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## The Frenzy, the Preacher, and the Music

*“The Frenzy of ‘Shouting’ . . . was the last essential of Negro Religion and the one more devoutly believed in than all the rest.”*

*“The Preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil.”*

*“The Music of Negro Religion . . . still remains the most original and beautiful expression of human life and longing yet born on American soil.”*

—W. E. B. Du Bois

AS THE NUMBER of southern migrants who attended mainline black Chicago churches surged, the worship patterns of those churches altered significantly. Indeed, with changes to the worship in mainstream black churches, the impact of black southerners on these congregations was complete. Southern migrants were fattening church rolls and exhausting as well as expanding financial and programmatic resources. They were also prompting a reconceptualization of the notion of church work through social service and alliances with the wider world. The capstone to all this transformation was how southern migrants helped shape the ways and means by which the faithful praised God. The anxieties of the dwindling number of “old settlers” who worried about the overwhelming influence migrants could have on black church culture proved well-founded. There were striking differences between the way churches operated in black Chicago in the 1890s and the way they did by the 1920s. And it was not so much about which people went to church; nearly all of black Chicago went to church, especially on Sundays. Drake and Cayton spoke to this when they asserted, “Sunday morning in Bronzeville is a colorful occasion.” They went on to say that “Eleven o’clock service is the main event of the day, and some of the larger churches are filled by 10:45 A.M., when the older members start the pre-service prayer meeting.” The congregants arrived at church by various means, including “jitneys” (illegal cabs), street-cars, buses, and “freshly polished” automobiles. “Church mothers” adorned with “little gray caps perched on their heads and secured by chin straps” conversed with the youth of the church “clad in their stylish Sunday best.”<sup>1</sup> Scenes like this were repeated weekly in churches all across the South Side.

The issue with black Chicago churches during the migration era, however, was who went to what church amid the vast array of choices—or better, the diverse range of people one was likely to find in those congregations along regional, generational, educational, as well as class lines. The complexity of black Protestant churches during this era served as one of the new religious culture's signature features. It was this complexity, the fragmented or mixed nature of mainstream black Protestant churches that prompted the profound changes in preaching, worship patterns, and church music. For many of these churches, the adaptations were not only necessary; they also had an air of inevitability about them.

One of the primary aspects of the religious services in mainstream black churches to undergo adaptation was the way ministers conducted their sermons. In many ways, the changes started with the sermon for it was the historical centerpiece and lifeblood of black worship. Preaching held the key to all that happened or failed to happen in the worship service. Its form and content were firmly rooted in history and the black oral tradition.<sup>2</sup> In the South, the basic form of black preaching had remained fairly consistent since the mid-nineteenth century. Black southern migrants who came to Chicago would have been familiar with a preaching style that was un-schooled, emotional, and theatrical. John Jasper typified the black southern “folk” preacher of the late nineteenth century. Born a slave in Fluvanna County, Virginia, in 1812, Jasper rose to become one of the most celebrated preachers of his day. Like many of his contemporaries Jasper had very little schooling, which may have, ironically, added to the power of his message and his delivery. Known most famously for his sermon, “Da Sun Do Move,” in which he claimed that the sun revolved around the earth and that the earth was flat, Jasper delivered all his sermons in dialect or vernacular speech. Likewise, the theatrical use of his body in the pulpit held his audiences spellbound. Jasper’s biographer, William E. Hatcher, described him as “a theater within himself.” Upon first hearing Jasper, Hatcher wrote: “Shades of Anglo-Saxon fathers! Did mortal lips ever gush with such torrents of horrible English! Hardly a word came out clothed in its right mind. And gestures! He circled around the pulpit with his ankle in his hand; and laughed and sang and shouted and acted out a dozen characters within the space of three minutes.”<sup>3</sup> In the twentieth century, southern black preachers continued in the tradition of Jasper, preaching theatrical sermons done in vernacular speech that were also highly emotional, theologically inventive, and socially conservative. Great showmen and stirring entertainers, many of these preachers recorded their sermons throughout the decade of the 1920s. The Reverend Calvin P. Dixon was the first to do so for Columbia Records in 1925. The most acclaimed sermon on record was done by Reverend J. C. Burnett of Kansas City, Missouri. His “The Downfall of Nebuchadnezzar” proved so enormously popular that it

