my hand, in my hand
I got my sword in my hand, hallelujah Lord
I got my sword in my hand, in my hand
I got my sword in my hand, hallelujah Lord
I got my sword in my hand, in my hand
I got my sword in my hand

B (0:30)

“And these shall go away
Into everlasting punishment,
But the righteous into life eternal.”⁷

Going to hell and who cares. Amen

C (0:39)

My subject tonight sets forth the fact
That there are people who are going to hell.
And my subject further show that there are people
That don’t care who goes to hell.

[Speaking]

(0:49)

People
Go to hell for not doing,
As well as doing. Amen

D¹ (0:54)

Jesus said, “When I was hungry
You give me no meat.
Well, well [sung]
When I was naked,
You didn’t give me any clothes.”
Yes

And these shall go in everlasting punishment.

E¹ (1:04)

All liars
On their way to hell [Singing]
All deceivers
On their way to hell [Speaking]
All gamblers
On their way to hell [Singing]

E² (1:15)

If the drunkard dies and goes to hell, who cares?
[Singing]
The man that sold him a drink don’t care.
Yeah
All he wanted
Was the money
For the price of the drink.

E³ (1:25)
If the dancing-woman dies and goes to hell,
Who cares?                             Well, well [Sung]
All the dancing-woman
Wanted was a man that told,
Told her how to dance.          [Humming]
He wanted the price that’s all.8

E4 (1:41)
Mother,                      [Humming]
If your son
Is shot down at the gamblin’ table, who cares?   [Humming spiritual]
Why the man
That sold him the dice don’t care.
All he wanted was the price
Of the dice.

D2 (1:49)
Well then,                           [Humming]
Tell me who cares?                    Yes
Jesus, Lamb of God, \[Multiple voices singing\]
The Rose of Sharon,                  Yes
The Lily of the Valley,
The Bright and Morning Star,           Yes He did
Who died on the cross of Calvary,
Calls for demons in hell,
Calls for death’s hand in the grave.

D3 (2:09)
Rose on Sunday morning
And declared,
“I am He that was dead.
But behold I’m alive forever more.”   Amen

D4 (2:19)
And then he called Matthew.
Said, “Oh Matthew,”
Go tell that man
That put a crown
Of seventy-two thorns on my brow,
I died on the cross for him.”   [Multiple voices]

D5 (2:33)
“Oh Mark,
Go tell that Roman soldier
Who pierced in my side,
I died on the cross for him.”   Alright

D6 (2:42)
“Oh Luke,
Go tell the [indecipherable] philosopher
Who [indecipherable] philosophizing [indecipherable].   [Singing]

8 Dr. David Evans claims the “dancing woman” may refer to dancers in dime-a-dance venues, popular in the early twentieth century, especially in large cities such as New York and Chicago.
I died on the cross for them.”

D7 (2:51)
“Oh John,
Go tell motherless children,
I died on the cross for them.”

D8 (2:58)
“Yeah, tell that man,
The way-faring man
I died on the cross for him.”

F (3:05)
And sinner,
If you won’t get saved,
Get in touch with Jesus right now.
Amen.

4. “Hiding Behind the Stuff”
April 23, 1927; Chicago
Vocalion (VO 1108B), Supertone (Spt S2240)
Form: A (Song), B (Intro: Scripture), C (Contemporary relevance), D (Bible story), E (Conclusion)

A
Song: “Nowhere to Hide”

Well, there ain’t nowhere to hide
Well, there ain’t nowhere to hide
Oh, Well, there ain’t nowhere to hide
Oh, Well, there ain’t nowhere to hide from God”

B (0:23)
“And when they sought him, he could not be found.
Behold he had hid himself among the stuff.”
Hiding behind the stuff.

C1 (0:30)
We have three classes of people.
In this world that’s living in three tenses.
Always
Living…some always living in the past tense,
Always talking about
“What I used to be,
what I used to do,
what I used to give.”
God wants to know what are you doing now.

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9 I am uncertain about the title of this song. Blind Willie Johnson recorded, at a later date, “Can’t Nobody Hide from God” with the same melody. See YouTube, (accessed June 7, 2018), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6l37h5McfA.

And then we have another class of people always living in the future tense. Well [sung] Talking about “what I’m gwine to be, What I’m gwine to do, How I’m going to give and serve,” And never do anything. Yes

And then they have a few living in the present tense who are willing to serve now. [Humming spiritual]

So many people who are trying to hide behind the trash of this town. But I want to tell you: You can’t hide from my God.

Jonah tried to hide from God, but he found out he couldn’t hide from God. Old Jonam [Jonah] went down to Joppam [Joppa]. He found a ship fixin’ to sail on down to Tarshish. And Old Jonah said, “Flier, How much is the fare on a seat? I want a ticket” He paid his fare and got on the ship and went down to the bottom of the ship [ship] among the trash of the ship [ship], Yes among the rubbish of the ship [ship], [Speaking] in a dark part of the ship [ship].

And while old ship had moved off from the shore. After while, I can see, The old ship was got out on the briny deep. After while, A storm came on. Yes Old Jonah was fast asleep, Well, well, well [sung] And God looked out from glory. He told His wind, “I want you to over-take that ship [Shouting] And bring Old Jonah back home.” [Shouting]

I saw the four-way wind: One got on the right side of the ship [ship], Yes Another got on the left side of the ship [ship], [Speaking] One got in the front of the ship, And another got on [Humming] A-behind the ship [ship], And the old ship couldn’t turn around.
The western wind hit the old ship behind
And knocked the ship and then she fell down.
Another wind knocked her right on her side.

D^4 (2:15)
After while,
Old Jonah,
When the Captain woke him up,
And said, “What meanest thou oh sleeper?
Arise and call on your God.”
And Old Jonah got up and said, “Flier,

D^5 (2:28)
Oh, captain,
If you throw me overboard,
The sea will become calm.”
They picked Old Jonah up and threw him overboard,
And when they threw little Jonah overboard,
Old whale
Swallowed Jonam [Jonah],
Right down in the bottom of the shim [ship].
And for three whole days
Jonah was in the belly of the whale.
Yes
No wholesome air,
No food,
And Old Jonah call on God.

D^6 (2:54)
He said, “Oh – oh God,
If you let me out of this place,
I’ll go where you want me to go,
I’ll do what you want me to do.”
And when Old Jonah came up,
The old whale opened his mouth,
Old Jonah leaped out.

D^7 (3:09)
And they tell me that three days long journey,
In Nineveh
Old Nineveh made it in one day crying.
Nineveh shall be destroyed,
Oh Nineveh.

E
If you wanna be saved,
Get in touch with God right now.
Amen.

5. The White Flyer to Heaven – Part 1
June 29, 1927; Chicago
Vocalion (VO 1170), Brunswick (Br7020), Supertone (St S2252)
Form: A (Intro: Scripture), B (White Flyer), C (Song), D (Nix speaks to congregation), B (train continues)
A¹
I take my text in Matthew seventh chapter and fourteenth verse.
“Straight is the gate and narrow is the way
Which leadeth into life
And few there be that find it.” Amen

B¹ (0:12)
This train
Is known as the White Flyer to heaven.
God is the engineer,
The Holy Ghost is the headlight,
And Jesus is the conductor.

B² (0:22)
I see the White Flyer
As she gets ready to start off for heaven.
The bell is ringing heaven-bound, heaven-bound.

B³ (0:30)
Jesus cries out, “All aboard for heaven.”
No liars
Can ride on this train.
No deceivers
Can ride on this train.
No murderers,
No gamblers can ride on this train.

B⁴ (0:45)
Every man must purchase his ticket
At the station of Regeneration.
And as the White Flyer starts off for heaven,
Jesus will say,
“The first stop
Will be Mount Calvary.
I wants to show the saints of God
Where I died on the cross.”

B⁵ (1:01)
I want to see them
Where they put a crown of seventy-two thorns on my brow.
On the cross
Where they drove the nails in my hand.
On the cross,
Where they pierced me in my side.

B⁶ (1:16)
On the cross, where I cried,
‘It is finished.’
On the cross where
I signed every man’s bond
With my own blood.

(1:27)
And as the train stops there a while.

Preach!
I can hear some old battle-scarred child
Of God look in the crowd and sing:

C (1:34)

Oh the blood,
Oh the blood,
Oh the blood done signed my name
Oh the blood,
Oh the blood,
Oh the blood done signed my name

Oh the blood,
Oh the blood,
Well, the blood done signed my name
Oh the blood,
Done signed
My name

D (2:08)

Children,
Didn’t He sign your name
In His own blood?
Have I got a witness here?

B (2:15)

And then when the train will leave Mount Calvary,
Will pass on through the first heaven.
The heaven of the clouds,
And through God’s machine shom [shop]
Where he pick up his whirlwind in his storm [?].
And go higher and higher,
Higher and higher.
We’ll pass on through the Second Heaven.

(2:32)

The starry big heaven
And view the flying stars
And dashing meteors,
And then pass on by Mars and Mercury
And Jupiter and Venus
And Saturn and Uranus and Neptune
With her four glittering moons.

(2:47)

But don’t let me stop there.
Higher and higher,
Higher and higher,
On up to
The high rocks of ages.
And stop there in a shelter in a time of storm.
And rock our troubles away.

6. The White Flyer to Heaven – Part II
June 29, 1927; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1170), Brunswick (Br7020), Supertone (St S2252)
Form: continuation of “The White Flyer to Heaven – Part I”
(A) (Intro/Scripture implied), B (White Flyer re-introduced), C (Arrival in Heaven), D (Song), E
(Conclusion: Reprise of C)

B¹ (0:02)
And now the White Flyer
Will continue its trip to heaven.
God
Is the engineer,
The Holy Ghost is the headlight,
And Jesus is the conductor. Amen! [shouted]

B² (0:12)
And as the White Flyer
Starts on
Up from the high rocks of ages,
On higher and higher,
Up beyond the sun, moon, and stars,
Back behind God’s eternal word,
Yes
Amen [sung]
Amen [spoken]

(0:24)
Someone will cry out,
“Yes
“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now I’m found,
Was blind but now I see.”
Amen! [shouted] [Spiritual melody]
Let the name of Jesus

B³ (0:37)
And then look back over the distance over which we have come
And then cry out:
Through many dangers,
Toils and snares
I have already come.”
Amen

(0:48)
T’was “Grace that brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me on home."
And then go higher and higher,
Higher and higher,
Until we
Will bid farewell to every tear
And wipe our weeping eyes.
Yes
Let the name of Jesus

C¹ (1:05)
And then,
We’ll go dashing through the pearly white gates
On into God’s eternal kingdom.
[Speaking]
And when we get there,
I’m gonna sit down  Yes
And chatter with the Father  Yes
And chatter with the Son  Yes
And talk about the world I just come from.

(1:22)
And then someone will cry out,  [Spiritual melody]
“Trouble will be no more.
Home,
Home at last.”  [Sung single note]

C² (1:30)
And then when I get there,
Some mother’s child will cry out.
The reason why  [Speaking]
I’ve made up my mind  Yes
To go to heaven,  [Speaking]
I’ve
Got a mother up there.
Well, well, well [sung]
I promised her
I’d meet her in glory.
Yes,
I told her on her dying bed
Before she left this world.
Amen! [Shouted]

D (1:53)
Song: “Look for Me”¹²

| You may look for me but I’ll be there | [Singers join in on “for me”] |
| I’ll be there, I’ll be there, I’ll be there |
| You may look for me but I’ll be there |
| I’ll be there |

Glory to His name

C² (2:19)
Children, are you going?  Yes! [Shouted & Spiritual melody]
Have you got the ticket?  Yes! [Shouted & Spiritual melody]
Well if you don’t go,
I’m going on anyhow
And when I get there
I’m going to sit down
And meet my mother in heaven.
I’m gonna help her crown Jesus Lord of all,
When I get in glory.
Amen.

¹² Hymn written by Charles Austin Miles, c. 1905. This song is quoted in Sutherland, An Analysis of Negro Churches in Chicago, 90.
7. The Seven Rs
June 29, 1927; Chicago
Vocalion (Vo 1125)
Form: A (Intro: Scripture), B (Bible story), C (Seven Rs), D (Nix to congregants), E (Song), D²

A
I take my text in Luke, fifteenth chapter and eighteenth verse.
“And when he came to himself,
He said, ‘I will arise and go to my Father.’”

I want you to notice
Seven Rs in the story
Of the Prodigal Son.

B (0:16)
This boy’s father
And mother had done all they could do
To make his home happy for him.
Yes
He had . . . but he had a roving mind,
Yes
To run all over the country,
Alright
Like so many boys
Of today.
He demanded
[ Spiritual melody]
His goods from his father
And left his comfortable home,
Yes
And went out in the world
For a good time.
Alright
But he soon spent all of his money
And lost all he had.
Yes
And he went starving to death
With hunger.

C¹ (0:46)
Now the first R
He remembered,
Yes!
His mind
Went back home.
He remembered that comfortable home.

C² (0:53)
The second R,
He rose,
He rose up like a man.
Yes
He said,
“If I stay here,
I’ll die.
I’ll die [sung]
If I go home,
I can live.”
Well, well [sung]

C³ (1:03)
The third R,
He returned.
Yes
He returned to his home. [Spiritual melody]
He said,
“I know I look bad,
I know,
I feel bad,
But I’m going back home anyhow.”
Oh gambler, [Spiritual melody]
God wants you to come back home.

C⁴ (1:21)
The fourth R,
They received him. Yes!
His father received him,
His mother received him, [singing]
All of his friends received him.

C⁵ (1:30)
The fifth R, [Spiritual melody]
They made a reception. Yes
They give a reception.
They killed the fatted calf.

C⁶ (1:37)
The sixth R, [Spiritual melody]
They put a robe on him.
They put a robe on him. Alright
They made him pull off his rags,
And clean up and dressed him up
In a long white robe. Alright

C⁷ (1:48)
The seventh R, Well, well [sung]
They all rejoiced.
Their family rejoiced.
The friends rejoiced. Yes
They all rejoiced.

D¹ (1:55)
But brother,
You talk about rejoicing. Alright [singing]
Just wait
Until the saints go marching home.

(2:05)
They tell him they be coming up from every nation, kindred, and tribe. [Spiritual melody]
Calling with their robe washed in the blood of the Lamb.
And some old battle-scarred child Alright!
Of God will be crying: [Shouts]

E (2:15)
Song “When the Saints Go Marching In”

*Well when the saints (well, when the saints)*
*Go marching in (go marching in)*
Well when the saints go marching in, Blessed Lord
Lord I want to be in that number
Ah, when the saints go marching in

D² (2:46)
Children,
When the roll is called,
Will you be there           Amen!
And answer to your name?    Yes!
Amen.

8. It is a Strange Thing to Me
June 29, 1927; Chicago
Vocalion (VO 1125)
Form: A (Intro: Scripture), B (Bible story), C (contemporary relevance), B, D (Song), E (conclusion)

A
I take my text in John third chapter and ninth verse.
“Nicodemus said unto him,
‘How can these things be?’”
(0:08)
My subject:
It’s a strange thing to me.     Yeah

B¹ (0:12)
Nicodemus was a master of Israel,      Well [sung]
A ruler of the Jews.
He was a teacher
And a leader for the people.        [singing]
And yet blind to the spiritual knowledge [Spiritual melody]
Of Jesus Christ.

C¹ (0:23)
It’s a strange thing to me   Yes
How some people want to teach and lead
Others.
And yet they themselves
Have never been borned again.
Can’t lead prayer meetings,         Yes
Can’t pray in public,        [Spoken]
And yet want to be a leader.
It’s a strange thing to me.

C² (0:42)
Just think
How many men and women        Preach!
Who call themselves Christians  Well, well, well [sung]
Have been living in this town for months and years   Yes, Preach!
And have never joined anybody’s church at all.      [Spiritual melody]
Living out of the church making excuses.
It’s a strange thing to me.
While Nicodemus
Was ruling over the Sanhedrin court.
Hearing the many charges
Joined against Jesus Christ.
And when
He had closed his court in the evening,
And everybody had gone home,
Nicodemus
Was rule reading [?]
Over the document. Yes

As he read,
He said, “They tell me
That He turned water to wine.
He healed a man
That was sick for eight long years.
He fed 5,000 hungry men and women
With two small fishes and five loaves of bread.
He pulled the deaf plugs
Out of a man’s ear,
And cut loose his stammering tongue.
He opened the eyes
Of a man that was born blind.
He raised a man from the grave
That was dead four long days.”
Then Nicodemus
Threwed down the documents and said,
“How can these things be?
It’s a strange thing to me.”

They tell me
He went out at midnight
When everything was quiet,
And he found Jesus outside of the city
And he went on in and said,
“Master,
They know that Thou art a teachem [teacher].
That come from God,
For no one can do these things that you’re doing,
Except God be with him.
But how can these things be?
It’s a strange thing to me.”

But Jesus said,
“Nicodemus,
If you want to understand
These things,
You must be born again.                      [Shouts]
You must be born from above.                  [singing]
You must be born until you can feel it.

(2:34)
Born,                                      [Spiritual melody]
Until you feel like crying.                Alright!
Born,                                       
Until you feel like singing.               [Shouts]
Born,                                      
Until your soul is singing:”

D (2:47) “I’m So Glad I Got My Religion”
   I’m so glad                              [Females join in]
   I got my religion in time
   I’m so glad
   I got my religion in time, hallelujah
   I’m so glad
   I got my religion in time
   Well, oh my Lord
   Oh my Lord
   What shall I do?

E (3:13)
   Children aren’t you glad                Yeah!
   You’ve been born again?                Amen!
   Amen.

9. The Prayer Meeting in Hell
June 30, 1927; Chicago
Vocalion (VO 1124)
Form: A (Intro: Scripture), B (Bible story), C (Nix’s advice to congregants)

A
   “In hell, he lifted up his eyes
   Being in torment
   And he said, ‘Father Abraham,
   Have mercy on me.’”                          Amen
   A Prayer Meetin’ in Hell.                    Amen

B¹ (0:16)
   Lazarus
   Was a poor man
   And a beggar.                                   [Speaking]
   Yet, he was a child of God.
   The rich man had plenty
   And fared sumptuously.                         Alright

B² (0:26)
   But one day,
   Lazarus being hungry,                          Alright
Went up to the rich man’s gate
And called the rich man’s servant
And said, “I’m hungry!”
But I don’t want to come in the king’s palatial home
I don’t want to make him feel bad
And displease his guests.
I don’t want to sit down in the royal table
And eat of the luxuries of the king’s table.
But just send me the crumbs
That fall from his table
And I will be satisfied.”

Oh
Well, well, well, well
Amen
Alright
Mercy Lord, have mercy
Yes
Alright

B³ (1:00)
Brother,
That’s just like a child of God.
At once, the rich man
Called his dog
And drove Lazarus away from his gate.

(1:10)
And when Lazarus died,
God called him into glory
And He set him down at the welcome table
And he began to feast off of the ambrosia
Of God’s eternal felicity.