outsold Bessie Smith in 1926.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the most acclaimed and certainly the most prolific preacher to record his sermons was J. M. Gates from Atlanta, Georgia. His many recordings, including such titles as “Death Might Be Your Santa Claus,” “Women Spend Too Much Money,” “Kinky Hair Is No Disgrace,” and “Death’s Black Train Is Coming,” demonstrate the black southern sermonic tradition in all its elements, including the fabled “preacher’s breath”—vocal interjections at the end of sentences. They also included “call and response” and chanting, or the “singing sermon.”<sup>5</sup> Certainly, Du Bois had rural African American preachers working from this tradition in mind when he wrote “the preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil.”<sup>6</sup> By the early 1920s, many mainline black Chicago preachers came to embrace aspects of this sermonic tradition in deference to congregations that held growing numbers of blacks from the rural South.

Prior to 1915, established black Chicago churches placed great emphasis on preaching that was “orderly” and worship that was “decorous.” Although the lack of an “educated ministry” was a perennial critique both in the North and in the South after the Civil War, most ministers of Chicago’s larger churches possessed ministerial degrees and had been trained in homiletics.<sup>7</sup> Moses H. Jackson, Richard R. Wright, Jr., Archibald J. Carey, Sr., Elijah John Fisher, and James Alfred Dunn Podd, for example, were all prominent African American ministers who held advanced theological degrees during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Fisher, who had studied at the University of Chicago, was a scholar proficient in both Hebrew and Greek. Podd, a West Indian, came to pastor both Olivet and Bethesda Baptist in the 1890s after having finished a “classical collegiate course” in England in preparation for the Episcopal ministry. Miles Mark Fisher described him as an eloquent preacher with “pulpit ministrations” that were “brilliant” and “scholarly.”<sup>8</sup> It was, however, the combined pressures of competition from other churches and from secular organizations for the attention of migrants who enjoyed “a more emotional ritual” that persuaded many ministers of mainline African American Chicago churches to adopt what Drake and Cayton called a “mixed type” preaching style.<sup>9</sup> Unlike the southern sermonic tradition, which was often done entirely in dialect, a sermon of the mixed type basically attempted to appeal to “two classes” of listeners in a congregation: the intellectually inclined and those who felt compelled to express their emotions freely and demonstratively.<sup>10</sup> On a deeper level, this new and innovative addition to the black sermonic tradition attempted to appeal to both reason (rationality) and to the emotions on the same occasion—if not at the same time. Olivet’s Lacey Kirk Williams, for example, was said to be a “thoughtful, forceful, orthodox, interesting and emotional preacher” whose sermons simultaneously “satisfied the intellectual elite, convinced

the skeptic and . . . electrified the washer woman.” When a 1929 *Chicago Daily News* article lauded Olivet Baptist’s extensive social outreach programs for southern migrants, Williams clarified that the church had not, in the process, neglected worship. “We have plenty of ‘rousement,’” he maintained, “and I think at one of our services even one who believes as little as our good friend Clarence Darrow would be ‘roused.’”<sup>11</sup> (A humanist and “freethinking” agnostic, Darrow made no secret of his disdain for organized religion and religious fervor. He would later write that he thought blacks to be too religious and their worship services to be “religious orgies.”)<sup>12</sup> In tone, delivery, and intent, mixed-type sermons differed widely from those that had been preached among Chicago’s African Americans prior to the migration.