(1:23)
And way back at midnight,
While the rich man was counting over his riches
And his wealth,
The death angel knocked at his door
And told him,
“Your soul is required at the judgement bar.”
And the rich man died
And his soul went to hell.
And while he was in hell being tormented,
He looked up to heaven
And saw Lazarus wrapped up in the bosom of Abraham
Sitting way back in glory.

B⁴ (1:51)
And the rich man
Opened up a prayer meetin’ in hell
And cried out,
“Oh Abraham,
Oh Abraham,
Have mercy on my soul!
That is why I am tormented in these flames
Send Lazarus down here
That he might dip his finger in cool water
And cool my parchin’ tongue
Because I’m tormented in the flame.

Alright, Yes
Have mercy on us
Have mercy
Hallelujah
Alright
But if you can’t send him here,
Send him down yonder
And tell my five brothers,
Don’t come down here in hell.”

Alright

B5 (2:27)
He opened up a prayer meetin’ in hell.
He prayed but his prayer was too late.
He called on God but he called too late.

Amen

[singing]

C (2:34)
Oh sinner,
Don’t wait until it’s too late to call on God.
If you call God in time,
He will hear and answer your prayer.
Won’t he do it children?
Didn’t he hear you a long time ago?
He heard me a long time ago.

Amen.

10. After the Ball is Over
June 30, 1927; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1124)
Form: A (Intro: Scripture), B (Bible story), C (contemporary relevance), D (Conclusion: Nix’s advice)

A
I take my text in Matthew fourteenth chapter and sixth verse.
“When Herod’s birthday was kept,
The daughter of Herodias danced before them
And pleased Herod.”

Amen

After the ball is over.

B1 (0:14)
This is the anniversary
Of Herod’s birthday.
His palace is all lighted
Up with the glittering and sparking lights.
The people
Were coming in from everywhere
To take part in this lustrous occasion.
They all are sitting down around the table.
They are drinking strong wine
And strong drink.
They are not satisfied.
The King cries out:
“Turn on more lights!”

Alright

Pour out more wine
And let the music sound.

B2 (0:44)
Call
In Salome
The dancing girl.”
Salome comes in, runnin’ and skippin’
And whirlin’ on tiptoes,
All dressed in a low neck and short tight skirts,
And now she is dancin’ before the king.
They all are spellbound.
“Stand back!” cries the floor master.
“Make more room on the ballroom floor
For Salome.”
She is dancin’ now.
The king’s eyes
Are fast upon her fascination.
He lost his balance,
He fell, falls back in his chair.
His soul is filled with a pulsation on the thing.

B³ (1:21)
And the bell sounds,
The ball is over.
And when the ball is over
The king cries out,
“Whatsoever
You want,
I will give it to you,
If it’s a half of my kingdom.”

B⁴ (1:35)
The king makes a bad promise.
Salome takes advantage
Of this bad promise,
[Speaking]
And she says,
“Go kill John the Baptist
And bring me his head
On a chargem [charger].”
As this is after the ball is over.

C¹ (1:49)
Brother,
Just after the ball is over,
So many bad promises are made.
[Speaking]
Then troubles start,
Jealousy arises.
And then comes fighting and killing.
It’s just after the ball is over.

C² (2:04)
And then comes hell,
Hell in your home.
A great many people
Are livin’ in hell today
That started on the ballroom floor.
After the ball is over,
Then you go out in the midnight air,
You take bad cold,
And then deep cough,
And then pneumonia will set in,
And then consumption,
And end in an early grave.
Just after the ball is over.

Oh, mother’s son,
Come off the ballroom floor.
Oh, father’s daughter,
Come off the ballroom floor.
If you don’t come off the ballroom floor,
Hell will be your home.
You outta come off the ballroom floor while you have time.

I take my text this morning in first Thessalonians, fourth chapter, eleventh verse.
“We exhort you brethren that you study to be quiet
And mind your own business.”
Mind your own business.

As we start out on another year’s journey
Let every man and woman turn over a new leaf this year.
And mind your own business
And let other people’s business alone.
Don’t you know that a great deal of all the trouble in this world come from people
Not minding their own business

Back in the Garden of Eden
If Mother Eve had minded her own business
And left forbidden things alone
She would have saved humanity from sin.

If David had minded his own business
He wouldn’t have been on the house top look into his neighbor’s bath house
And caused his heart to become lustful.

If men and women
Who are behind prison bars today,
Had minded their own business
They would not have been in jail this morning.

C³ (0:54)
Paul said,
He came across people in the church of Thessalonica
Who were busy-bodies and tattlers
Meddling in other people’s business
And let their own business go undone.
And all those folks are not dead yet

B² (1:08)
Brother,
Why, as we start out this year
Upon life’s sea of time
With our hopes of making a good run.
If you want to succeed,
You must mind your own business.
Keep your own house clean
And trust you on to let your neighbor’s house alone.
Pull the beam out of your own eye
And let your neighbor’s eyes alone.
Remember
While you are cleaning up your neighbor’s backyard
Somebody’s throwing trash in your front yard.
Brother, mind your own business
And come on and follow Jesus.

D² (1:41)
Some people are always finding fault with the church.
Because there are crooked people in the church.
There’s always been crooked people in the church,
And always will be until Jesus come.

C⁴ (1:51)
Judas was a church member
Yet he was be-tricked, betrayed his master.
Ananias and Sapphira were church members,
And yet they were liars and thieves in the church.
Simon the Sorcerer was a church member
But yet he was a conjurer and a trick-worker in the church.
So we seen in the first church back yonder with a small membership
It had its one traitor,
Two liars,
And one trick-worker.
And they’re all not finished yet.

(2:14)
But Jesus says,
“Come on and follow me
And mind your own business.”
Some people are always talking about [Spiritual melody] There are too many churches. Yes And they don’t know which one is right. So they’ll find fault of all the churches. Yes You can hear them say, “The Presbyterians are too cold, Yes The Methodists are too warm, The Episcopalians have too much ceremony, That’s it The Baptists are too tight, The Congregationalists too free, The Salvation Army’s too noisy, Alright And the Quakers are too quiet.” Yes So the criticism goes right on.

B³ (2:43)

But Jesus said, That’s it “Follow me and mind your own business.” Twelve months in the year Mind your own business. Yes Fifty-two weeks in the year, Mind your own business. Yes Three-hundred and sixty-five days That’s it In a year Mind your own business.

E (2:58)

Brother, when God shall call the roll In the judgement Be found Minding your own business Amen.

12. Death Might Be Your Christmas Gift

October 12, 1927; Chicago Vocalion (VO 1143), Supertone (Spt S2247) Form: A (Intro: Theme), B (Contemporary relevance), C (Death theme), B, C, B, C, D (Nix advice), C, E (Jesus/God), D² (conclusion)

A

Brothers and Sisters, my Christmas message this morning is “Death may be your Christmas gift.”

B¹ (0:06)

We are reminded that this is Christmas time
And they tell me that Jesus was born on Christmas day. Amen
And the wise men from the East came and give
The young child Jesus precious and valuable gifts. Amen
For Christmas
Is a season of giving gifts, Yes
And everybody’s looking for a Christmas gift Amen [sung]
Of some kind.
But did you not stop to think
That Death may be your Christmas gift?  Yes

C¹ (0:29)
Death
Is an unwelcome visitor  Alright
And a stranger to man.  [Singing]
Nobody wants to meet Death.
The best fighters in the world  [Singing]
Won’t engage in a battle with Death on a battlefield.

C² (0:41)
Death separates friends,  [Spiritual melody]
Husbands and wives.  Alright
Death
Takes a little darling babe  Yes
From mother’s breast.
Death
Comes into every home  Yes
And leaves sorrow and sadness.
For Death
Is an unwelcome guest.
Death is without a friend in the world.  Yes

B² (0:58)
Thousands  [Spiritual melody]
Of people have been planning  Well, well, well [sung ]
All the year to have a big time  Alright
On Christmas day.
Giving and receiving precious gifts  Yes
And costly gifts.
But Death may be your Christmas gift.  [Spiritual melody]

C³ (1:10)
Man proposes  Alright
And God disposes.
Man plans,
But Death breaks up plans.

B³ (1:17)
And as we plan to celebrate Christmas,
Let us keep in mind,  [Speaking]
That this is a season of giving  Yes
And making precious and valuable gifts.  Yes

C⁴ (1:24)
Death
May interfere with your Christmas plans.  Amen
Giving brings joy
To the giver  Yes
And joy to the receiver

C⁵ (1:32)
When the world was in darkness  Well, well, well [sung]
And wandering from the fold of God,  [singing]
It was God who gave His only begotten son in the world,  
As a gift to the world, that the world might have joy and happiness.  
But Death came in the world and broke up man’s happiness.  
And Death is on every man’s trail.  
Death  
Has conquered every man from Adam on down the times.  
Yes  
[singing]  
[Humming spiritual]  
That’s right  
C⁶ (1:51)  
And on Christmas morning,  
When Christ was born  
In a manger’s stable because there was no room in the inn,  
Death started on His trail.  
Then Death while [?]  
Is getting ready on Christmas morning.  
That’s right  
D¹ (2:04)  
Now let me urge upon you today.  
You must get ready to meet Death.  
Yes  
C⁷ (2:08)  
Yonder,  
Is a crowd  
That’s looking for silver  
And gold,  
Rubies and diamonds.  
Lightening flashes [Sung]  
C⁸ (2:15)  
Yonder,  
Is a broken-hearted mother and father  
Looking for their children to come home on Christmas morning  
To the family reunion.  
But Death may get there first.  
Well, well [sung]  
[singing]  
[Speaking]  
E¹ (2:26)  
Jesus Christ  
Is the only one who’s ever conquered Death.  
It was on Calvary’s rugged hill.  
When Christ [?],  
And pulled the sting of Death out  
And went down in his grave,  
Robbed the grave of his victory,  
And made up your dying bed.  
[Singing]  
[Spiritual melody]  
Alright  
Yes  
E² (2:43)  
And today,  
Every child of God  
Can rejoice  
That he has been borned of God.  
Yes  
D² (2:50)  
And brother,  
I wanna tell you,  
Be able to meet Death when he come.  
Amen.
13. Watch Your Close Friend
October 28, 1927; Chicago
Vocalion (VO 1149)
Form: A (Intro: Scripture), B (Contemporary relevance), C (Nix advice), B, C, D (Biblical story), E (conclusion)

A
My text this morning is found in Judges, sixteenth chapter and eighteenth verse.
“And when Delilah saw that he hath told her all of his heart,
She sent and called for the lords of the Philistines saying,
‘Come, for he hath told me all of his heart.’”
Watch your friends.

B^1 (0:17)
It is natural for all people to have someone
Whom they regard as their friend. Amen!
Everybody likes to have a friend,
But a true friend
Is hard to find. Amen, Amen!
Most all of the heartaches
And disappointments and deceptions [Spiritual singing]
And trouble of all kind come from people
By their supposed friends.
Great many people who have committed crimes
Have been turned up to the law by their supposed friends. Amen!

C^1 (0:41)
Sister,
Watch that woman that loves you so well All right!
That she’s always at your house. Amen!
And just as soon as your back is turned,
She is makin’ love to your husband. Amen!

C^2 (0:52)
Brother,
Watch that friend that thinks so much of you
Until he won’t room with nobody else but you. All right!

B^2 (0:58)
There are great many widows in separation
And breakin’ up of families Well!
In the world today
Because of bosom friends Well!
And roomers in your home.

C^3 (1:09)
A great many
Homes have been robbed
Today, All right!
Are robbed by some friend
Who knows all about your house.
Watch that friend Yeah!
That’s in business with you,
Watch that fast friend
And pal of yours
That knows all about the secrets of your life.
All right!
That’s right!

C

Your enemy
Cannot harm you,
But you must watch your friend.
Your best supposed friend today
May be your worst enemy tomorrow.
Amen!

D

Just as soon as Samson’s wife
Had got to him to tell her all,
All of his friends,
Why she went and called
All of his [?].
And she called his enemies
And they rushed in and bound him
And put his eyes out
And made a slave out of him.
Well!

D

Brother,
Watch that close friend of yours.
I thank God
That there are some true friends in the world today.
Damon and Pythias were true friends.
Jonathan and David were true friends.
Christ is a root, never failin’ friend
He is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.
He’ll feed you when you’re hungry.
And when you’re outdoors
And in the storm,
He’ll take you in.
All right, Oh yeah!

D

When everybody’s tryin’ to crush you down
And starve you out of the world,
He’ll open a way for you.
Won’t He do it children?
Have you ever tried Him?
Have I got a witness here?
If you want a,
A true friend in the world,
Jesus will be your friend.
He’ll stick to you ‘til the, until the end.
Amen!

14/23. Deep Down in My Heart
October 28, 1927 (Chicago)
#14: Vocalion (VO 1149) substituted with #23: Vocalion (VO 1149)\textsuperscript{13}

15. Generosity  
January 11, 1928  
Unissued “Test Recording”  
Re-recorded January 18, 1928

16. Throwing Stones  
January 11, 1928  
Unissued “Test Recording”  
Re-recorded January 18, 1928

17. Your Bed Is Too Short and Your Cover Too Narrow  
January 18, 1928; Chicago  
Vocalion (VO 1159), Supertone (Spt S2253)  
Form: A (Intro: Scripture), B (Contemporary relevance), C (God), B, D (Nix advice), B, D, B, E (conclusion)

A  
I take my text in Isaiah twentieth-eighth chapter and twentieth verse.  
“For the bed is shorter than a man  
Can stretch himself on it.  
And the covering is narrower  
Than he can wrap himself up in it.”  
Amen

(0:10)  
Bed’s too short  
And cover’s too narrow.  
Amen

B\textsuperscript{1} (0:13)  
In this subject,  
It shows the restless condition of men and women  
Who try to stand upon an unsafe  
And insufficient foundation.  

B\textsuperscript{2} (0:21)  
It shows a man or woman  
Trying to lay down upon a bed  
That is too short for them to rest  
And sleep with ease.  
And the cover you put there,  
For them to cover up  
And be protected from being exposed.

B\textsuperscript{3} (0:34)  
So many  
Men and women  
Are standing upon a fragile foundation  
Trying to make it through this world.

\textsuperscript{13} See footnote for recording #23, “Deep Down in My Heart.”
You have been fooling the people  
For many years,  
But your foundation is going to give way after a while.

C (0:45)  
It is said  
That you can fool some of the people all the time,  
But you can’t fool all the people all the time.  
And God says,  
That which is covered up, shall be un-covered.  
Amen!

B^4 (0:55)  
Some women  
Are always got men living with them,  
On the ground that he is my roomer  
And my boarder.  
And they get by with it.

D^1 (1:03)  
But that bed  
Is going to be too short for you  
To stretch out on,  
And that cover  
Yes [sung]  
Is too narrow for you to cover up your sins.

D^2 (1:11)  
Somebody  
Is going to find out after a while.  
[Shouts]  
We have so many hypocrites in the church today  
[Shouts and singing]  
That will shout all day Sunday,  
[Spiritual melody]  
And lie and steal  
And deceive one another all the week.

D^3 (1:22)  
But when you come face to face with my God,  
Well, well, well [sung]  
Your bed  
Is going to be too short for you  
And your cover’s gonna be too narrow for ya’.

B^5 (1:30)  
So many people  
Are standing upon a weak foundation  
[Singing]  
That keeps them always tremblin’,  
Afraid somebody  
Is going to tell the world  
What they know on you.

D^4 (1:39)  
Your bed  
That you are trying to stand on and stretch out on  
And protect you from your own sins.  
That bed  
Of hypocrisy,  
That bed  
Of deception,
That bed
Of religion,
That bed
Of morality -
Is going to be too short for you,
And your cover
Is going to be too narrow for you to cover up your sins.

B⁶ (2:00)
Tell your wife the reason why
You stayed out all night,
You were at the lodge meeting,
When there was no lodge meeting.
And tell your husband
When you went out and stayed all day
And came in late,
That you went by and was feeling sick and stopped by your mother’s,
When there was no sickness,
And your mother was gone at work.

E (2:16)
That cover
Is too narrow to cover up your sins.
But by and by,
You’re going to need a long bed
And a cover that is wide enough to cover up your sin.
Jesus Christ is that bed,
His grace is that cover.
He’s long enough for every man to stand on,
And His grace is wide enough to cover up your sin.
That storm may rage
And the winds may blow,
But God will meet you on the other shore.
Isn’t that right children?
Amen.

18. The Matchless King
January 18, 1928; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1158)
Form: A (Bible verse), B (those who had a match), C (Jesus), D (quotes), D, E (conclusion)

A
I take my text in Revelation nineteenth chapter and sixteenth verse.
“And He hath on His vesture
And on His thigh a name written,
King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”
A matchless king.

B¹ (0:12)
This is a king
That has no match.
All of the great leaders of the earth
Have had a match.                               Yes! Well [sung]
Socrates and Plato,
And Aristotle, Demosthenes.                  Well, well, well [sung]
Aeschylus and Sophocles and Euripides.
And Themistocles to Thucydides.
And Phidias and Zeno and
Epicurus and Xenophon.
All have had a match.14

B² (0:30)
Napoleon,
The great Emperor of France
Was a wonder in military history
He led his six hundred thousand men
Into the Battle of Waterloo,
But there he met his match.

B³ (0:41)
Alexander
The Great was a great Grecian warrior [Shouts]
Who conquered the world.
And wept because there was no one else to conquer,
Finally met his match.  Amen

B⁴ (0:50)
Hannibal,
He led his army over the Alps mountain
And looked down on Rome
Sitting on her seven hills,
But he finally met his match.  Alright [sung]

B⁵ (0:57)
Caesar,
The great emperor of Rome,
Had a mighty army
And his power belted the globe, [hums]
But he finally met his match. [Spiritual melody]

B⁶ (1:05)
Moses
Was a great general.
He led Israel for forty long years,
But he finally died. Well
Joshua
Was a great mighty leader.
He had the sun on top on Mt. Gideon.
And the moon in the valley of Aijalon,15
But he finally died. [Spiritual melody]

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14 Nix brings his knowledge of Greek history that he learned while at State University into this sermon.

15 See Joshua 10:11-14, King James Version.
C¹ (1:19)
But here
Is a King that has no match.
He is the King of Kings,
And Lord of Lords.
He came all the way from Glory.
He conquered every battle.
He conquered his death in the grave,
Got up on Sunday morning,
And declared, “I am He that was dead,
But behold,
I’m alive evermore.”

C² (1:41)
And now He’s called the witnesses.
Jacob said,
“The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh come.”¹⁶
Isaiah said,
“He’s the Prince of Peace.”
Jeremiah said,
“He’s a mighty hammer.”
Ezekiel said, “He’s a wheel in a wheel.”¹⁷
Daniel said, “He’s a chief cornerstone.”
John said, “He’s the Lamb of God.”

D² (2:04-2:42)
The lawyer laid down his law books and said,
“He’s my counselor.”
The doctor said,
“He’s my Balm in Gilead.”
The botanist said,
“He’s my Rose of Sharon
And my lily of the valley.”
The carpenter said,
“He’s my sure foundation.”
The astronomer
Laid down his microscope
And said, “He’s my bright and morning star.”
The farmer
Came up out of the farm
And said, “He’s my well of water in a dry place.”
The baker tore up his baked bread,
And said, “He’s my grain of life.”

¹⁶ See Genesis 49:10, King James Version.

The old battle-scarred child of God,
Said, “He’s my rock in a weary land.
And, my shelter in a time of storm.”

Well [sung]

E [2:42 – 2:48]
Have I got a witness here?
Is he the captain of my salvation?
Amen.

19. Three Boys in a Strange Land
January 18, 1928
Vocalion (VO1159), Supertone (S2253)
Form: A (Intro: Scripture), B (Bible story), C (conclusion)

A
I take my text in Daniel, third chapter and seventeenth verse.
“Our God whom we serve
Is able to deliver us from a burning fiery furnace.”
Amen!
Three boys
In a strange land.

B¹ (0:12)
Nebuchadnezzar
Had conquered most of the nations of the world
And now he planned to unite all of the kingdoms
By an image of gold.
He built an image of gold
Sixty cubits high
That could be seen all over Babylon.

Well, well [sung]

(0:25)
Delegates
From the whole empire
Were called to meet on that great occasion.
They gathered around the golden image,
As it stood glittering in the sun.

Hallelujah [sung]

(singing)

B² (0:34)
When everything was ready,
The king cried out,
“To you
It is commanded,
All ye people,
Nation and language,

[humming spiritual melody]

(0:42)
When you hear the sound of the music,
You must fall down and worship this golden image
And whosoever falleth not down,
The same hour,
Shall be cast in the burning fiery furnace.”

B³ (0:52)
And when the music was sound,
A mighty multitude fell down
To worship this idol god.

But Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to bow.
And the King said,
“You’ve got to bow.
I’ll give you another chance.”

Well, well, well [sung]

The music sound,
Everybody fell down.
But Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego
Begin to say to each other
“What are you going to do?
To bow
Is to live
And to stand is to die.”

Well, well, well [sung]

But Shadrach said,
“We’re down here
In a strange land
A long way from home.
If I must die,
O, let me die,
And hope in Jesus’ blood.”

Well, well, well [sung]

Meshach said,
“Death cannot make my soul afraid,
If God be with me there.”

Well, well, well [sung]

Abednego said,
“I am not ashamed on my Lord
[indecipherable].”

Well, well, well [sung]

The God we serve
Is a man of war,
And the Lord is His name.
We are going to stand by our God,
Down here in a strange land.

Yes [sung]

But Shadrach said,
“I’ll send for the Father.”
Meshach said,
“I’ll send for the Son.”
Abednego said, “I’ll send for the Holy Ghost.”
And they called on God.
“And oh Lord,
We are your children
Down in Babylon,
In a strange land,
A long way from home.”

“You told us a long time ago
You would be with us in the sixth supper,
And in the seventh You would not forsaken us.”

B\(^6\) (2:14)
And God heard their prayers,
Angels laid down their harps.
Michael said, “I’ll go down.”
Raphael said, “I’ll go down.”
Gabriel said, “I’ll go down.”

B\(^7\) (2:23)
But Jesus,
The Lamb of God,
Reached over the [indecipherable],
And dropped the old [indecipherable],
Came all the way down,
Walked in the fiery furnace,
Cooled off the flame.

C (2:36)
Brother, if you trust in God,
You can walk through the fire,
And the fire won’t burn.
He’ll stand by His children.
Amen.

20. Your Time is Out
January 18, 1928; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1157)
Form: A (Intro: Scripture), B (God), C (the earth), D (Bible story), E (Nix’s advice), D\(^2\) (conclusion)

A
I take my text in Genesis seventh chapter and first verse.
“And the Lord said unto Noah,
‘Come thou and all thy house into the ark;
For thee have I seen righteous before me
In this generation.’”

Your time is out.

B (0:14)
God is the speaker in this text.
God is grieved.
His heart pains him.
God had done all that He could do
To convince man that He loved him.
And that He was a God of mercy,
And a God of pity,
Amen [sung]
Amen [sung]
Amen [sung]
Amen [sung]
And a God of compassion.

C¹ (0:28)
  The fertile fields of man’s choice
  Had brought forth good, bountiful [indecipherable].
  The sparkling waters of the mighty deep
  Had quenched his thirst.
  The earth
  Had given birth to lovely flowers.
  The sun
  And all of its glory and beauty,
  Shone upon his pathway.
  The moon by night
  Had turned her soft radiant rays down on,
  Upon man.
  The stars
  Had marched before his eyes.
  The heaven declared
  The glory of God
  And the firmament lit to unfold his handiwork.
  The winter wind
  Had withered the green grass of the forest.
  But the morning spring rain
  And burning warmth
  Had invigorated the bosom of nature.
  The trees,
  And many creatures again stood forth,
  In all their precious beauty.

C² (1:08)
  The flowers
  Of the fields that demand [?] Their sweet-smelling fragrance.
  The birds
  Of the air flew over his head
  And singed a sweet song of springtime.
  The turtle dove
  Mourned and contrasts
  With the myriad [indecipherable] of the forest.

C³ (1:21)
  All nature
  Told man to look up and see God,
  And thank God for his being.
  But man had grown ungrateful,
  His time was out.

D¹ (1:29)
  Yes,
  People scoffed at Noah
  Who tried to obey God
  And follow after him.
They scoffed old Noah’s God.
But Noah said,
“You may scoff and ridicule at my God,
But while I live I’m going to serve Him.”
They tell me for a hundred and twenty years,
Noah preached and built on Noah’s ark.

E¹ (1:46)
But Brother,
When God has finished His work,
Then your doom will come.
Your time is out.

D² (1:52)
As they generally were eating and drinking
and dancing,
One morning
A black cloud rose in the east,
One in the west and one in the south
And one in the north.
The wind began to blow.
The whole heaven
Were draped in mourning.
A black drape was hung over the sun.
The zig-zag lightning begin to play
A limber tale and a bluesy song.
And the murmuring thunder were heard rolling.
And the crowd,
In alarm,
Begin to run into the mountain.

D³ (2:16)
The birds
Begin to soar to the sky.
But man had no strength to lead him,
Because his time was out.
His doom had come.
And it begin to rain
For forty days and forty nights.
I could hear many women and children crying,
“Oh Noah,
Please let me in.”
But Noah said,
“My God has locked the door,
And carried the key away.
Your time is out.”

E² (2:39)
Brother,
Before your time is out,
God wants you
To get right with Him.
Seek Jesus now.
Amen.

21. Robbing God
January 18, 1928; Chicago
Vocalion (V01157)
Form: A (Intro: Scripture), B (God), C (man’s actions), D (Nix’s personal advice)

A
I take my text in Malachi, third chapter and eighth verse.
“Will a man rob God?”
Robbing God.

B¹ (0:05)
My dear friends, just think,
Can you imagine will a man be so low as to try to rob God? Amen
Let us consider who God is.
God is the intelligent, self-existent, infinite,
And Perfect Spirit.
The Creator
Of all things.
In Him, all things have their source, Purport and end.

B² (0:27)
Now will a man rob God?
Oh, well [sung]
God made man in His own image,
Oh, well [sung]
And likeness,
And blessed him
And give him power to rule the world.
Yes
And now will a man rob his creator?
Yes

C¹ (0:37)
Men have been robbing one another [Singing]
Ever since the creation of the world.
They have been robbing the rich,
Robbing the poor,
Robbing the blind,
[Singing]
And robbing the dead,
And robbing everybody.
But brother, will a man
Rob God?
Yes

C² (0:52)
A great many of the banks [Spiritual melody]
And the stores
And all kinds of business places
Are robbed
Have been robbed by someone
Someone on the inside
That knew all about everything

C³ (1:02)
But will a man rob God?
When you rob
And steal from God’s church,
You’re robbing God.
When you hold back a part of God’s money
Like Ananias and Sapphira,
You are robbing God.
When you rob God’s people,
You’re robbing God.

B³ (1:18)
Yes,
God blessed you with,
With good health and strength,
And give you six days
In the week to work for yourself.
And asks that you go and keep the church on Sunday,
And worship Him in service,
And you stay home all the day long.
And rob God out of His service.

C⁴ (1:35)
Men and women
Will go to the theaters
On Sunday
And pay a big price
For a seat in the theater,
And spend their time,
In frivolity
And fun.
And the church of Jesus Christ
Is suffering for your help
And your prayers
And your presence.

C⁵ (1:49)
Brother you’re robbing God.
You’re robbing God
Of your time and your talent.
God has given you good talent
To pray and sing,
But you’re using that talent for the devil.
And giving your time to the devil.

D¹ (2:02)
Brother,
What men and women need today
Is that old-time religion.

That religion
That will make you
Stay off the ballroom floor.
That religion
That will keep your feet off the gambling den.
That religion
That will make you love God,
And your neighbor,
And go to church on Sunday
And stop robbing God.

Well, well, well [sung]

(Spiritual melody)

D² (2:24)

Brother,
Have I got a witness here?
Have you got that kind of religion
That will make you obey God
And stop robbing God?
You’re not robbing God,
But you’re robbing yourself.

I want to tell you today
You’re robbing God.
Amen.

22. Done Found My Lost Sheep

January 18, 1928; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1158)
Form: A (Intro: Scripture), B (parable), C (song),

A

I take my text in Luke fifteenth chapter and sixth verse.
“And he calleth to gather his friends
And neighbors saying, ‘Rejoice with me.
For I found my sheep which was lost.’”
Subject: Done found my lost sheep.

B (0:13)

I want you to notice this beautiful parable
Of the lost sheep.
Great many leaders
Are only interested in certain particular members of their flock.
But God wants you to go out yonder in the wilderness,
And bring in that lost sheep
That hath strayed away.

(0:29)

This is a two-fold parable
That relates to a sinner
That needs to be brought to Jesus Christ.
It also relates to a back-slider
Who’s wandered away from the fold
And needs to come in.

(0:39)

We’ve been preaching about it,

(Speaking)
And now let us sing about it:

C (0:43)  
Song “Done Found My Lost Sheep”\(^\text{18}\)  

[Chorus]

Done found my lost sheep  
Done found my lost sheep  
Done found my lost sheep  
Hallelujah  
Done found my lost sheep  
Done found my lost sheep  
Done found my lost sheep

(0:59) [Verse]

My Lord had one hundred sheep,  
One of them did go astray.  
And that left just ninety-nine.  
Go into the wilderness, seek and find.  
If you find him bring him back  
Across your shoulders, on your back.  
Tell the neighbors all around,  
That lost sheep has done been found.

(1:20) [Chorus]

Done found my lost sheep  
Done found my lost sheep  
Done found my lost sheep  
Hallelujah  
Done found my lost sheep  
Done found my lost sheep  
Done found my lost sheep

(1:37) [Verse]

In that Resurrection Day,  
Sinner can’t find no hiding place.  
Go to the mountain, mountain will move.  
Run to the hill, the hill runs too.  
Sinner man tremble on trembling ground,  
Poor lost sinner that’s never been found.  
Sinner why don’t you stop and pray?  
Then you’ll hear your shepherds say,

(1:57) [Chorus]

Done found my lost sheep  
Done found my lost sheep  
Done found my lost sheep

Hallelujah
Done found my lost sheep
Done found my lost sheep
Done found my lost sheep

(2:13) [Nix speaks]:
Sisters, let’s sing it:

(2:17) [Chorus]
Done found my lost sheep
Done found my lost sheep
Done found my lost sheep
Hallelujah
Done found my lost sheep
Done found my lost sheep
Done found my lost sheep

14/23. Deep Down in My Heart
January 18, 1928
#14: Vocalion (VO 1149)
#23: Vocalion (VO 1149)19
Form: A (Introduction), B (Religion), C (Song)

A
My dear brothers and sisters,
I am to talk to you this morning on the subject: religion deep down in my heart. Amen
Everybody that’s talking about religion haven’t got religion. Amen
Religion’s better felt than told. Is that right children? Yes

B (0:12)
Religion
Is love deep down in your heart. Amen
You must have the fallowed ground of your heart torn up [Singing]
By the plowshare of the Gospel
And the seed of love sown in
Then you can cry out and sing:

C (0:26) “Deep Down in My Heart”
[Chorus]
Deep, deep, deep down in my heart
In my heart, in my heart
Deep, deep, deep down in my heart
Deep down in my heart

19 Note: “On the sheet for the first selection (masters C1563-4) [“Deep Down in My Heart] a notation reads: ‘Above masters to be substituted for master in production of record A-1149.’” – either Nix was not satisfied with the performance or the label was concerned of a technical issue. If the sermon was selling well, they would want it re-recorded. See Laird, Brunswick Records: A Discography of Recordings, 1916-1931, Vol. 3: Chicago and Regional Sessions, 998.
(0:41)

I've got good religion down in my heart
Oh, in my heart, in my heart
I've got good religion down in my heart
Deep down in my heart

(0:56) [Chorus]

Deep, deep, deep down in my heart
In my heart, in my heart
Deep, deep, deep down in my heart
Deep down in my heart

(1:11) [Verse]

I can feel the spirit moving down in my heart
Oh, in my heart, in my heart
I can feel the spirit moving down in my heart
Deep down in my heart

(1:26) [Chorus]

Deep, deep, deep down in my heart
Oh, in my heart, in my heart
Deep, deep, deep down in my heart
Deep down in my heart

(1:41) [Verse]

There's a little wheel a-turning down in my heart
Oh, in my heart, in my heart
There's a little wheel a-turning down in my heart
Deep down in my heart

(1:56) [Chorus]

Deep, deep, deep down in my heart
Oh, in my heart, in my heart
Deep, deep, deep down in my heart
Deep down in my heart

(2:11) [Verse]

There is joy, joy, joy down in my heart
Oh, in my heart, in my heart
There is joy, joy, joy down in my heart
Deep down in my heart

(2:27) [Chorus]

Deep, deep, deep down in my heart
Oh, in my heart, in my heart
Deep, deep, deep down in my heart
Deep down in my heart

24. Generosity
January 18, 1928; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1156)
Form: A (Intro: Scripture), B (Theme of generosity), C (contemporary relevance), D (Nix’s advice)

A

488
I take my text in Luke
Sixth chapter and thirty-eighth verse.
“Give, and it shall be given to you,
Good measure, pressed down,
Shaken together, and running over.”
Generosity.

B¹ (0:11)
My dear friends
I am to speak to you on the subject generosity.
That’s a mighty big word
But it means a whole lot.

B² (0:18)
God Himself sets the example
Of generosity,
Because He was generous in giving His son to die for the world.
So generosity
Is one of the main springs in Christian religion.
It carries with it
The idea of giving,
And giving
And whoever gives
Must give liberally.

C¹ (0:35)
Nobody likes to be bothered
With anyone that is so tight.
Even women these days
Haven’t got much time to lose with a man
That is so tight.

C² (0:43)
They are looking for men
Who are liberal,
A man
That is liberal in giving
To others
And giving to the church.

B³ (0:50)
God
Is liberal in giving to him.
But He says,
“He which soweth bountifully,
Shall reap bountifully.
And he which soweth sparingly,
Shall reap also sparingly.”
For God loves
A cheerful giver.

C³ (1:03)
A tight-fist person
Is just like the Dead Sea,  
That’s always ready to take in  
And never give out.  

C\textsuperscript{4} (1:09)  
Some people  
Always  
Have nothing to give,  
But always got something to sell.  

C\textsuperscript{5} (1:15)  
The reason why  
So many of our churches these days  
Are having such hard times  
And trying to raise money to pay off their bills:  
We have so many tight members in the church.  
They are liberal  
And generous in giving to the lodge,  
And giving to worldly pleasures  
And good time sport.  
But they are tight when it comes  
Ah, to the church.  

C\textsuperscript{6} (1:32)  
Some folks think  
That the preacher gets all the money  
That’s raised in the churches.  
And when the church puts on a rally,  
A half the members will stay at home all day  
With their rheumatism  
And lumbago.  
They have what you call...  
And they go to work on Monday.  
They have what you call the one-day sickness,  
And that’s on rally day.  
And then they’re the first ones  
To always want to know  
What did you do with all that money that was raised on Sunday.  

B\textsuperscript{4} (1:55)  
God says,  
“The liberal heart shall grow fat.”  
The people that are liberal with God,  
Why, God is liberal with them.  
God will always open the way for them.  
They always have money and friends  
Because when you got friends,  
You’ve got money.  
He will feed you when you’re hungry,  
Make friends when you are friendless.  
Won’t He do it children?  
Have I got a witness here?
Yes, generous giving brings joy to the soul. It gives joy to you when you have helped the poor. And the church of living God. It's a generosity spirit of a child of God.

Whatever you do, be generous in giving, generous in service, generous with your prayers. Amen.

25. Throwing Stones
January 18, 1928; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1156)
Form: A (Intro: Scripture), B (Bible story), C (contemporary relevance), D (Nix’s advice)

A
I take my text in John eighth chapter and seventh verse. “He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone.”

B1 (0:09)
They tell us that these men had caught this poor woman in the act of adultery. And now they are planning to stone her to death just because they had the power to do so. Now they are trying to decide which one would have the right to throw the first stone. And while the dispute was going on they looked down the road and saw Jesus coming and decided they would present this matter to Him and let Him pass His decision on this case.

B2 (0:37)
And when they set to determine it, Jesus came up and began to write on the ground, “All you liars can’t throw a stone.” And one man walked up and read it and said, “I told a lie this morning and I can’t throw a stone.”

B3 (0:48)
And then Jesus kept on writing
“None of you drunkards
Can throw a stone.”
Another man walked up and read it
And said, “I had a drink this morning
And I can’t throw a stone.”
[Burning]

And Jesus kept on writing,
“No midnight rambler
Can throw a stone.”
Another man walked up and said,
“I was out all last night
And didn’t get in until this morning,
And I can’t throw a stone.”

And after a while,
Jesus raised up
And every man had gone because
Each one of these who was so anxious
To stone this woman to death
Was guilty of something equally as bad.

Brother,
We have so many people
In this world today
Who are never satisfied
Unless they are throwing stones at somebody.
Always
Running somebody down
And your past life
Is just as crooked as a snake.

Some preachers
Are always fighting each other
And throwing stones at one another.
Some businessmen and people
In all ranks of business profession,
Are always throwing stones at one another.
And you can hear them saying,
“Well so-and-so is alright
But…”
Now, that word “but” is a stone.
That they use to reflect on your standing
To make the people think there’s something wrong about you.

Brother,
There is too much fighting
And throwing stones in the Christian church today.
To do the call of God much good. [Spiritual melody]
There is too much stone-throwing
In the church.

Can’t pray
Without throwing stones in your prayer.
Can’t talk in covenant meetings
Without throwing stones at somebody.

And sometimes the man or woman
Who has the blackest heart
Has, his life is spotted as a leopard,
And he is actually the first one,
Always will throw a stone at you.
People who live in glass houses
Should never throw stones.

Well, well [sung]

Remember,
While you are throwing stones at somebody,
Somebody will throw back at you.
And when people plot after you,
They’re going to get you
If they have to dig up some of your dead folks outta the grave.