Mixed-type sermons 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. The opening of “Reverend F’s” sermon “was as erudite a discussion as one would expect to hear in a Hyde Park church,” Robert Sutherland reported in 1930. The preacher, “one of the best educated ministers serving one of the largest churches,” read from a prepared text on the subject “Christianity as a Mystery.” Impressed with the minister’s “style and thought,” Sutherland excerpted heavily from the sermon: “The beauty without is a reflection of the beauty within. . . . A rose is beautiful because of our power of aesthetic appreciation.”<sup>13</sup> As a mixed-type 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. Sutherland was not so impressed with the extemporaneous portion of Reverend F’s sermon.

After ten minutes of thoughtful preaching, Reverend F. began to wander occasionally from his manuscript, inserting now and then vivid descriptions with strong emotional appeal. This was merely a suggestion of what was to follow. Soon he rose to the height of enthusiasm. Manuscript and sermon subject was abandoned. With a skill I have never seen equaled, he played upon the emotions of his people. “God is everywhere. He is here. He is there. He is in the air. If a spiritual hand were out there I would grasp it.”

Reverend F then began “gesturing” and “strutting” in the performance of his sermon. He blended singing and speaking as if carrying on a “face to face dialogue with the Lord.” When he came to the “climax” of his sermon, Reverend F gave a “cry of abandonment” that referred back to the opening portion. “I am born of God,” he exclaimed. “I can’t be intelligent all the time. I’ve got to be myself. I’ve got religion. I’ve got religion.” The

congregation responded with holy dancing (one woman doing what Sutherland claimed was “not dissimilar to the Charleston”), and shouts of “Amen” and “Glory to God.”<sup>14</sup>

Ministers such as Williams and Reverend F who became adroit at mixed-type preaching understood that the division between the “two classes” of listeners was not only along class or economic lines, but along cultural, regional, generational, and educational lines as well. As early as 1915, Theobald Smythe came under pressure from “two distinct classes of worshippers” in Bethel AME Church. Older members of the congregation wanted sermons that would “move them to shouting” while the younger congregants demanded sermons that were “more intellectualized.” Although Smythe apparently attempted to satisfy the old and the young, the *Chicago Defender* still depicted Bethel as not a place where “fanatics” vented their emotions.<sup>15</sup> One African American Chicago minister, observed in the forties by a researcher for Drake and Cayton’s *Black Metropolis*, calmed his congregation down (after having incited an explosion of emotionalism) by proclaiming, “My, I forgot where I was this morning. I musta thought I was still down between the plow-handles and not here in a Chicago pulpit. Lemme get back to this paper [manuscript]. I forgot I had these educated folks in here. But I’m not ashamed of my Jesus!”<sup>16</sup>

Preachers of mixed-type sermons employed several techniques designed to make allowances for emotionalism. First, as the above example shows, these sermons often made direct references to the South. In this way, the sermon evoked images of a way of life familiar to many of the listeners while at the same time suggesting a familial connection of call and response between speaker and audience. Robert Sutherland noted that in mixed-type sermons, metaphors taken from rural life were the norm. He described in his typically pejorative manner one such sermon given at a South Side church.

The discourse was filled with anecdotes all of which were taken from rural life. His analogies were grossly drawn and he apologized for the impropriety of one—comparing a weak Christian to the runt of the litter which couldn’t keep up with the sow. One story drew a moral from the antics of a donkey. Another was based on cabbage plants.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, mixed-type preachers speckled the emotional portion of their sermons with vernacular speech. Used as a means to establish a rapport with the poor, less educated, or southern migrants (between whom few mainline ministers drew any distinction), the dialect speech commonly referred to aspects of urban life. They especially stressed the hardships and dislocation typically experienced by this segment of the congregation. Lastly, although mixed type preachers endeavored never to “alienate the ‘educated’ members,” anti-intellectualism was another technique they

routinely employed. Mixed-type sermons would often attribute certain sins as particular to those who were educated or intellectual. In a sermon about pride given by an African American Chicago minister in the 1940s, for example, the story of Jesus' questioning by the chief priests and Pharisees in Luke 5:27–6:10 was given a contemporary bent. After their attempt to stump Jesus with questions had failed, the minister asserted, "That fixed 'em—all those Ph.D.'s in their long robes and mortarboard hats, all puffed with their education. With all their degrees and learning, they couldn't trick the Son of the Living God!"<sup>18</sup>