[Speaking]

Brother,
If you don’t want to be stoned
Don’t throw stones at anybody.
What you
Sow you will surely reap.

All you stone-throwers,
You back-bitin’, long-tongued liars,
You gonna reap just what you sow.
One of these days.
Amen.

Well, well [sung]

Well

October 26, 1928; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1217)
Form: A (Intro: Theme), B (reflection), C (Nix’s advice)

A
Ladies and gentlemen,
I bring to you my Christmas message
This morning
From the subject:
“Begin a new life on Christmas day.”

Well, well
Yes!
Twelve months have come and gone,
And many who start out with us this year
Have fallen by the way.
And when we look back over our twelve-month’s journey,
We can truthfully say,
Through many dangers, toil, and snares,
We have already come.
Many has been our conflicts,
Ups and downs.
But God has brought us
Safely through all the way.
But all of your devilment and meanness
And disobedience this year,
God has
Put His weight up with you,
And all of your meanness.

So I bring you a message this morning:
You had better change your ways,
For God may not stand next year
What He’s already stood for this year.

First,
You got to change your way of living.
Too many men and women
Are living together without being married.
You’re living on the installment plan.
You’re trying them out
By living by the week,
Trying to shun the real manly responsibility.
Living
With one until you get tired,
And then get you a new one
And try them out.

And starting out this year,
You got to change your way of living.

Second,
You got to change your Christian profession.
Too many men and women
Have been whipping the devil around the stump this year,
Trying to hold on with God
And flirting with the devil at the same time.

You’re blowing the Christian horn on Sunday,
And doing business with the devil on weekdays.
You’ve got to turn over a new leaf this year. A lot of people claim to be Christians, Talking Their way to heaven.

(1:37)
They will stand up in the church on Sunday, And in covenant meetings and class meetings, And you can hear them saying, “Brothers and sisters, I’m a child of God. Going to heaven in a haste and high speed. Ain’t gonna stop at no place Until I get to the holy place.”

C⁵ (1:54)
And you go right out And pass by your brothers and sisters Without speaking to them. And try to pay your house rent By playing policy wheels And giving moonshine parties on Saturday night, Or trying to get by without working. You got to change your Christian trumpet And play the game fair with God.

C⁶ (2:12)
A great many people Are trying to cheat their way through this world. Some are trying to steal their way through the world. Some are lying their way through the world. Some are bumming and b-beggin’ their way through the world. Trying to get through this world any way Just so you get through.

C⁷ (2:26)
But brother, Christmas day might be your changing station. For God Is getting tired of your crooked ways. You men who have been staying out all night, You’ve got to come in now. You women Who run the streets all day long, You got to come in.

C⁸ (2:41)
Change your way And begin a new life. Turn over a new leaf. God is not gonna stand this year What He stood for last year.

(2:49)
Your husband’s not going to stand
What he’s already stood for.
Your wife is not going to put up with
What she’s already put up with.
You’ve got to turn over
A new leaf
And play the game fair with God.

(3:01)
And now
I will pause just one moment….

[To be continued in Part II]

27. Begin A New Life On Christmas Day – Part II
October 26, 1928; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1217)
Form: A (Introduction), B (contemporary relevance), C (Nix’s advice), D (Song), C

A
I was just telling you,
You’ve got to change
And begin a new life.

Yeah

B (0:04)
We’re living in a bad age.
Our churches
Have so many liars and hypocrites
And backbiters and conjurers
And trick-workers in them,
Until you can’t hardly have a prayer meeting.

Yeah
Alright
[spiritual melody]

C¹ (0:16)
You card-players,
Got to throw away your cards.
You dice-rollers,
Got to get off of your knees.
You whiskey-drinkers,
Got to throw away your bottle.
You Sunday-school teachers,
And choir members,
Have got to come off the barroom floor.

[shouts]
Yes!
Alright!
[shouts]

C² (0:31)
You got to change your ways
You turn over a new leaf this year.
For God’s sake make a change.
For God is getting tired of your crooked ways.
The road that you are traveling,
Is the road that leads down
Into eternal damnation
And destruction.

Alright
Preach! Preach!
Well, well, well [sung]
Yes!
[speaking]
[singing]
C³ (0:48)
You ought to change your ways
For the sake of your home.
Change your ways for the sake of your family.
Change for the sake of your health.
Change your ways for the sake of your child.
Change for the sake of your soul.
And for God’s sake, turn over a new leaf this year.

[spiritual melody]

C⁴ (1:05)
If you will change your way of living,
And change your Christian profession,
If you’ll play the game fair with God,
If you turn over a new leaf this year,
And begin a new life,
You’ll have a better home,
You will have better churches.
Husband and wife will get along better,
Will make this a better world to live in.
And when you come to die,
You soul
Can shout and sing with God,
Deep down in your heart

[shouts]

D (1:33)
[“What a Great Change Since I Been Born”]

What a great change, since I been born
What a great change, since I been born
What a great change, since I been born
What a great change, since I been born
The way I used to live, I don’t live no more
The way I used to live, I don’t live no more
The way I used to live, I don’t live no more
What a great change, since I been born

The lies I used to tell, I don’t tell no more
The lies I used to tell, I don’t tell no more
The lies I used to tell, I don’t tell no more
What a great change, since I been born

What a great change, since I been born
What a great change, since I been born
What a great change, since I been born
What a great change, since I been born

C⁵ (2:48)
Brother!
As you start out this year,
Make up your mind

[shouts]

Well, well [sung]
You’re gonna change your ways. [shouts]
Turn over a new leaf, [shouts]
And begin a new life this year. [shouts]
And when you come to die, [shouts]
Heaven will be your home.
Amen.

28. Hang Out Your Sign
October 26, 1928; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1247)
Form: A (Intro: Scripture), B (Biblical past), C (contemporary relevance), D (Nix’s advice)

A
“And this shall be a sign unto you.”
Subject: Hang out your sign.
Alright

B (0:04)
People in the days of Christ
Wanted to know
Of the coming of the future,
By signs.
[speaking]

C1 (0:11)
And men and women
Have been looking for signs
All down through the ages of the world.
And today,
Everybody’s got a sign of some kind.
If you want the world to know who you are,
Just hang out your sign.
[singing] Yes, yes
Well [sung]
[shouts] well, well [sung]

C2 (0:23)
A great many people are governed by signs.
They say,
If your feet ache,
That’s a sign
Of bad weather.
But I’d rather think,
It’s a sign of bad feet,
And the best remedy for that
Would be a hot foot bath.
[spiritual melody] [shouts]
Alright

C3 (0:36)
And they tell me,
If a black cat crosses the street in front of you, go back,
‘Cause that’s a bad luck sign.
Yeah
And if a man
Buys a woman a pair of stockings,
The sign is,
She will walk away from him.
[shouts]

And if he gives
A running watch,
She’ll run away from him.
Alright

C⁴ (0:53)
The world
Is full of signs.
Everybody’s got a sign.
So, what is your sign?

(0:58)
If you want
The people to know who you are,
And what you are,
Just hang out your sign.

C⁵ (1:04)
All businessmen have signs
To advertise their business.
Doctors and professional men,
Have signs to let the world know
Who they are.
Lodge members have signs
Of all kinds
By which they know each other.

And if you want people to know
Who you are,
Just hang out your sign.

C⁶ (1:22)
The woman
Who belongs to the good-time society,
Have a sign.
In fact, the fast-life
And flirtatious crowd is moving by a sign.

(1:31)
This modern dress of the day
Is a fashionable sign.
Dresses very short,
But interesting,
And it’s a disgrace to the society.

(1:40)
So, you will see women,
Walking down the streets
With their red-painted lips and powdered faces,
Or short tight skirts, window-pane stockings,
Walking on their shame,
Why, this shall be a sign unto you.

If you want men to know who you are,
Just hang out your sign.
C\(^7\) (1:56)

People are governed by signs. [shouts]
The company you keep why it tells what you are. Alright
If you want to know the world,
The world will know who you are - hang out your sign. [shouts]

(2:04)

These people, if you want to know Yes
What’s going on in their house, [spiritual melody]
Why read their sign
That’s on the outside.

D\(^1\) (2:10)

If you belong to the world, hang out your sign.
In a good time and fast life crowd,
Why hang out your sign. Yes
If you are a child of God, hang out your sign.
If people find,
That you hang out, tells the world what you are. Alright
Everybody [shouts]
Is reading your sign.

D\(^2\) (2:25)

You want to be careful [shouts]
That you haven’t put up the wrong sign. Yes
You will be misjudged and misunderstood, [singing]
If you have up the wrong sign.

D\(^3\) (2:33)

Your sign [spiritual melody]
That you have hanging up Alright
May welcome the world. Alright
But down in your heart, you may be innocent as a lamb. [shouts]
The reason why so many
Is knocking on your door, Alright
You may have up the wrong sign. [shouts and singing]

D\(^4\) (2:45)

Take down your sign, Alright
If you don’t want the world to come in. Have mercy
If you change your sign, Alright
Better change your company. [shouts]
God has a sign,
The devil has a sign [shouts]
Whose sign are you on?
Amen. Alright

29. Sleeping In A Dangerous Time

October 26, 1928; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1247)
Form: A (Intro: Scripture), B (Contemporary relevance), C (Nix’s advice)
My text is found in the book of Jonah,  
First chapter and sixth verse.  
“What meanest thou, O sleeper?”  
Subject: Sleeping in a dangerous time.  

A great deal of the trouble of this world  
Comes because too many people are sleeping in a dangerous time.  
They are sleeping  
When they ought to be wide awake  
And their eyes open.  
Sleeping  
While the storm of life is on.  
They are sleeping  
While men and women  
All around them are dying.  

Think of a man  
Sleeping while his house is on fire and burning down.  
Some men are asleep  
With their eyes wide open.  
They just can’t see some things  
That they – going on  
That they oughta see.  
They are too dumb to see what they should see.  

Some of this partnership business  
Is a pain to me when you think about it.  
One partner’s doing all the managing,  
And taking all the money  
While the other partner  
Is sleeping  
On the job  
With his eyes wide open.  

Just think  
Of some of these roomers  
You have in your home.  
They just can’t room with nobody else but you  
They love you so well  
And think so much of you  
Until they just must come and live with you.  
He wants to help you pay your house rent  
And when your back is turned  
He is doing everything in your house  
That you are doing.  

He’s buying your wife’s clothes  
And giving her his payroll  

B^1 (0:09)  
Alright   
Amen  

B^2 (0:27)  
Well [sung]  
Well, well [sung]  
[singing]  
[singing]  
Alright  

B^3 (0:43)  
Well, well, well [sung]  

C^1 (0:56)  
Hallelujah  

C^2 (1:16)  
[shouts]
At the end of the week.
And you are wondering why it is
That you wife’s getting dressed so fine
Alright
And have so plenty,
So much spending money
Yes
To do everything she wants to do
And with the small amount that you’re giving her.
The truth of the matter is
Why, you are sleeping in a dangerous time.
[shouts]

C³ (1:36)
When you go to work on the day shift,
[spiritual melody]
That roomer goes to work on the night shift.
And when you change to the night shift,
[multiple singers]
He changes to the day shift.
So that when you’re working in the day,
He’s in your home in the day.
And when you’re working at night,
He’s in your home in the night.

C⁴ (1:51)
Some women
[multiple singers]
Are sleeping
While their husbands are going
To the lodge meetings every night.
And when he comes home just before day
In the morning,
He tells her that the lodge held him all night long.
[multiple singers]
He had so much work to do
And poor thing,
She believes his story.

C⁵ (2:09)
But Sister!
[spiritual melody]
You are just sleeping
In a dangerous time.
And when you wake up,
Some woman other has -
Some other woman has your husband.

C⁶ (2:17)
So many mothers and fathers
Are sleeping
While their sons and daughters are roaming the streets in the dark hours of night.
Sometimes
When you think they’re in school,
They are somewhere else
And sometimes,
When you think they’re going to the place where they told you they were going,
They’re at some other place.

C⁷ (2:33)
And when you wake up,
[spiritual melody]
Why it’s too late then. Your daughter is ruined, Her virtue’s gone. You’ve been sleeping too long

C\(^8\) (2:46)

“What meanest thou, O sleeper?” Yes
You’re sleeping in a dangerous time. [spiritual melody]
Wake up!
Look all around! Yeah
Open your eyes!
And see what’s going on.
Amen.

30. The Black Diamond Express to Hell – Part 3
August 24, 1929; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1421)
Form: A (Intro: Black Diamond theme), B (Devil), C (stations)

A

The second section
Of the Black Diamond Express Train is now pulling out for hell. Alright
Sin
Is the engineer. Alright
Pleasure is the headlight, Yes
The Devil is the conductor. Alright

B (0:10)

So many people are going to hell
Until the first section could not carry them all. [Speaking] Yes
The Devil has been busy day and night
Getting his crowd ready
For the Black Diamond. Alright

(0:19)

He has a fine personality. Yes
He is a sheikh of sheikhs. Yeah!
The Black Diamond
Is now ready to pull out for hell. Yes
The devil cries out,
“All aboard for hell.” Alright

C\(^1\) (0:29)

First station
Is Murderer’s Road. Yeah
Got a big crowd of murderers down there. [Speaking]
Old murderers and young murderers.
They’ll murder your feelings
And destroy your reputation. Yes
But they got to go to hell on the Black Diamond. [Speaking]

C\(^2\) (0:41)

Next station
Is Immoral Switch. [Speaking]
That’s where young women
Lose their womanhood and virtue. [Speaking]
Old girls [Spiritual melody]
From good families
Are led astray by bad women
And no-count men.
But they got to go to hell on the Black Diamond Train.

C³ (0:55)
Next station [Spiritual melody]
Is Gossiping Town. Yes
A big crowd of tattlers
And gossipers down there, [Speaking]
Always going from door to door. Yes
They’re talking about everything and everybody.
Well they got to go to hell on the Black Diamond Train. Alright

C⁴ (1:06)
Next station [Speaking]
Is Knockersville.
A big crowd of knockers down there. [Spiritual melody]
Always knocking on the preacher, Preach!
And knocking on the church
And knocking on the lodges. [Speaking]
They’re knocking on Heaven [Spiritual melody]
And they’re knocking on hell.
You may knock the Black Diamond,
But you got to go to hell on the Black Diamond Train.

C⁵ (1:22)
Next station [Spiritual melody]
Is Cheating Town.
A big crowd down there
Up trying to get up in the world
By cheating everybody Yes
At some of these grocery stores.
You can never get full weight No
At some of these meat markets.
When the butcher weighs your meat,
He’ll weigh his hands with it. [Speaking and singing]
At some of these business stores.
When if you don’t get a receipt when you pay your bill,
They’ll make you pay it over again. [Speaking]
And they got to go to hell on the Black Diamond Train.

C⁶ (1:45)
Next station [Spiritual melody]
Is Dishonest Gallow [?]. Yeah
There’s a big crowd down there Uh-huh
That won’t do right to save your life.
They’ll borrow money from you [Speaking]
And never pay you back. [Speaking]
They owe everybody in the neighborhood,
And if you ask them for it,
They’ll get mad with ya’ [Speaking]
And stop speaking to you.
They always buying on credit
And never pay their bill.
They move every month. [Spiritual melody]
To keep from paying their rent
But they got to go to hell on the Black Diamond Train.

C⁷ (2:10)
Next station
Is Hypocrite’s Flag. [Speaking]
A big crowd of hypocrites is at church down there.
They’ll pray and shout all day Sunday
And raise hell all day Monday. That’s right
Alright
They claim to be your friend
But they’re running with your enemies. Okay
But they got to go to hell on the Black Diamond Train.

C⁸ (2:25)
And now the Black Diamond
Will stop just a minute
To see if there’s anybody
That would like to get off. [Speaking]

31. The Black Diamond Express to Hell – Part 4
August 24, 1929; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1421)
Form: A (Intro: continuation of theme), B (stations), C (contemporary women), D (results of riding on the Black Diamond), E (Nix’s advice), F (song), E

A
A mother’s girl
Who promised to meet her mother in Heaven
That’s right
Has just stepped off the Black Diamond
And now the Black Diamond
Will continue its trip on to Hell [speaking]

B¹ (0:08)
Next station
Is Fussin’ Town Yeah
A big crowd of women down there Yeah
Who’d rather fuss than to eat
Some go to bed fussin’
Get up fussin’ Yes
They go to work fussin’ Alright
And come home fussin’ [Spiritual melody]
They’ll raise a fuss anywhere Alright
If it’s possible,
They’d raise a fuss in Heaven
But they got to go to Hell on the Black Diamond Train

B2 (0:28)
Next station
[Spiritual melody]
Is a twentieth-century style shop
It’s where the women
Get the latest styles
For the modern dress

C1 (0:35)
The dresses the women are wearing these days
Are almost a knock-out
Some are wearing Crêpe de chine and Georgette
That you can see clear through them
Some are wearing satin-beaded dresses
With low necks and low backs
And all of them
Are wearing
Short, tight skirts cut off above the knees
Through-peep shoes
Window-pane stockings and socks
And some no stockings at all
With painted lips and powdered faces
[Moaning] Alright
They will charm you
And then talk to you with their eyes

C2 (1:02)
I tell you
This modern dress today
Is mighty hard on the men
You can find
These women in large numbers
On Hastings Street in Detroit
And on Forty-Seventh Street and South Parkway21
In Chicago
Along Market Street in St. Louis
On Eighteenth Street in Kansas City
On Lennox Avenue in New York
On Beale Street in Memphis
On South Rampart in New Orleans
And on Decatur Street in Atlanta, Georgia

C3 (1:29)

And when these women ride on the train
With their legs all crossed          [Singing]
The men will have to almost close their eyes
And the thing that looks so bad now
Old women
Have cut off their dresses
Above their knees
Trying to look giddy and gay.

D (1:42)
But the Black Diamond will give them
A fast ride on down to hell.
And when the Black Diamond
Will hit the main line
And make a fast run for Hell
She’ll land in Hell
While the Hell-fire’s burning
And while the Hell-hounds are howling
And when the Devil
Will pull out the linchpin of damnation
And a lake of fire and brimstone
The devil will unload in Hell

E¹ (2:03)
Oh mother’s son
Get off the Black Diamond Train
Oh, midnight rambler
Get off the Black Diamond Train
Ever since I got off the Black Diamond Train
My soul has been singing:

F (2:15)
Well the awful sinner
When the world’s on fire
Won’t you want Christ’s bosom
For to be your pillow
Oh hide me over
In the Rock of ages
Rock of ages
Cleft for me

E2 (2:35)
Brothers!
If you don’t get off
The Black Diamond Train
She’ll land you in Hell
Just as sure as you’re born
Amen.

32. Love Is A Thing Of The Past
August 24, 1929; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1431)
A
My brothers and sisters
I’m to talk to you this morning
From the subject,
Love is a thing of the past. Alright

B¹ (0:07)
There was a time years ago,
When it paid a man and a woman to love each other.
People used to marry because they loved each other,
And that love would hold them together,
Until death. Yes

B² (0:18)
Just think
Of a man and a woman living together forty and fifty years,
And still love each other.
And the longer they stayed together,
The better they loved each other.
But all that crowd are dead now.
And love today is a thing of the past. Have mercy Lord

B³ (0:33)
A man is crazy
If he thinks a young woman of today
Will live with him forty years.
And the young men of today
Are not studying about, staying with no one woman forty years.
They both need to be congratulated
If they live together one year.