Although mixed-type preaching as a concession to the southern folk religious sensibility became common during the Great Migration, it did not change everyone's mind about the perceived dangers of emotional worship. One Chicago preacher insisted in 1930 that the practice of "shouting," which mixed-type preaching was designed to accommodate, was a "form of insanity." Alexis de Tocqueville had made a similar claim in the early nineteenth century after witnessing the worship at a "camp meeting," asserting, "religious insanity is very common in the United States."<sup>19</sup> Though it appeared strange to many longtime black Chicagoans, however, "shouting" had a long history among black religionists, particularly those in the South. In southern African American rural religion, "shouting" or "holy dancing" was second only in importance to the sermon and was the centerpiece of emotionally frenzied worship. It was after having witnessed such a display of religious emotionalism that Du Bois penned his own description of "the Frenzy," calling it "the last essential of Negro religion and the one more devoutly believed in than all the rest."<sup>20</sup> Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the rise of emotionalism in mainstream black Chicago churches elicited intense responses. These responses typically ranged from favorable to highly unfavorable. A few remained ambivalent. One African American pastor confessed, "I don't know how to handle it. It confuses and bothers me."<sup>21</sup> Even those who saw the practice as harmless worried that it was ultimately retrograde. "I think when it's sincerely done, it's alright," an interviewee proclaimed in the forties. "On the whole, though, I regard it as a turning back toward slavery days."<sup>22</sup> By this time, however, mixed-type preaching and emotionally frenzied worship were pervasive and characteristic of black churches across a wide denominational spectrum. It had made significant inroads even into many of the city's old-line institutions, providing identifiable spaces for the church's growing number of southern migrant congregants.

The ability to appeal to the "two classes" within most congregations became an important test for black clergy. And not every minister who recognized the need for mixed-type preaching could perform it. An African American minister in Robert Sutherland's 1930 study confessed that "I sometimes bring in some other preacher to do the emotional part

and he gets results where I couldn't."<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, whatever ministers and churchgoers thought of mixed-type preaching or of religious enthusiasm, the presence of it in church worship reaffirmed notions essential to southern migrant religious culture. One African American pastor of a large and reputedly nondemonstrative church interviewed in the late 1930s inadvertently testified to the pervasiveness of mixed-type preaching by that time. "My preaching appeals to the better class, but it is not pedantic. We have two thousand five hundred members including ignorant people who fall in line and keep step. I believe in the preparation of sermons, in illustrations for sermons, and write my sermons down, but do not read them." With this obvious concession to the "ignorant people" of his congregation, clearly it was this minister who was falling in line and keeping step.<sup>24</sup>

At the same time that mixed-type preaching was reconfiguring the worship styles of many of Chicago's established black Protestant churches, black gospel emerged to replace the classical music and "Negro spirituals" that had become the most regularly performed music in these churches. As with many African American religious cultural forms, there remains an ahistorical, timeless perception about black gospel music. The genre has been so intimately associated with the black experience in the United States that the notion that black gospel emerged within a particular historical context has often been obscured. There is, however, a specific historical development to black gospel and it is intricately tied to the migration and urbanization of American blacks. Black gospel is a musical genre deeply influenced by the cadences of the South and southern religion, but it was born in the city and at its core reflects urbanization and modern life. As Mellonee Burnim stated, "when blacks migrated to urban centers in the North and South during the aftermath of World War I, they created gospel music, music which reflected their changing ideas and ideals in this new sociocultural environment."<sup>25</sup> Chicago was central to the historical development of black gospel, not only because it was the home of the modern gospel era, but also because black gospel provided a drastic contrast to the worship music that had become common in black Chicago churches. By the 1890s, classical music and classically trained musicians and choristers dominated the church music scene in the city's prominent black churches. The African American middle class in particular found no more appropriate way to showcase cultural refinement and respectability than with the music of their houses of worship. Churches like Grace Presbyterian, for instance, professed that they were "wide awake to the issues of the day in art and music."<sup>26</sup> Though churches did not entirely abandon the Negro spirituals and hymns of their evangelical heritage, it became common and expected to include the works of classical composers in the worship service. Additionally, intense vocal