B⁴ (0:48)
People these days don’t marry for love.
Some are marrying
Just to get by easy.
Some are marrying for a shield and a cloak.
Some are marrying for convenience.
Some are marrying for a meal ticket.
And some get married on Monday,
And separate before Saturday night. Have mercy

B⁵ (1:04)
Love today
Is a one-sided thing.
When a man [spiritual melody]
Has a bad dose of love for a woman,
She don’t love him. Yes
She loves some other man.
And when a woman finds out,
She has a bad case of love for a man,
While, she loves…
He loves some other woman.  Yes
So the thing is one-sided.  Yes
One is doing all the loving.  Yes

C1 (1:25)
I tell you [spiritual melody]
It’s hard for you
To love someone  Yes
That don’t love you.  Alright
It will make you
Feel bad and miserable
And unhappy in your home.  Have mercy

B6 (1:35)
Love these days [spiritual melody]
Is a one-sided thing.  Yes
Some people
Who used to...uh...
Love and be happy,
Are fighting,
And knocking down,
And dragging out and separating,
And cursing and damning.
Because there is no love.
Love has run out.

C2 (1:51)
Sometimes I think [spiritual melody]
A man is about as well off  Yes
These days
To marry
Just like you buy furniture
On the installment plan.  Alright
Love by the day,
Love by the week,
And love by the month.  Have mercy
So when quitting day comes,
It won’t be so hard on ya,
You’ll be ready for the motion
And you won’t have the heartache.

C3 (2:09)
Love is alright  Alright
If you’re treated alright.  Yes
But it’s mighty hard these days
To find two people
Who love each other
And their home is happy.

C4 (2:18)
Brother!
Let me tell you what love will do.  Yes
It’ll make a man bring his money home,  Alright
To his own wife and children. Yes
Love will make a woman feel Yes
That her own husband Yes
Is all she needs. Yes
For that kind of love is almost played out now. Yes
It is a thing of the past.

B7 (2:35)
Some women Yes
Don’t mind telling you, “Husband, Yes
If you can’t give me what I want, Yes
Somebody else can.” Yes
And then the fight is on.

C5 (2:43)
Brother! Yes
As long as you got plenty money to spend, Yes
You can get plenty loving, Yes
You can get plenty money to love. Yes
Why…why when you
Or when you are broke and you’re money’s all gone, Alright
Your love is gone
And you are left alone.

C6 (2:57)
So brother, Alright
Love these days without money
Is a thing of the past.
Amen.

33. That Little Thing May Kill You Yet (Christmas Sermon)
August 24, 1929; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1431)
Form: A (Intro: Theme), B (Scripture), C (Nix’s advice)

A
My dear friends, Yes
I bring you this morning my Christmas message Yes
From the subject Yes
That little thing may kill you yet.

B (0:07)
There is a verse in the Bible that says Yes
“Behold how great a matter Yes
A little fire kindleth!” 22 Yes
That shows that great destruction and trouble Yes
Usually start from some little thing, Alright
Those little no-harm things.

C1 (0:20)
And especially

---
22 James 3:5, King James Version.
That little thing which you are so crazy about. Yeah
Just think about [singing]
That little thing of procrastination. Yeah
Always putting off things for tomorrow Yeah
What you should do today. Yeah
That little thing [spiritual melody]
Of making big promises
And never fulfill any of them. Yeah

C² (0:36)
You promised God last year
You would turn over a new leaf Alright
And live a better life. Yeah
But you haven’t done it.
You’ve had God shut out all the year. [speaking]
You jumped in the devil’s bandwagon, Yes
And you’ve gone wild after a good time following sin. Have mercy
But that little thing may kill you yet.

C³ (0:52)
That little habit of lying, Yes
When you tell one lie,
You’ve gotta tell another lie to shield that lie.
For one lie always calls for another lie.
And it keeps you lying all the time, That’s right
Until finally,
You become to be Preach!
A notorious liar. Yeah!
But that little lie
Will kill you yet.

C⁴ (1:10)
There’s another thing Yeah!
That may lead to your downfall:
That little tongue of yours.
The wise man saying,
“He that keepeth his tongue,
Keepeth his life.”
That stump tongue of yours²³ Yes
Is an unruly member. Alright
It cannot be tamed. No
It is full of poison. [spiritual melody]
It sit on the fire of hell. Yes
It’ll praise you one minute, Yes
And curse you out the next minute. Alright
That little tongue of yours
Will kill you yet. Yes

C⁵ (1:35)
And there’s another thing [spiritual melody]

²³ Possibly “stump” is a mistake that Nix corrects as “tongue.”
That has carried thousands of men and women,  
Boys and girls  
To a disgraceful life  
And to an untimely death,  
And that little habit of drinking moonshine.  
The idea of a man drinking whiskey  
And moonshine on Christmas day.  
Who hath woe?  
Who hath sorrow?  
Who hath red eyes like balls of fire?  
Who is it I say,  
That always gets beat up all the time?  
They that tarried long at the wine cup.  
But I tell you!  
That liquor habit  
Will kill you yet.  

C6 (2:06)  
Brother!  
And sister!  
That little thing of yours  
May kill you yet.  
That little thing you’re so crazy about  
May lead to your downfall.  
It may be that little pet sin of yours  
That is so precious and dear to you now  
But there is a little wheel a-turning  
A little meal a-grinding,  
Slow but sure.  
It’s grinding out the poison  
That will cause that little woman  
Or that little man  
Or that little friend of yours  
To lead you to your downfall.  

C7 (2:33)  
And now,  
In conclusion,  
Let me warn you men  
And you women and boys and girls  
To watch your step.  
That little thing that look so sweet to you now,  
May lead to your ruin  
And kill you yet.  

Amen.  

34. What’s Wrong With The Church Today?  
December 12, 1929; Chicago  
Vocalion (VO1548)
You've got the wrong man.

December 12, 1929; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1448)
Form: A (Intro: Theme), B (contemporary relevance), C (contemporary women), D (contemporary men), E (Nix’s advice)

A

My dear friends,
I’m to talk to you on this all-important subject:
You’ve got the wrong man. [speaking]

B¹ (0:06)
A great deal of all of the devilment
Is being carried on these days.
And in town, Yes
When the law goes out to arrest someone, Yes
Sometimes they find out
That they got the wrong man. [shouts]

B² (0:17)
So many…many men and women,
Are making great blunders in marriages
These days. [speaking]
Getting married before you know it, Yes
And they separate before you know it. [speaking]
Marrying
Used to be a sacred business.
But now,
It’s a secret business. Well, well [sung]

C¹ (0:31)
It has
So many young grass widows these days Oh Lord [sung]
Than the world Yes
Has ever known.
Of all colors
And all kinds. Well, well [sung]
We have some chocolate brown, [speaking]
Some high brown,
Some compromising brown,
Some tantalizing brown,
Some teasing brown,
And almost make a preacher to lay his Bible down. Well, well [sung]

C² (0:50)
And some of them
Have been married
Two and three,
And four times, [shouts]
And didn’t live together

Missing track that has not been found.
Hardly two and three weeks
Before they were fussing and fighting
And separating.
You may be a pretty little Widow now,
But you had the wrong man.

C³ (1:06)
Some of you girls,
Are so lazy
You don’t want to
Do anything
But keep looking
A looking glass and a powdered [sic] puff
And a lipstick
In your hand
Primping
All the time.

C⁴ (1:18)
Your mother
Can’t get you to help her wash dishes
And cook and iron.
And some of them
Will sleep and primp all day long
And run the streets
All night long.

C⁵ (1:28)
And when you get married,
You don’t know how
To cook for your husband
If your husband had to depend on
Your cooking,
He would be sick half the time
With the indigestion
And then die with the ptomaine poison.

C⁶ (1:40)
That man
May have been used to good cooking
And should he take his meals
On the outside,
Don’t get mad and fuss at him.
Just think,
You got the wrong man.

C⁷ (1:50)
Some of you men
Who….have men rooming
With you
To help you pay your rent,
And when your wife
Gets cold towards you,  
And don’t want to  
Be bothered with you,  
Every time you speak to her  
She’ll get cold  
And snappy,  
And grouchy,  
And then she finally wants to sleep  
In a room by herself.  
And then you begin to accuse someone  
On the outside  
Of stealing your wife’s love.

D₁ (2:13)  
Then you will feel like killing,  
This man  
And a-before  
You know all about what’s going on.  
But brother,  
Before you kill that man,  
Just remember  
You’re about to kill the wrong man.

D₂ (2:23)  
That roomer  
In your home,  
Help you to pay your rent  
Is doing more  
Than the contract calls for.

D₃ (2:29)  
Some of you husbands  
Are going around here  
With your mouths all puffed out  
Wondering why  
All of your children  
Don’t favor you.

C₈ (2:37)  
Your wife told you  
That you were the father  
Of all her children.  
But the older that child gets,  
The more it favors  
Somebody on the outside.  
And then you begin to wonder  
Your wife has had the wrong man.

C₉ (2:49)  
Most all of these women  
Who are going out  
These nights  
And partying at midnight parties
And social functions all night long,
Some of them
Are going out with the wrong man.

E¹ (3:00)
Now
Let me say a word to you
Old hard boiled
Men and women
That’s always jumping on somebody else for a fight:
One of these days
You’re going to jump on the wrong man.

E² (3:10)
Now in conclusion,
Let me warn you fast men and women,
Slow down,
Take your time
Think before you act
For you may have
The wrong man.

36. You’re Flirting With Death
December 12, 1929; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1548)

Missing track that has not been found.

37. A Country Man In Town
December 12, 1929; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1448)

Form: A (Intro: Theme), B (contemporary relevance), C (contemporary women), D (Nix’s advice), C, D

A
I want to talk to you this morning from the subject:
A country man in town.

Amen

B¹ (0:04)
These country-fed and country-raised men
Who come to the big cities
They lose control of themselves.
And they go crazy about
The city fast life
And the good-looking city women.

Yes
[shouts]

B² (0:16)
Let me tell you men
Some of these city women
Sure do know how to trim a country man.
They will feed him on a good promise
And make him believe

[shouts] Well, well [sung]
Yes
That everything is going to be peaches for him. Yes
And that crazy fool will dump Well, well, well [sung]
His whole pocketbook [speaking]
And all his money Amen
In that city woman’s lap [spiritual melody]
Just on a good promise. Yes
And all he gets Oh yes
Is a lot of hot air
And a sweet promise.

B\(^3\) (0:40)
Some of these country men [spiritual melody]
Just from the backwoods
Of Mississippi, Georgia, and Alabama, Amen
Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana
Who have never
Been in the city life before
Will come up here
And forsake their own wives and children
And fall in love
And go crazy [spiritual melody]
About these butterfly, Yes
Giddy and gay
Partnership
City women.

C\(^1\) (1:03)
And even long before [singing]
They are bumping
His head
And filling him up with a lot of hot air
And sweet promises
Making him believe
That there will be
A big time for him
On Saturday night
After he’s paid off.

C\(^2\) (1:17)
And just as soon [shouts]
As she gets all of his money Yes
She will call him sweet names [shouts]
And hitch him with a sweet promise.
And while he is waiting,
She will go right out Lord have mercy
And give that money [speaking]
To her whole regular-city Yes he will [sung]
Sweetheart. [shouts]
And just . . . he’s just a country man in town Yes
Paying a big price [singing]
For the city life.
You young men,
They will
Take you out on this big crowd
And make you spend all the taxi fares,
Make you pay all
The midnight suppers
And all the midnight trains.
And all you get
Is a sweet name
And a sweet promise
And a lot of hot air.

"I will see you on Saturday night."

Stay with your own wives
And your own children
Who love and care for you.
And uh, stop letting these city women
Make a big fool out of you.

And the thing that looks so bad
Is to see an old man
Going crazy
About a young city girl
And
She will told…
And get what…
Make him do everything she wants him to do.
And uh…
This will be
An old man, when she gets through with him.
He’ll look like
A lost tramp in a starving land.

You
Ah, young men
And women.
These young women
Will...strip you
They’ll make you go crazy about them
And carry you a cat’s life.

She can do anything she wants to do.
She can stay
Out half the night
And come home
And dare you to open your mouth.

She can make
While her
Husband work every day
And on Sundays and holidays
And make him work overtime.
And while she run the streets
And have a big time.
And when she comes home at night,
All tired and broke down
And needs a little rubbing,
She’s either sick,
Or feels bad,
Or sleepy.

It is a country man
All tired out
Living in hell
With the fast life.
Say old man,
You’re going crazy
About your pig meat.
But before that pig meat gets through with you
You’ll wish you had had
Hog meat.

Let me tell you
You had better
Be yourself
Stay in your class!
Don’t let your head run away with your feet!
That city fast life
Will soon carry your grave.
Amen.

38. Who Dressed You Up for Easter
Mid-January, 1930; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1470)
Form: A (Intro: Theme), B (Easter), C (Nix’s advice), D (contemporary women), C, D, C, B, C

My dear friends
I’m bringing you my Easter message this morning from the subject:
Sweeten up and look your best.
B¹ (0:07)
It is on Easter day when everything points towards beauty, Well
Sunshine and happiness. Well, well
When everybody should plan to come forth Sho’ enuff
Looking their very best.

B² (0:16)
They tell me
It was on Easter morning
When our blessed Savior rose from the dead Well, well
And brought life to a dead world.

C¹ (0:25)
So everybody should clean up, Alright
Shine up, [unknown melody]
And take a hot bath, Amen
And dress up and come out
On Easter Sunday
And own your shape.

C² (0:33)
Pull off your old rags [unknown melody]
And put on something brand new.
For Easter day
Is always
Show day with everybody. Alright
You got to come out
And parade the streets
And show your good clothes
And catch new sweethearts and beaus. Well, well, well [sung]

C³ (0:49)
Here’s old Brother Dick sitting here now all dressed up. 
This is the first time I’ve ever seen him
With a new suit on. [congregant responses]

And there’s Sister Sarah
Looking mighty hot
All shining with her diamond rings on her fingers, Well, well
And gold bracelets on her wrists, [speaking]
And a brand new hat and a new dress. [speaking]
And shoes and stockings and other things under there,
Looking most fittin’.

D¹ (1:12)
I’m just wondering who dressed her up so swell, Well, well
And if those things are paid for? Hmm

Female voice:
Brother pastor this is what you’ve been giving me all this year, Hmmm
From time to time.
If anybody wants to know who dressed this kid up,
And buys all my clothes,
Believe me my pastor dresses me up.
Nix:

Well Sister,
You sisters must be a little careful
What you say in public here
When you are joking like that.
My wife is here this morning
And she didn’t get
An Easter dress for Sunday
Because I told her I didn’t have the money.
So don’t let us spoil a good Easter day joking like that.

Amen
Amen
Have mercy
Well, well

C\(^4\) (1:45)
What I’m trying to get you all to see is
That everybody should dress up on Easter day.
And believe me,
If all these fine clothes
I see are paid for,
Somebody
Made a lot of money.
And if they’re not paid for,
Somebody lost a lot of money.

[speaking]
[spiritual melody]
Yes
Amen

D\(^2\) (2:01)
Now let me tell you women something right here.
It is one thing
To be dressed up
And looking mighty good and sweet,
But don’t forget the man
That dressed you up.

[spiritual melody]
Alright

D\(^3\) (2:11)
Some of you women
Look so sweet
Your husbands dressed you up.
And some of you,
Your sweethearts dressed you up.

Well, well, well [sung]
[shouts]

D\(^4\) (2:18)
And some of ya’
Some other woman’s husband dressed you up.
But what do you care for that
Just so you are dressed up anyhow?
But don’t forget the man
That dressed you up.

Well, well [sung]
[shouts]
[speaking]

C\(^5\) (2:28)
Remember that Easter day is coming again
And you must remember the bridge that brought you over.
Now while you are passing your flowers around,
And everybody looking sweet and fine,
Remember
There’s no flies on your pastor,

[speaking]
[speaking]
Well [sung]
Well, well [sung]
For he’s out here on his shape this morning.            Preach!

B\(^3\) (2:43)
They tell me
In all the big cities up north,
And all the big cities and small towns
And country roads down south,
Where the people have been skim
All the winter.

(2:52)
They’re coming out on Easter day.
Every old rabbit is coming out of his hole,
Every old snake is coming out of his den.
Why?
Because Easter time is here,
When everybody should take on a new life.

C\(^6\) (3:04)
Throw away your old rags,
Clean up yourself.
Buy yourself a new suit,
Pick yourself a new garment.
For this is Easter day.
While Easter brings joy,
Let us all come on
And spread a little joy around.

Amen.

39. Pay Your Honest Debts
Mid-January, 1930; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1470)
Form: A (Intro: Theme), B (contemporary relevance), C (Nix’s advice)

A
My dear friends
I’m to talk to you this morning from the subject:
Pay your honest debts.            Well

B\(^1\) (0:06)
There are so many people in the world today
Who are trying to ride through on everybody.            Well alright
They will buy groceries on credit.
Eat them up and never pay for them.            Hallelujah
They’ll buy furniture on credit and wear it out,
And never pay for it.

B\(^2\) (0:21)
Some people even get married on credit
And never pay the preacher.            Yeah
And I’m a good witness to that
Because a lot of all you here still owes me yet.
Brother,
Why don't you pay your honest debts?

Well

B³ (0:32)
Some of you all,
When you get sick you want the doctor to come on credit,
And you never pay your doctor’s bill. [Speaking]
And when you die,
The undertaker’s going to get his pay
If he has to take all your insurance.
Brother why don’t you be a man
And pay your honest debts?
Well, well, well, well [sung]

B⁴ (0:47)
Some people even move every month
To keep from paying their room
And house rent.
Some of you all dress so swell and fine.
You make a big show on the outside
Just like you’re going to do on Easter day
And you owe everybody in town.
And the collector
Is running you down every day.

C¹ (1:04)
Here’s Sister Jane
Right here now
All dolled up
In her fine Easter outfit,
And I bet she bought it on credit
And has never paid for them.

Female voice:
Brother pastor that’s my business how I buy my clothes.
You just preach the gospel,
And stay off my clothes!
I always buy on credit.

Nix:
Well why won’t you pay your honest debts then?

C² (1:23)
A lot of you all are here
Always borrowing money from your friends [humming]
And you never pay them back.
It’s getting so these days
You hate to even meet your old friends.
Just as soon as you meet them,
They’re hard up
And want to borrow money
And if you let them have it,
They’ll never pay you back.
They are just beating their way
Through the world.

C³ (1:43)
As fast
As some people work hard and save up a little money,
There’s always someone coming along
Hard up and singing the blues
Who wants to borrow your money.
Brother!
You ought to pay your honest debts.

C⁴ (1:56)
Too many people are trying
To live above their wants.
You only get a small salary,
And why don’t you live
According to your income?
You try to buy the finest cars
And the finest clothes
And you never pay for any of them.

C⁵ (2:09)
You’re always
Up here in Chicago trying
To live in these high-
Priced flats.
You are doing
Towards everything to pay this high rent.
Some of you are selling moonshine,
Some of you playing the policy wheel,
Some of you are giving house parties,
Trying to live
In these high-priced flats,
And you know you’re not able to pay for them.

C⁶ (2:30)
You all
Are leaving your honest debts unpaid.
Why don’t
You live according to your income
And pay your honest debts?

C⁷ (2:37)
Live so
You can look every man in the eye
And tell him, shake his hand
And tell him where to go.

C⁸ (2:43)
Live so
You can have…
You don’t have to be running
And dodging from everybody.
Whatever you buy,
Buy what you can pay for,
And pay for what you buy.

Well, well, well [sung]
[shouts] [shouts]
Alright
[speaking] Have mercy
[speaking]
[shouts] [singing]
[shouts]
[speaking] Well, well
[singing]
Hm-hum
Well [sung]
[singing] Well, well, well [sung]
[singing]
[shouting]
[speaking] [singing] Preach!
[singing]
Preach!
Well Alright
[shouting] Well, well, well [sung]
C⁹ (2:53)
Brother this way, 
Trying to rise through the world Well [sung] 
On everybody 
And borrowing money from everybody [blues riff] 
And never paying your bill [shouts] 
Has got to be stopped. [shouts] 
Get you a job, Well, well, well, well [sung] 
And go to work, Amen 
And pay your honest debts. 
Amen.

40. Some Folks Don’t Know What They Want
Mid-January, 1930; Chicago
Vocalion (VO 1659)
Form: A (Intro: Theme), B (contemporary relevance), C (spoken dialogue), B

A
My dear friends,
I’m going to talk to you from the subject 
Some folks don’t know what they want. Amen

B¹ (0:08)
Some folks want everything until they get it, [speaking]
And when they get it they don’t want it. [speaking]
That’s why we’re having so many separations and breaking up of homes these days So true

(0:17)
A lot of you all here 
Will get in these fine dresses for Easter 
So you can run the streets all day. Well, well, well [sung]
You know your husband didn’t buy them for ya’. well, well [sung]
I’m looking to hear 
Of a whole lot of fussin’ and separation 
After Easter. Yeah

B² (0:31)
Some of you men don’t know what you want. [speaking]
Some men 
Want every good looking woman they see. That’s true

B³ (0:36)
We are living in an age now 
Where nobody wants the same thing long at a time. Sure ‘nuf [sung]
Everything is changing now. Amen

B³ (0:43)
Men and women [spiritual melody] 
Used to court each other four and five years Yeah 
Before they married Well alright!
And they wouldn’t go with anybody else. [spiritual melody]
But a woman never would get married these days 
If she’d go with the same man four years.
Some folks wouldn’t stay with Jesus four years
At a time.

B⁴ (0:59)
Some of you men
Would just worry a woman to death
Until you get her.
And when you get her,
You’re always parking your horse
In some other man’s stall.

B⁵ (1:08)
Some of you men
Are always trying to put yourselves
On some other woman.
When you know she don’t want you.
I don’t care how good they look
I don’t want no woman
That don’t want me

B⁶ (1:20)
Many women
Want big men
And big men
Want little women.

Old women
Want young men
And old men
Want young women.
Well you can’t kill ‘em for that.
Some folks don’t know what they want.

C¹ (1:34)
Here’s old Aunt Dinah
Sitting here now
Seventy-five years old.
She’s already had five husbands,
And she tells me
She wants a young man now
With plenty ambition and vigor.

(1:47) Dinah:
Yes Elder
Every woman wants a young man these days
Who can do what she wants done
With plenty ambition and pep.
Amen, that’s me!

Nix:
But you old women don’t know what you want!

B⁷ (1:58)
Women
Have long hair
Are cutting it off
In order to get short hair.

And the short-haired women
Are going in the beauty parlors
Trying to get long hair.  [speaking]

Women with straight hair
Are paying big money
To have it curled.  Amen!

And women with curly hair
Are paying big money
To have it straightened.  [shouts]

You women
Don’t know what you want.

B^8 (2:19)
Some of you folks
Want everything for yourself
You don’t want anybody else to have anything
You want the world
In a jug
And the stopper in your own hands.
You are never satisfied.

B^9 (2:31)
It’s getting so these days
I can’t hardly preach to suit ya’.
If I preach you to heaven,
You are grumbling about that.  [singing]

(2:38)
If I really preach you
The Truth and
Send you to hell,
You are grumbling about that.

B^{10} (2:42)
I hear it’s being whispered around here
That some of you want a new pastor now
Who can take a paint brush
And paint the stars.
Some of you folks
Don’t know what you want.  [singing]
Amen.

41. The Fast Life Will Bring You Down
Mid-January, 1930; Chicago
Vocalion (VO 1659)
Form: A (Intro: Theme), B (Contemporary relevance), C (Nix’s advice), B, C, B, C, D (Personal anecdote), E (conclusion)

A
My dear friends
I’m to talk to you from the subject:
This fast life will bring you down. Amen

B¹ (0:08)
The world today is running on wings and wheels.
And everything and everybody
Is moving mighty fast.
People these days are living fast
Running fast and dying fast.

(0:19)
This fast life…
Ah, people
Living today
Will bring you down.
Young men and women
Are trying to work all day
And run the streets all night.

B² (0:29)
Old married women
These days
Are trying to
Keep up with the young married women.
And the young girls
Are out-running them all.

(0:37)
Some old married women
Are having a mighty hard time
Trying to hold their husbands,
And especially
If he makes a-plenty of money.
It used to take good looks to win a woman.
For now it takes good money
And a whole lot of it.
It takes a whole lot of money
These days
For the young women.
They spend too much money for dresses, paint,
And powder
Getting ready for Easter.

B³ (0:58)
These old men
Are going wild
After these young girls.
And believe me,
These young girls today
Know more
Than the old women
Ever did dare to know.
These little girls
Are running around here
Know everything.
They know how to get by.
But I tell you,
This fast life
Will surely bring you down.

Go out
If you please
To the hospital.
Go out to the jails and penitentiary.
You will see a large crowd
That has this fast life has brought down.

Brother!
This fast crowd
Is too fast for me.
They’re putting off everything these days,
From a midnight crap game
To a noon day hold up.

And a lot of these young girls
Are too fast for me.
Some of them
Are cursing and smoking,
Drinking and fighting,
And passing razors and guns.
I tell you men
Some of these women
Are getting mighty tight in Chicago.

The policemen
Are kept busy on Maxwell Street on the west side,
Kept busy on State Street on the south side,
Kept busy on Lake Street on the north side,
Kept busy on Cottage Grove
On the east side.
Operating before the church [?].

You men,
Better go back to your old-time wives.
They know
The only ones
That’ll keep you well
And cooking for you.
That old battle-axe of yours
Will do to rely on.  
She is the only one  
That will take time  
To patch your pants,  
Sew buttons on your shirts,  
And darn your socks.

B7 (2:22)  
The people these days  
Are living  
And running too fast  
Some of them won’t  
Stop even for the red light.  
They won’t stop for the danger signal.

C4 (2:31)  
Run on  
You midnight ramblers  
Run on you fast-life livers.  
This fast life  
Will surely land you in jail.  
It’ll land you in your sick bed.  
It’ll land you in your grave.

D (2:42)  
I’m talking, uh  
Ah, to these little girls  
One day.  
I was talking to a little girl and she told me,  
That she would  
Would know what she was doing.  
I asked her about living  
And running with these men.  
What do you think she told me?  
She put her hands on her hips and said,  “You needn’t  
Say anything to me.  
I know my onions.”

(3:00)  
But you girls  
May know your onions,  
But the doctor knows your case.  
The preacher knows your funeral,  
The undertaker knows your coffin.

E (3:08)  
This fast live  
You’re living  
Will soon bring you down.  
Amen.

42. It Was Tight Like That
My dear brothers and sisters
I’m going to speak to you this morning
From this famous subject:
It was tight like that.

As we find ourselves standing upon the pathway of life,
And realize the many difficulties,
Through which we have come,
And the many battles in which we have fought,
Against our enemies and the devil himself,
We can all truthfully say,
It was tight like that.

This seems to be a hard and tight world we’re living in these days,
It getting so nobody wants to be bothered with you,
Unless you got something to give them.

Old friends
Don’t want to know you anymore.
And new friends
Don’t want to meet you.
And strangers
Don’t want to be bothered with you.
And you will find yourself
In the middle of a bad fix
When it’s tight like that.

Just think
When a man is cold,
Hungry and mad,
And ain’t got no job
And you can’t borrow any money,
And your credit is no good,
Your wife is fussin’,
And the children are crying.
Brother,
You will feel like you in hell
When it’s tight like that.

Life ain’t worth living
When you are broke.
Your appetite
Will call for everything
That’s no joke.

B⁵ (1:06)
There comes an opportunity
That knocks on every man’s door.
There’s no need of anybody being always broke,
Always out and down,
All the time.

C¹ (1:15)
I have been warning you men and women
That these hard times would come,
When times would be tight,
Jobs would be hard to get,
And you couldn’t get much money.
You should have made preparations
For these hard times
When it was tight like that.

C² (1:28)
But now,
You’ve run through all your money
You’ve lost your job,
And starvation is at your door.
Don’t bring me your troubles now!
I can’t use them.
Bring me some money!
And bring all of you hams and chickens.
It’s money I want,
And money I must have,
And a-plenty of something to eat.
So I can satisfy
My gastronomical propensities
When it’s tight like that.

C³ (1:51)
Get ready!
Starvation is coming!
Come down,
You high-minded men!
Live so you can have friends.
Don’t let your money and your job
Swell your head.
For the prodigal Son
Has plenty money.
But he lost all he had
When it was tight like that.
Don’t try to be what you are not.

D¹ (2:09)
There’s Aunt Betsy sitting here now,
She’s a member of our praying band.
She’s too old to do anything else now but pray.
But I remember
When she was a wheel-horse in this town [singing]
Painting the town red. [shouts]
She had all you women’s husbands running to her house,
And you were afraid to open your mouths. [shouts]
She would take any woman’s husband,
When she was tight like that.

(2:29)
Female:
Yes Elder,
Praying is all I can do now.
But believe me,
When I think about the past,
This world don’t owe me anything.
In my young days,
I had my time.
I was tight like that.

D² (2:41)
Nix:
Yes, sister,
But you ain’t got nothing on me!
How can you feel so happy, Sister Lucy Well [sung]
When your house rent is due,
And you’re behind with your furniture bills, [shouts]
And your lodge dues are not paid,
And you’re behind in your pastor’s salary,
And you haven’t got no money and no friends,
Everything is tight like that,
What will you do?

(3:00)
Female voice:
Brother Pastor
When everything gets tight like that
I just let the bills go.
I ain’t gonna let nothing send my soul to hell.
When I ain’t got no money,
I got good religion.
Glory, Hallelujah!

C⁴ Nix:
Yes, religion is alright,
But I want to tell you all now,
When your bills are due and
Starvation’s at your door, Yes
And your friends are all gone, [shouts]
And everything is tight like that, [shouts]
You better have some money in your pocket Yes!
To pay your bills Yes!
When it’s tight like that. [shouts]
Amen.

**43. How Long - How Long**
February 18, 1930; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1505)
Form: A (Intro: Theme), B (contemporary relevance), C (contemporary people), D

A
My dear brothers and sisters
I’m going to speak to you tonight
From the subject: How long, how long.

B¹ (0:06)
This is a solemn question that comes to every man
Woman, boy, and girl.
It deals with your past and your future.
I have been preaching to you all these years,
Trying to get you to change your ways
And change your life,
And turn over a new leaf
And begin a new life.
But you’ve been putting it off and making excuses
And I want to know,
How long, how long?

C¹ (0:27)
How long will you women continue
To lie to your husbands
Like you’ve been doing?
When your husband is at home
You’re always mad and fussing
And complaining that you are sick.
And just as soon
As he goes away,
You are either in the streets running,
Or you got some man running to your house,
And all the time laying around.

(0:47)
And sometimes,
When your husband comes home,
And knocks on the front door.
You are letting your old sweetheart
Out at the backdoor.

C² (0:54)
You women
Are getting mighty sharp these days.
You don’t even want your husband to have a key
To your front door
Of your house.
You want to keep all the keys
I keep all my keys
To yourself.
So when he comes home, [singing]
He can’t get in [speaking]
Until you let him in.
That gives you a chance [shouts]
When he knocks on the front door,
You can clear the house [shouts]
Before he can get in.
How long, how long? [shouts]
How long [speaking]
Will you keep this up? [speaking]

C³ (1:18)
Say, [speaking]
You all-night lodge men,
You got so many lodge meetings
That keeps you at the lodge,
All night.
Two and three times a week.
You have been telling your wife
That same old lodge lie,
All these years.
How long, how long, how long?

C⁴ (1:34)
Some of you church members
Just make me sick. [shouts]
You’re always [singing]
Full of religion one minute,
Then you’re full of the devil next minute.
You’re shouting one minute,
And cursing the next minute.
You laugh in my face one minute, Yes
And shake my hand
And tell me that you love me,
And just as soon as I am through preaching,
Out the door you go,
You never pay your church dues,
How long, how long, how long? [shouts]
How long? [sung]

C⁵ (1:56)
Do you expect to
Try to fool me [shouts]
There is so much sham, Well, well [sung]
In religion, Yes
That these days,
Until you hardly know
Who is right. [singing]

C⁶ (2:04)
The deacon
Is always watching the preacher,
And the preacher’s jealous,
Of the good-looking choir members,
And the deacon.
The old women
Want the preacher
And the preacher want the young women.
Sisters,
Do you call that religion? No, no!
How long, how long, how long
Will this last? [spiritual melody]

C⁷ (2:21)
Miss Peaches,
What was the trouble with you
And old lady Ball this morning
In the choir back there?

Miss Peaches:
Brother Pastor, she got mad.
And was fussin’ at me.
Because I showed her that sweet letter you wrote me.
She oughta know you don’t want her,
Old jealous thing.

Female voice 2:
Yes, and you told me
You and the pastor went out driving last Saturday night.
And you didn’t get home until two a.m.
You must-a have done some riding.

Nix:
How long, how long, how long?
How long?

C⁸ (2:51)
Will you sisters continue to tell your
Trouble to one another?
That’s what I say about women anyhow. Yes
When you’re doing well,
You won’t let well enough do. [shouts]

When I go out to pray,
For the sick,
Whose business is it
Who I take with me
When I pray for the sick?
How long, how long, how long? [shouts]

D (3:07)
Will you people sit in judgement on your shepherd? [shouts]
Brother
And sister, Jesus said, [singing]
He that is without sin among you

Yes
Let him cast the first stone.  [shouts]
Amen.

44. The Black Diamond Express to Hell – Part 5
April 8, 1930; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1486)
Form: A (Intro: Theme), B (continuation of sinners on the Black Diamond train), C (dialogue with Nina Mae McKinney), D (song), C

A
My dear brothers and sisters,
The Black Diamond Express Train is going to make another trip to hell.  Uh-huh

B (0:05)
The first and second sections of the Black Diamond Express Train
Carried a large crowd of high-class sinners  Alright
And professional liars of all kinds  Yes
And scientific gamblers.  Yes
Men and women of high society  Yes
Who had plenty of money to pay their way to Hell  Yes
On high-class accommodations.  [spiritual melody]

(0:23)
And now,
The Devil is running
A reduced rate excursion train to hell.  Yes

Come on here
All you cheap-skates,
You alley-rats,
You midnight-ramblers,
You little cheap street-walkers.
You all got to go to hell
On the Black Diamond reduced-rate excursion train,  [singing]
Where you will burn in hell-fire
And brimstone,
Forever and forever.
In a lake of fire,
Where there’ll be wailing
And gnashing of teeth.
Get on here
All you hell-bound sinners.

C1 (0:50)
Nina Mae McKinney:
Ha, ha, ha!
Listen at that old preacher.
He’s trying to scare somebody, talking about going to hell.
Say you can’t scare me and make me cry
Like you done all those old people.
I ain’t studyin’ about that old hell-bound train.

Nix:
This train
Is leaving for eternal hell right now. [Speaking]
All aboard for hell.

Female voice #2:
Mister Preacher, what can I do to keep from going to hell?

(1:11)
Nix:
You must come right up here now to the alter
And bow down
And repent of your sins.

(1:16)
Nina Mae McKinney:
Just look at those old crazy fools up there bowing down praying.
Say you can’t make me pray.
Everybody calls me “Hard-Boiled.”

(1:24)
Nix:
Yes
But you must give up the world [Speaking]
And call on God
And be saved now. Alright
Or else,
You will land in hell [speaking]
In the black shade of midnight. [speaking]
This is your last opportunity
To get off the Black Diamond Train.
I plead with you
To get off the Black Diamond
I urge upon of you to get off the Black Diamond [speaking]
Before it’ll be too late.

(1:44)
Female voice #3:
Elder I’ll give up my sinful life and get off this hell-bound train.
Amen! Amen!

Male voice:
Glory, Glory!

Nix:
Will you give up sister?
Will you give up your heart to God right now?

Female voice #4:
Oh, Lord, have mercy upon my poor soul.
Yes, Elder, I’ll give up, I’ll give up, I’ll get off this hell-bound train.

Nix:
Amen, glory hallelujah! [shouts]
Another soul born in the kingdom of God.
Let us all sing:
D (2:08)

Free at last, free at last
Thank God almighty, I’m free at last
Free at last, free at last
Thank God almighty, I’m free at last

C² (2:22)

Nina Mae McKinney:
Ha, ha, ha!
If that ain’t a mess.
Say preacher, why don’t you try to make me pray and cry.
You know better.
You know I won’t fall for that kinda’ stuff.
Say, you’ll have to come after me some other way.
My name is Hard-Boiled
And believe me,
I’m a hard nut for you to crack.

(2:38)

Nix:
The downward road leads to eternal damnation
And the upward road leads to eternal joy and happiness
Well, well [sung]
And whosoever will can come now.
Choose you this day which road you will take.
The broad road leads to hell
And the narrow road leads to glory
And while the Black Diamond waits for a few minutes,
Make up your mind
Which road you gonna’ take.

45. The Black Diamond Express to Hell – Part 6
April 8, 1930; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1486)
Form: A (Intro), B (Black Diamond will enter hell), C (dialogue with Nina Mae McKinney), D (song), C

A

Nix:
The train will stop just a few minutes
At Farewell Station
Just long enough for everyone on board
To bid the world farewell.

Farewell [sung]

B¹ (0:08)
It’s where
The White Flyer
And the Black Diamond Train will separate.

Yeah

Mother

Will bid farewell to her children.  
[Children] bid mother farewell.  
Farewell. Farewell. Farewell.  
Farewell you hard-boiled sinners.  
The Black Diamond Express train  
Will hit damnation switch  
And make a fast run for hell.