competitions, highly stylized concerts, and musicals were frequently staged and well attended. The sixteenth annual “Pleasant Sunday Afternoon” concert series held at Bethel AME on March 19, 1916, for example, included international folk song and dance, but the works of Grieg, Haydn, Chopin, and Tchaikovsky predominated.<sup>27</sup>

There was a twofold purpose for performing classical music in black churches. First, many middle-class African American pastors and their choirmasters desired to educate Chicago blacks about music of the “higher type.” This motivation comprised the central mission of the Umbria Glee Club, one of the oldest such organizations in America, the R. Nathaniel Dett Club, and Chicago Choral Study Club. Under the direction of Professor Pedro Tinsley, the Chicago Choral Study Club made a commitment to doing “the most difficult pieces” in order to “create a desire for better music among Chicago Negroes.” In addition to chorales by Handel, Bach, and Beethoven, the Chicago Choral Study Club also introduced to Chicago the works of the Afro-British composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor.<sup>28</sup> Second, middle-class black churches that performed classical music wanted to answer charges that African Americans were limited musically. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many whites were convinced of African Americans’ “natural” musical ability but restricted that ability to “work songs,” “corn field ditties,” and Negro spirituals, which at their best could “only be rendered by Negroes.” Such artists as Anita Patti Brown, a vocal artist of enormous popularity who regularly performed in middle-class black Chicago churches, proved that “the expression of music in the Negro could not be confined to just the Spirituals.” Brown, a soprano who had developed a national reputation after graduating from Chicago Musical College, often included arias by Verdi, Donizetti, and Meyerbeer in her concerts.<sup>29</sup> In regular concerts rendered throughout the 1890s, she and a large number of other “Divas and Divans” helped middle-class African American churches overturn theories of the “Negro’s limited musical ability.”<sup>30</sup>

The rise of classical music performance in Chicago’s middle-class black churches, however, worked as much to exaggerate social and class differences among the city’s blacks as it did to educate and to dispel notions of black musical inferiority. Membership in most of the musical organizations, choruses, and choirs was strict and exclusive. With reputations to maintain for music of the highest quality, the leadership carefully monitored the groups and limited membership to the “highly refined.”<sup>31</sup> And the performances themselves were not entirely democratic affairs. Although much of the classical music performed in churches was done as a part of the public worship service, and therefore free of charge, other performances were staged to raise funds either for the church or for the particular organization and deliberately targeted an audience of the “more

cultured class.” Such an audience attended Bethel AME in 1910 when “Madame” Sallie M. Jones Downs gave a concert that was “repeatedly encored by the wave of handkerchiefs.” And when the Umbriai Glee Club gave its initial concert of the season that same year at Quinn Chapel AME, opening with the battle hymn from Wagner’s opera, *Rienzi: Der Letzte der Tribunen* (The Last of the Tribunes), it was to “a large gathering of Chicago’s best society people.” The opera, set in the fourteenth century, fell outside of Wagner’s Bayreuth canon and did not represent in an aesthetic sense the trajectory of his later music. The piece lacked any obvious spiritual content to suggest it as particularly apt for religious worship. It was most certainly the obscurity of the opera, therefore, that made it a prime choice for black Chicagoans keen on demonstrations of “respectability” through music. *Rienzi* would later have a tremendous influence on the young Adolph Hitler.<sup>32</sup>