(0:27)
Every child of God  
Will rise above the clouds  
And bid farewell to every fear  
And wipe their weeping eyes.  
In hell  
In the black shade of midnight,  
In hell,  
With all the demons crying,  
In hell,  
With all the hell-hounds howling,  
The hobgobs of hell  
Will be put upon your soul.  
You may not bow now,  
But you will bow in hell.  
You may not cry now,  
But you will cry in hell.  
Listen,  
I can hear some mother’s daughter cryin’.

C1 (0:55)
Nina Mae McKinney:  
Oh, Oh, Oh, Lord.

Nix:  
All the stubborn-hearted men and women  
Will be in hell.  
All you hard-hearted sinners  
Who turned down God  
And turned down the church  
And turned down the Gospel,  
Will be in hell.  
I bid you hard-boiled sinners  
Farewell, goodbye.  
We never will see you no more.

Nina Mae McKinney:  
Oh, don’t leave me.  
Please don’t leave me.

Nix:  
As we start out for heaven  
And immortal glory,  
I can hear the children of God singing,  
As they goin’ up higher.
D (1:28)
“Come and Go With Me To That Land”

There is joy in that land
There is joy in that land
There is joy in that land
Where I’m bound, where I’m bound.

Well, there is joy in that land
There is joy in that land
There is joy in that land
Where I’m bound.

C2 (1:52)
Nix:
Farewell. Goodbye.
We’re leaving you now.

Nina Mae McKinney:
Ah, don’t leave me.
Please don’t leave me.
I don’t wanna go to hell.
I will pray and be good.
Oh Lord, have mercy.

Nix:
Yes, my daughter.
I’m glad to see you come over on the Lord’s side.

Nina Mae McKinney:
I will give my heart to the Lord
And serve him as long as I live.

(2:15)
Nix:
God bless you my dear child.
God bless you.

Nina Mae McKinney:
Elder,
I’ll do anything you want me to do.
Elder, will you please help me?

Nix:
Huh, what did you say?
Do you really mean that?
My dear, I will do anything you want me to do.
The Elder will comfort you now at this hour.

Well, well [sung]

Nina Mae McKinney:
I will join the church and I will be baptized.
I will sing in the choir.
I’ll lead prayer meetings.
I will do anything.
I wanna meet the Lord in peace.
Oh Lord, have mercy on my poor soul.
(2:44)
Nix:
This is the best step you ever did take my dear little child. [Speaking]
The Lord is with you.
The Lord is in you. Well, well [sung]
You are one of the Lord’s little lambs.
Nina Mae McKinney:
Oh I love the Lord.
And I love all of his people.
And Elder, above everything,
I sure love you.
You know I love you.
Nix:
My dear little one
You sure will meet the Lord in peace now.
Nina Mae McKinney:
I’m so happy.
Oh, I’m so happy.
I’m glad I got off that hell-bound train.
Nix:
Yes my dear little lamb. [Singing]
Oh, you love everybody
And we all love you.
Amen.

46. The Dirty Dozen – No. 1
June 20, 1930; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1526)
Form: A (Intro: Theme), B (contemporary relevance), C (Nix’s advice), D (conclusion/pause)

A
My dear friends
I come before you today with a very serious subject: Amen
The Lowdown Twelve.
Yes
Or in other words,
The Dirty Dozen.
Alright

B¹ (0:08)
We have so many lowdown men and women in the world today, Yes
Until you hardly know what to do, Alright
Or what to say or where to go for safety. Yes
You will catch hell if you do, Yes
And you’ll catch hell if you don’t. Alright

B² (0:20)
The first lowdown person I bring before you today is: [Spiritual melody]
The drunkard. Yes
Any man or woman who will drink
And get drunk off this mess
That is being made these days
Is bad off for a drink.
They are mighty lowdown.

(0:34)
A drunken man
Feels like
He owns the world.
And a drunken woman
Is a disgrace to the world.
And what they will do and say
Is mighty lowdown.

B\textsuperscript{3} (0:45)
We have another lowdown man:
A professional gambler.
A professional gambler
Will take a chance on losing anybody’s money.
He’ll gamble away his wife’s money.
He’ll gamble the clothes off his back
And gamble the shoes off his feet.
Gambling
Is a game of hit or miss.
And you will miss more than you will hit.
And I can prove that by Sister Betty
Sitting here now.

C\textsuperscript{1} (1:09)
Sister Betty,
Your husband is a gambler.
Tell us,
Does he miss more than he hits?

Betty:
Well, Elder
I don’t wanna do much talkin’.
But all I gotta say,
If I just show you all these scars on my head and my back
You would see that he has been hittin’ more than he has been missin’.
And if you call that gamblin’, he has almost ruined me.

Nix:
Yes, my sister
But you got a lowdown man.
And he belong
To the Dirty Dozen.

B\textsuperscript{4} (1:32)
We have another lowdown man:
A high-class sweetback.
This man
Is commonly known
As a jellybean.
He is a sweetback.
This man is always dressed up.
He never works.
If you talk to him about working,
You will hear him say, “My mother’s named Work,
And I promised not to hit her.”
But he’s a lowdown man.

B⁵ (1:52)
We have another member of the Dirty Dozen:
A wife beater.
Any man who’s always beating up his wife,
Is mighty lowdown.
Ain’t that right Brother Ned?

C² (2:01)
Woman:
But Elder some women are so mean and fussy, you just got to whoop ‘em.
When they get to fussin’ and quarrellin’, well nothing’ll do dem but a good whoopin’.

Nix:
Well,
If you got to always whip your wife,
And you can’t get along without whipping her,
Send her home to her folks.
This fussin’,
Fightin’ like cats and dogs,
Is mighty lowdown.

B⁶ (2:20)
Another member
Of the Dirty Dozen
Is that man who says,
Let the women do the work.
That lazy scoundrel,
Always got some fool woman working for him.
While he walks the streets
Sitting around the pool room and barbershop telling lies,
While his w--wife is out doing the working.
He’s mighty lowdown.

B⁷ (2:38)
We have another member
Of the Dirty Dozen:
A selfish fool.
Some folks are fooled and know it.
And some are fooled and don’t know it.
That man
Wants everything for himself.
He’s full of greed, lust, and game.
He wants every woman he sees.
And he don’t want his wife to look at another man.
He wants all the new clothes
And his wife to stay in rags.
He wants to do all the going
And his wife to stay at home.  
He wants the world in a jug  
And the stopper in his own hand.  

Alright  
Yes  

D (3:07)  
And now we’ll stop a few minutes  
And then I will tell you about  
A few lowdown women.  
Amen.

47. The Dirty Dozen – No. 2
June 20, 1930; Chicago  
Vocalion (VO1526)  
Form: A (Intro), B (contemporary relevance), C (Nix’s advice)

A
My dear friends,  
We have just found a few more lowdown men and women.  
Yeah  

B¹ (0:04)  
The double-life live-r  
We have too many men and women living together  
These days who are not married.  
A woman is lowdown  
Who will let a man live with her,  
Load her down with children,  
Wear her out  
Just as soon  
As she begins to fade away,  
And wrinkles come in her face.  
He’s ready to leave her  
And get him a fresh woman.  

(0:25)  
Some women  
Don’t know when they have enough of men on their strings.  
This double-life living  
Is mighty lowdown.  

B² (0:33)  
The next lowdown we have  
Is deceitful men and women.  
Some men  
Are going around deceiving women,  
Carrying a thick  
Bank book in his pocket,  
Marked up with several thousand dollars on it  
To make believe he’s got plenty of money.  
Because he knows  
Women these days  
Are crazy about plenty money.  
A woman don’t care so much about a man these days,
It's his money
She’s crazy about. [Speaking]
Some men and women
Will stoop to the lowest thing [Speaking]
Of this world
To deceive one another. [Spiritual melody]

B^3 (1:02)
We have another member of the Dirty Dozen: [Spiritual melody]
The notorious thief.
This is a man
Who will steal bread out of a Blind man’s hand. [Speaking]
He’ll steal money Out of a dead man’s eyes. Yeah
He will steal Bread from a baby, [Speaking]
Steal from his mother. Yeah
He’ll steal from the church, Well, well [sung]
And steal from the lodge.
He’s so lowdown
He will steal from anybody. [Spiritual melody]
He’d rather steal anything
Than ask for it. Alright

B^4 (1:28)
The next
Lowdown member we have of the Dirty Dozen Yes
Is a heart breaker. Well alright
Some men and women [Speaking]
Will make love with every good-looking person they see. [Speaking]
They are never satisfied with their own. [Speaking]
They want what belong to somebody else. [Speaking]
Some women [Speaking]
Will get a man dying crazy about her,
Then see [Speaking]
Him fall hard to the ground. [Speaking]
Any man or woman [Speaking]
Will steal your heart,
And then let you fall.
Is mighty lowdown. Alright

B^5 (1:54)
We have another lowdown group: [Spiritual melody]
The hypocrites.
This world is full of hypocrites.
Men and women pretend to be what they are not. [Speaking]
They will smile in your face Amen [Loud]
And go behind your back [Spiritual melody]
And bleed your heart.
They will wear a face for every occasion.
One while
They’re like they’re a saint from heaven.
And again
They’re like a demon from hell.         [Spiritual melody]
They will listen what you say
And go out and tell it some other way.
And I tell you hypocrites
Are mighty lowdown.

B^6 (2:20)
Last but not least,
We have the chairman of the Dirty Dozen,         [Spiritual melody]
Mister
And Mrs. Lowdown.                 Well alright
This man or woman
Is the head of the lowdown crowd.
They stand at the head of the class.
They have no principles.
They have no self-respect.
They will do anything
When things
Are too low for anybody else to do.               Spiritual singing
It’s just right for them.                        Amen [loud]
They are the ones
Who will do the dirty work.
The lower the deed is,                       [Speaking]
The better they like it.                     [Speaking]

C (2:49)
Brother!
These are the Lowdown Twelve          [Speaking]
Or the Dirty Dozen.
That you will find in this world today.        Alright
Clean out
The dirty dozen
And times will get better
For you and for me.
Amen.

48. You Have Played The Fool
C. June 20, 1930; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1542)
Form: A (Intro: Theme), B (contemporary relevance), C (Nix’s advice)

A
My dear brothers and sisters,
I am to talk to you
This morning from the subject:
You have played the fool.          Well alright

(0:09)
I think this subject
Ought to catch everybody. Yeah
Everybody in this world have played the fool Certainly has, Yeah
At one time in their life. Alright
We have so many people
Who have played such big fools Yes
Until they will not admit to it. Yes

But brothers, Amen!!
An honest confession [spiritual melody]
Is good for your soul.

B¹ (0:29)
Some of you women Alright
Have had real good husbands Yes
Who worked hard
To try to give you everything
That you
Could have in this world. Alright
And you started
To running around
With some cheap dude Yes
That didn’t have anything to give you. Well

(0:45)
And now Well, well, well [sung]
That good husband
Has quit you. [speaking]
And that dude [speaking]
Has nothing to give you. [speaking]
And you got to go to work Speak your word!
In somebody’s kitchen Yes [shouts]
Slinging skillets, pots, and pans
From early morning
Until late at night. God almighty
And come home all tired out Yes, Amen!
Feeling bad. [spiritual melody]
And when you think
How your good husband
Kept you dressed up Yes
At home everyday. [speaking]
And now you can see [speaking]
Where you played the fool. Yes

B² (1:13)
Some of you men [spiritual melody]
Who had good honest wives Alright
Were true – were true to you Yes
Every way. Well, well, well
You got jealous
Of her
And other men.
And you accuse her
And abuse her
And beat her up so
Until she got tired of your bad treatment,
And got a divorce from you
And married another man.
And now she’s getting along fine.

(1:36)
And the wife
You got now
Is just as crooked as a snake.
And when you think about
Your good true wife,
And how,
You mistreated her,
You can see where
You played the fool.

B³ (1:48)
What about that good job
That you had drawing a good salary?
And you handle it mighty careless
And you lost your job
And you see where you played the fool.

B⁴ (1:58)
Some preachers
Who had good churches
Drawing good salaries
Got crazy
About women
And crazy about money
And drinking liquor
And getting drunk
He played the fool.
And lost his job.

C¹ (2:12)
Brother!
It is a-too
Late to grieve
When you’re playing the fool.

(2:17)
When opportunities
Have knocked at your door
A-a-at some time or other
Which would have put you in good circumstances,
But you played the fool
And let that opportunity go by.
Too late to grieve now.
You have just played the fool that’s all.

C\(^2\) (2:32)

Some of you men
When you come to this town
You had good money saved up in the bank.
But you got
With a fast crowd
And you got played out. When you got plenty money.
You got plenty of friends
And as long as you’ll spend your money
Your friends will gather ‘round you.
They will call you a fine man
In town.

(2:51)

And whenever you
Lose your money,
Then you lose all your friends.
And then this fast life
And good-time crowd
Will use you up
And leave you broke in this world.
And then you are through
With the world.
And then you can see where
You played the fool.

C\(^3\) (3:08)

Play young men!
Play young women!
Old men!
Old women!
Why don’t you tell yourself
Take your time.
Know what you’re about to do
And stop playing the fool.

Amen.

49. Too Much Religion

c. June 20, 1930; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1542)
Form: A (Intro: Theme), B (contemporary relevance), C (Nix’s advice), B, C, D (song)

A

My dear friends,
I want to talk to you this morning from the subject:
You have too much religion.

B\(^1\) (0:11)

Too much of anything will always ruin you.
Some people have too much temper.
It keep them always in trouble.
Some people eat too much.
It keep them always sick.
Some people are idle too much.
It keeps them always in devilment.

Ain’t that right Sister Mollie?

C¹ 0:28
Sister Mollie:
A-well, Elder,
If being idle makes you think, “devilment,”
The devil is doing big business these days
Because half of the people in this country
Are idle now.

That’s true

Nix:
Well, you can have too much religion.
You can always tell when some people
Have an over-supply of religion.
Nothing suits them.
Nobody’s right but them.
They will do more shouting in the church,
Make more noise in the church,
Take up more time in the church,
And find more fault with the church
And give less money to the church
Than anybody else
In the church.

That’s true

(1:01)
If you don’t believe me,
You just watch them from now on.
They tell me
An empty wagon
Makes more noise
Than a loaded wagon.
And shallow water runs faster downstream
Than deep water.

B² 1:15
Some folks,
I tell you,
Have too much religion.

Well, well, well [sung]

[1:18]
We have too many
“Grasshopper members”
In our churches these days.

[1:20]
A grasshopper
Is a little insect
That’s always hopping and jumping
From place to place.
He never stays long in no one place. Preach!

We have too many grasshopper members in our churches [shouts]

Who never stay long

In no one church. [singing]

They’re always jumping and hopping [shouts]

From church to church. [spiritual melody]

No church suits him.

He has too much religion.

B\(^3\) (1:44)

We have some members

In our churches today

Who have been members Yes

Of every church in town.

They have hopped in,

And hopped out.

They will hop in one church,

And when they can’t fault everybody there, Well, well, well [sung]

And run things their way.

They will raise hell in that church [shouts]

And then hop out [shouts]

And jump in another church. [shouts]

And they’re not there long

Before they’re raising the same hell Alright

And then they will start their hopping and jumping again. [singing]

B\(^4\) (2:07)

Some folks [spiritual melody]

Have so much religion. [shouts]

They have done [singing]

Some of everything that’s in this world.

Until now, [shouts]

They have turned holy.

They Have what you call

“Talking religion.”

C\(^2\) (2:18)

But Brother! [singing]

A real child of God Yes

Is humble and submissive Yes

As they go through this world, [singing]

Amid howling wolves

And tempting devils. Well, well, well [sung]

D (2:28)

You can hear them crying,

\(I\ \text{want Jesus to talk} \ [\text{sic}] \ \text{with me,}

Walk with me.

\(I\ \text{want Jesus to walk with me,}

I want Jesus to talk} [sic] with me,

Walk with me.

I want Jesus to walk with me,
50. How Will You Spend Christmas?
November 1, 1930; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1553), Supertone (Spt S2242)
Form: A (Intro: Theme), B (contemporary relevance), C (Nix’s advice)

A
My dear friends, I’m going to talk to you this morning from the subject: How will you spend your Christmas? [speaking]

B¹ (0:06)
When we think about these hard times, Everybody’s out of work and things are tough and tight, [speaking]
You can’t hardly find a job no place, [speaking]
And as we draw near to the Christmas time, I want to know, How will you spend your Christmas? [speaking]

C¹ (0:20)
Some of you men and women
Had good jobs but you wouldn’t keep them. Yeah
You were making good money,
But you wouldn’t save it. [speaking]
You spent it all
Having what you call a “big time.” Well, well, well, well [sung]
And now Christmas
Is almost here Yes
And you are broke. [singing]
You’ve got no money,
And you don’t know where you can get any. [speaking]
If you’ve got any friends, You can’t find them.

C² (0:41)
Brother! [humming]
Don’t blame anybody
Because you are broke.
Just blame yourself. [speaking]
You should have saved up for these hard times. [speaking and humming]
When you had money,
You didn’t use good sense. [shouts]
Now brother, [singing]
Your wife wants to know
And your friends want to know, Yes
How you’re gonna spend your Christmas. [singing]

C³ (0:56)
Sister Jones,
As we face these hard times, Yes
You seem to be mighty happy all the time.
How are you going to spend your Christmas?

Mrs. Jones:
My God, child,
I’m not going to spend Christmas.
How can I spend what I ain’t got?
I’m going to celebrate Christmas.
And believe me, I mean celebrate.
Nothing worries me.
Glory hallelujah! Amen

C⁴ (1:16)
Nix:
Yes,
That’s alright too! Yes
But you can’t even celebrate these days, [speaking]
Hard times without some money. Yes
You’ve just to have it, that’s all. Amen

Christmas is a time when everybody’s supposed to give Right
Somebody a present. [speaking]
And it takes money to give presents.
And when you get no money,
And you can’t have any friends,
And don’t know where you can find any.
How are you going to spend your Christmas? [shouts]

(1:39)
Your wife is mad, and the children’s crying. Yes
How will you spend your Christmas? Well alright!

C⁵
Say my friends!
Let me tell you, Yes
Times
Ain’t these days what they used to be. [shouts]
There was a time when everybody [spiritual melody]
Had plenty of work and some money.
And Christmas time,
You could spend your Christmas
Just like it was nobody’s business.
You could pray and sing
And get mighty happy.
But how
Can a man pray and sing
And get happy
When he’s broke and hungry?  

C⁶ (2:07)
It used to be
You could sit down
At a big table
And have
Eat a big dinner
And drink plenty
Good old time
Egg nog.
Made in the shade
And stirred with a spade.
It was the best egg nog that ever was made.
It would roll your cheeks and curl your hair,
And make you feel like a millionaire.
But those good days are gone now.
And I’m wondering
How you’re going to spend your Christmas?

C⁷ (2:30)
But times ain’t what they used to be.
But brother!
Don’t get discouraged!
Cheer up! Better days are coming after a while,
When you can spend your Christmas praising God.
And give Him the thanks
For what He’s already done for you this year.
You can spend your Christmas
Praising to God
And praying to Him for times to get better.
Will Christmas day find
You at the church,
Or will it find you in jail?
Will Christmas day find you sober,
Trying to stand up
Like a man and serve God?
Or will it find you drunk on moonshine,
And a disgrace to the world?

C⁸ (3:03)
Brother!
You must take the world as you find it,
And let the Holy Ghost be your friend.
For when you
Get a good job, [spiritual melody]
Save your money.
And so when Christmas time comes
And these hard times come,
You can…
Know how you’re gonna spend Christmas.
Amen.

51. Slow This Year For The Danger Signal
November 1, 1930; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1553), Supertone (Spt S2242)
Form: A (Intro: Theme), B (contemporary relevance), C (Nix’s advice)

A
My dear friends,
I bring you my New Year’s message:
Slow down this year for the danger signal. [speaking]

B¹ (0:06)
It seems these days everything and everybody
Is in a mighty big hurry. [speaking]
Everybody wants to go at break-neck speed. Well alright
People these days are going mighty fast,
They’re living mighty fast, they’re dying mighty fast. Yes
Seems that the password these days
Is: Step on the gas. [speaking]
There was a time when people used to walk everywhere they went and didn’t mind it.
But the latest
And the fastest way they want to go now is by the way of the airplane. [speaking]
But brother!
You’ve got to slow down. Yeah!

B² (0:32)
People these days
Don’t want to stop even for the red light. Alright
Go out to the hospital if you please. Lord, Lord [sung]
You will find
Some mighty fine young men and women
Whose bodies Well, well, well, well [sung]
Are dwindling away
With diseases
Because they wouldn’t stop
For the danger signal. Yeah!
They tried to run [singing]
And live too fast.
They ran over
The red light. Oh Lord [sung]

C¹ (0:51)
Young men,
Young women,
I want you,  
As you enter upon a new year,  
To slow down,  
And stop for the red light,  
The danger signal,  
Stop sign.  
You work all day  
And run all night.  
Your health will break down on you.  
Stop trying  
To drink that moonshine whiskey  
For it will eat you up inside.  
Stop trying to run  
With too many m..men  
And too many women.  
And they will keep your pocketbook empty all the time.  
Amen!  
Your health will break down on you.

C² (1:19)  
Brother!  
As you speed down  
The boulevards and highways,  
Of the city,  
You will come to the danger signal.

C³ (1:26)  
The red light,  
At a certain flash,  
It says, “Stop.”  
To run on,  
It means danger.  
You’re taking a big chance on your life.  
As we move along  
The paths of life,  
There are danger signals  
All along the way  
That tells, ah, the traveler  
Upon every highway.  
Slow down,  
And take your time.  
And stop for the danger signal.

C⁴ (1:48)  
Young men,  
Young women,  
Old men,  
And old women,  
This fast life  
You’re living today  
Will soon land you in your grave.  
And a lot of these old women these days,
That used to sing and pray,
And lead prayer meetings in the church,
Have cut their dresses off
Above their knees
And taken the sleeves out of their dresses.
And wearing shoes without stockings.
Are painting and powdering up their lips and faces,
Trying to run
With a young crowd
And trying to flirt with the young men.
While aches and pains
Are darting all through your old body.

[shouts]
Well, well, well [sung]
[singing]
[shouts]
[singing]
[shouts]
Yeah!

C\(^5\) (2:20)
Old age
Is running you
To your grave.
Slow down!
Stop old lady!
You are running over the danger signal.

[shouts]

C\(^6\) (2:28)
As we start out
Upon this new year
I plead with ya,
I urge upon you
To slow down,
Take your time.
The danger ahead,
You must recognize,
The danger signal
And stop before it’s too late.
If you run on,
You’ve got to pay the price.
If you run on,
You’ve got to suffer the consequences.
If you run over the red light,
The danger signal,
You’ll land in hell.
Stop right there
For the danger signal.
Amen.

52. There’s Something Rotten in Denmark\(^{25}\)
November 1, 1930; Chicago
Vocalion (VO 1578)
Form: A (Intro: Theme), B (contemporary relevance), C (Nix’s advice)

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\(^{25}\) This line is taken from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, in which he states, “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.”
Dear brothers and sisters,
I want to talk to you tonight from the subject:
There’s something rotten in Denmark.

There are so many unusual things
That are happening these days,
That keeps us always wondering and guessing what’s next.
It seems that married life is almost soon to be a failure.
True love is almost run out.
Nobody is taking life serious these days.
A lot of men and women are living together
These days not married to each other.
And they want to be recognized and hold high places in the church,
And among the best society
And they don’t want the preacher to even say a word about
How they are living.
Brother, there’s something wrong in Denmark!

Just think of a man working hard
Every day
Making long hours and working overtime,
Trying to keep his wife dressed up,
Living in a swell flat
With fine furniture and polished floors.
She is too lazy
To have his meals on time
And fix his bath
When he comes home from work.
She wants…uh, uh…and when he wants to love her,
And put his arms around her,
She’s always pushing him away
And telling him,
“I don’t want to be bothered,
I don’t feel good.”
Brother!
There’s something
Rotten in Denmark.

Her love for you has grown cold,
Because
There’s another cat on your line.26
Some men
Are always worrying and wondering

Brother!

Why
All of his children don’t favor him.
Brother when your wife is having children,
And some of them don’t favor you,
You just put this down in your pipe and smoke it.
There’s something
Rotten in Denmark.

C² (1:31)
Sister,
When your husband is working everyday
And drawing a good salary,
And every time pay day come,
He comes home,
To you and the children very late
With a pitiful tale of woe,
Saying,
“I worked overtime,
And was robbed on the way home,
I lost my paycheck.”
I just want
To say to you, don’t believe that lie.
Just remember,
There’s something rotten in Denmark.

C³ (1:55)
Denmark,
May be in your home,
Or it may be
On the other side of town.
You women
Must remember,
Men
Will pay off
Where they get the best treatment
And service.
And if they can’t get it at home,
They will get it in Denmark.

C⁴ (2:10)
Why, howdy do Sister Betty!
Is this your baby?
It hasn’t been six months ago
Since I married you and Brother Joe.
And you have a baby this quick?
This baby
Don’t favor your husband.

Sister Betty:
Well, Brother Pastor,
I’ve been trying to explain to my husband
Why the baby was born so soon.
We’ve only been married five months, so I guess it must be a five-month baby.
And the reason why he don’t favor my husband,
He takes after his great-great-great-grandfather!
But I can’t get my husband believe it.

[speaking]

Male Congregant:
My God, I don’t believe it myself.

Nix:
Yes,
That may be alright sister.
But I want to tell you
You husbands
You...you...Your wife won’t believe that tale.
You husbands
Must recognize a [indecipherable].
There’s something wrong in Denmark.

[speaking]

C^5 (2:51)
Sister,  Amen
This way, trying to fool your husband  Yeah!
May work well sometimes.  Yeah!
But you gonna get caught.  [shouts]
Brother this way trying to fool your wife,  Yeah!
You can’t get by
At it always.  Yeah!
Why don’t you men and women
Be fair with and honest with your husbands and wives?  Preach it Elder!
Why don’t you Christian men and women  [singing]
Live true to God?  [shouts]
Why do you have to always be making excuses,
Trying to explain
Why you do that,  Yeah!
And why you do that.
And why you’re always getting caught?
Brother!
I want to tell you,  [blues riff sung]
There’s something rotten in Denmark.
Amen.

53. You Low Down Rascal
November 1, 1930; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1578)

Missing track that has not been found.

54. Jack the Ripper
March 28, 1931; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1609)

Missing track that has not been found.
55. Hot Shot Mamas and Teasing Browns
March 28, 1931; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1609)

Missing track that has not been found.

56. Strange Things Happening in the Land
March 28, 1931; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1634)

Missing track that has not been found.

57. Downfall of Man
March 28, 1931; Chicago
Vocalion (VO1634)

Missing track that has not been found.
APPENDIX B
ADVERTISEMENTS FOR REVEREND NIX’S SERMONS

"GOIN' TO HELL
And Who Cares"

by
REV. A. W. NIX
and Congregation

VOCALION RECORD
No. 1108

PEOPLE are still talking about the first record Rev. A. W. Nix, the noted national evangelist and power in Jehovah's quiver, made exclusively for Vocalion. His second record "GOIN' TO HELL AND WHO CARES" is another of those spicy sermons and you'll surely want it for your collection of great sermons. On the other side he gives us "HIDING BEHIND THE STUFF," which is mighty powerful too. Don't fail to hear this record today!

A FEW MORE VOCALION HITS:

Black Diamond Express to Hell—Part I Sermons with
Black Diamond Express to Hell—Part II Singing 1098
Rev. A. W. Nix and His Congregation 75c

Carrier Platoon Blues Piano, Guitar, Violin
Peeping at the Rising Sun Blues Piano, Banjo 1102
Singing Comedians Lucile Miller 75c

Let That Lie Alone Voice and Guitar
Jesus Will Make It All Right Voice and Guitar 1093
The Guitar Evangelist Rev. Edward W. Clarborn 75c

BETTER AND CLEANER RACE RECORDS

Vocalion Records
Electrically Recorded

Manufactured by The Brunswick-Balke-Collender Co., Chicago, Illinois

"When All the Saints Go Marching In"

Here is the best record of the day. "When All the Saints Go Marching In" and "Lord, I Can't Stay Away" are two of the most popular selections ever made, and when you find them on one record, you are really getting a big bargain. Every home should have this great record. Don't fail to hear it at your favorite dealer's today!

A Few More Vocalion Hits

Jellyroll Voice and Guitar
Mr. Furry's Blues Voice and Guitar with Mandolin
Furry Lewis

I'm Goin' Huntin' Voice and Guitar with Mandolin
If You Want to Be My Sugar Papa Voice and Guitar with Mandolin
Jimmy Bertrand's Washboard Wizards

Black Diamond Express to Hell—Part I
Black Diamond Express to Hell—Part II
Rev. A. W. Nix and His Congregation

Vocalion Records
Electrically Recorded

Better and Cleanest Race Records

Manufactured by The Brunswick-Balke-Collender Co., Chicago, Illinois

The Biggest selling record of today

BLACK DIAMOND EXPRESS to HELL

In 2 parts -
REV. A. W. NIX
and Congregation

VOCATION RECORD
No. 1098

Here she comes! The "Black Diamond Express to Hell" with Sam the Engineer, holding the throttle wide open. Pleasure is the Headlight, and the Devil is the Conductor. You can feel the rumbling of the Express and the moaning of the Drunks, Luts, Gamblers and other folks who have got aboard. They are hell-bound and they don't want to go. The train makes eleven stops but nobody can get off. Let the Reverend A. W. Nix tell you about the "Black Diamond Express to Hell." He does some powerful preaching and there's some mighty fine singing by Rev. Nix and his congregation. This record is in two parts.

HEAR THESE GREAT RECORDS TODAY!
Black Diamond Express to Hell—Part I 1098
Black Diamond Express to Hell—Part II 75c
Goin' to Hell and Who Cares
Hiding Behind the Stuff—Sermons
Rev. A. W. Nix and Congregation 1108 75c

BETTER AND CLEANER RACE RECORDS

Vocation Records
Electrically Recorded

MANUFACTURED BY THE BRUNSWICK-BALKE-COLFERD CO.

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"The PRAYER MEETING IN HELL"

The sermons of Rev. A. W. Nix, noted national evangelist and power in Jehovah’s Quiver, have taken the country by storm. He puts real thought into his powerful sermons that stir you through and through. The “Prayer Meeting In Hell” is exceptionally good, and “After the Ball Is Over,” on the other side, is great, too! Don’t fail to hear this record today!

A Few More Vocalion Hits

- Black Diamond Express to Hell—Part 1
- Black Diamond Express to Hell—Part II
- Rev. A. W. Nix and His Congregation

- Goin’ to Hell and Who Cares
- Hiding Behind the Stuff
- Rev. A. W. Nix and His Congregation

- Your Enemies Cannot Harm You
- The Gospel Train Is Coming

Vocalion Records

Better and Cleaner Race Records—Electrically Recorded

Manufactured by Vocalion-Brunswick-Graphophone Co., Chicago, Illinois

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FURRY LEWIS is the boy who is proving a sensation as a blues singer. He knows how to put the kind of feeling into his songs that makes them all big hits. Just listen to “Sweet Papa Moan” and you’ll agree he’s great. “C & O Blues,” by Blind Joe Amos, on the other side is very good, too. Be sure to hear this record today!

POPULAR VOCALION SELLERS

Rock Island Blues Voice and Guitar
Everybody’s Blues Voice and Guitar with Mandolin
Furry Lewis

Jellyroll Voice and Guitar
Mr. Furry’s Blues Voice and Guitar with Mandolin
Furry Lewis

Melancholy Fox Trot
Johnny Dodd’s Black Bottom Stompers

Bill Brown Blues Fox Trot
Bill Brown and His Brownies

Black Diamond Express to Hell—Part I
Black Diamond Express to Hell—Part II
Rev. A. W. Mix and Condensation

Vocalion Records
Better and Cleaner Race Records—Electrically Recorded
Manufactured by The Brunswick-Balke-Collender Co., Chicago, Illinois

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NEVER before have you heard a record like this new one by our latest exclusive Vocalion star, Henry Thomas, well known as "Ragtime Texas." He strums a mean guitar and it's a real treat to hear the way he sings and whistles the catchy tune of "John Henry." On the other side he sings "Cottonfield Blues," a low down number you'll like too. Hear this record today!

**A FEW OTHER GOOD HITS**
- Black Diamond Express to Hell—Part I
- Black Diamond Express to Hell—Part II
- Rev. A. W. Nix and His Congregation
- There'll Be Glory (When We Reach the Other Side)
- Death Is Only a Dream
- Voice and Guitar: Rev. Edward W. Clayborn
- Rock Island Blues
- Voice and Guitar: Furry Lewis
- Everybody's Blues
- Voice, Guitar and Mandolin
- 1111
- Electrically Recorded

Vocalion Records

EVERYBODY in Kansas City knows Jim Jackson. Down there folks claim he's the one of the greatest blues singer there ever was. We think he is too, so we had him make his favorite song for Voc alien. It's called "Jim Jackson's Kansas City Blues" and comes in two parts. Go down to your favorite Voc alien Dealer and have him play this great record for you. You'll be buying it before it's half finished. Don't fail to hear this record today.

A FEW MORE VOCALION HITS

John Henry — Voice, Whistling and Guitar
Cottonfield Blues — Voice with Guitar and Acc. Henry Thomas
Black Diamond Express to Hell — Part I
Black Diamond Express to Hell — Part II
Rev. R. W. Nix and Congregation
Rock Island Blues — Voice and Guitar
Everybody's Blues — Voice and Guitar with Mandolin
Furry Lewis
Let Jesus Lead You — Voice and Guitar, Guitar Evangelist
Bae and Bye When the Morning Comes
Voice, Guitar Edw. W. Clayborn
Carolina Bound — Fox Trot
Baltimore — Fox Trot, Vocal Chorus
Clarence Williams' Blue Five Orchestra

Vocalion Records
Better and Cleaner Race Records — Electrically Recorded
Manufactured by The Brunswick-Balke-Collender Co., Chicago, Ill.

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A LETTER FROM FATHER is always welcome. Sometimes it brings some money—sometimes it brings good news and most always some good advice that everyone needs when they're away from home. Hear the Rev. Edward W. Clayborn, the famous "Guitar Evangelist," tell you more about it. On the other side he gives us "Men, Don't Forget Your Wives for Your Sweethearts" another powerful singing sermon. Don't miss hearing this fine record today.

A FEW MORE VOGALION HITS!

White Ferry to Heaven Part I: Sermons with Singing 1170
White Ferry to Heaven Part II: Rev. Mix and Const'n 75c
Your Enemies Cannot Harm You
The Gospel Train Is Coming Voice and Guitar 1082
Edward W. Clayborn 75c
My Monday Blues
Mobile-Central Blues 1145
Voice, Guitar Jim Jackson 75c

Electrically Recorded

Ask your dealer to play these records for you TODAY. If he can't supply you write to us direct.

Vocalion Records

Manufactured by
The Brunswick-Balke-Collender Co., Chicago, Ill.

"LOVE IS A THING OF THE PAST"

By
REVEREND
A. W. NIX

VOCALION RECORD
No. 1431

When the Rev. A. W. Nix takes his place at the pulpit, the congregation gets ready for some powerful preaching. He puts the same power in his sermons when he makes Vocalion Records. Be sure to hear his latest hit "Love Is a Thing of the Past" and "That Little Thing May Kill You Yet" on the other side. They are without exception two of the best numbers this famous preacher has ever made. Ask your dealer to play

Love Is a Thing of the Past
That Little Thing May Kill You Yet

Vocalion Records

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St. Louis, Mo.

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APPENDIX C
DETAILS FOR NIX’S RECORDED SERMONS


Object C-1. Details for Nix’s Recorded Sermons (.pdf file 97 KB)
APPENDIX D
REVEREND SUTTON GRIGG’S RECORDED SERMONS

Only four of the six recordings have been located. Both “Speaking the Truth” and “Keeping the Peace” were unissued.

Table D-1. Recordings by Reverend Sutton E. Griggs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Matrix #</th>
<th>Date Recorded</th>
<th>Lyrical Theme</th>
<th>Musical Selections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“A Hero Closes a War”</td>
<td>Victor 21706</td>
<td>BVE-47056-1</td>
<td>9/18/28</td>
<td>Racial conflict between whites and blacks, but a black ends the race war through his charity.</td>
<td>“Down by the Riverside”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Self Examination”</td>
<td>Victor 38516</td>
<td>BVE-47058-1</td>
<td>9/19/28</td>
<td>One must look at themselves before judging their neighbor.</td>
<td>“Standing in the Need of Prayer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Speaking the Truth”</td>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>BVE-47059</td>
<td>9/19/28</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A Surprise Answer to Prayer”</td>
<td>Victor 21706</td>
<td>BVE-47060-1</td>
<td>9/19/28</td>
<td>Be careful what you pray for.</td>
<td>“Four and Twenty Elders”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Keeping the Peace”</td>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>BVE-47061</td>
<td>9/19/28</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


2 Phone communication with record collector, Joseph Brussard, June 11, 2018.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Terri Michele Brinegar, originally from San Antonio, Texas, received her bachelor’s degree from North Texas State University (now University of North Texas) and master’s degree from University of Central Florida, both in classical voice. She received her PhD in music from University of Florida in 2018. She has presented her research on African-American voices at numerous conferences, including the American Musicological Society, the Society for Ethnomusicology, and the Association for Recorded Sound Collections. She has been an invited speaker at both Baylor University and the University of South Carolina. She has performed for over twenty years in classic R&B and blues bands in both Los Angeles and Nashville prior to moving to Florida. Terri has three professionally produced CDs of blues and jazz original compositions. Her book, *Vocal and Stage Essentials for the Aspiring Female R&B Singer*, was published by Hal Leonard in 2012. Terri currently resides in Lake Mary, Florida, with her husband Jim and cat Sammy.