Black gospel forged its way into this world of Eurocentric, class-based worship in Chicago African American churches by the early 1930s. Even before the modern era of black gospel, however, nascent versions of the genre were heard first among the numerous Holiness-Pentecostal churches primarily established and frequented by black southerners. While in Chicago during the First World War, Langston Hughes happened upon one of these churches and wrote that he was “entranced by their stepped-up rhythms, tambourines, handclapping, and uninhibited dynamics, rivaled only by Ma Rainey singing the blues at the Old Monogram Theater.” Located on South State Street, the Monogram was one of Chicago’s hottest entertainment venues, featuring the stage acts of Erskine Tate and Ethel Waters, as well as Ma Rainey. Hughes went on to say that the “music of these less formal Negro churches early took hold of me, moved me and thrilled me.”<sup>33</sup>

Although ethnomusicologists and other scholars dispute the exact origins of black gospel, most agree that Chicago was the birthplace of the modern gospel music era.<sup>34</sup> And although many of these same scholars also disagree about the extent to which the evangelical hymns of nineteenth-century white Christians, African American “shout songs,” Negro spirituals, and the blues influenced the genre, they all agree that each played a part in shaping it. From the onset, the music was a vernacular form, tending to address common experiences and to be imbued with an urban cosmology. It was deliberately subjective and designed to encourage an emotional response. It also necessitated an emphatic, improvisational delivery by the performer. From a thematic and theological point of view, there were important differences between black gospel and the black sacred music that preceded it. Black gospel tended to infuse God into the present, into current situations. This focus did not dispel eschatological hopes, but it did temper them with a horizontal gaze on temporal conditions. “Ain’t

That Good News,” a song penned in mid-1930s by “Little Lucy” Collier and sung to choreography, captured these elements.

Jesus is coming, coming soon  
 Ain't that good news,  
 It may be morning night or noon,  
 Ain't that good news;  
 I'm going to lay down my burden, I'm going to shoulder up my cross  
 And I'm going to take it home to Jesus  
 Ain't that good news.<sup>35</sup>

Black gospel suggested a greater intimacy with God, a God close at hand. In contrast to Negro spirituals, the God of black gospel was present and highly anthropomorphized. God, in the person of Jesus, did not simply punish sin and sinners but also “talked” to his children, “wiped tears from their eyes” and “held their hands.” Many of the tunes composed in the 1930s and 1940s by Roberta Martin, who led one of the most successful gospel ensembles in Chicago, best exemplified the intimacy and the theological immediacy of black gospel music. In one song, Martin proclaimed “Jesus is My Only Friend”; In another, simply “Jesus Is Mine.” In still another popular tune, she encouraged listeners to “Try Jesus” because “He Satisfies.”<sup>36</sup> The theologies of black gospel were more personal than communal and the meanings more straightforward than in Negro spirituals. As an indigenous folk musical tradition, Negro spirituals were rooted in the slave experience and using biblical imagery and metaphor, reflected the cosmology of Christian slaves. Though essentially sacred in content, Negro spirituals typically contained a double, “coded,” and more subversive meaning. “Go Down Moses” and “Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel” had as much to do with the desire for freedom and rebellion as with the epic stories of ancient Israel. Christian slaves often used these songs to warn of impending danger, as well as to usher runaways to freedom. When they heard the words “Steal Away to Jesus” or “Get on Board, Little Children,” escaping slaves knew the way was safe.<sup>37</sup> Although infused with an urban cosmology and a decidedly this-worldly view, the lyrics of black gospel contained no broader political implications, as had been true for many Negro spirituals. At the same time, like Negro spirituals, black gospel made no apology for suffering and often called for immediate deliverance as well as ultimate salvation.

Initially, black gospel music met with sharp resistance from many within the African American religious community. Like the complaints about black southerners in general, some of this early resistance was rooted in anxieties about race respectability. A daughter of one of Chicago's African American doctors remarked that her father allowed her to listen only to “the best kinds of music—classical and opera and the

like.” “He couldn’t stand the blues and the gospel songs that were becoming popular,” she stated, noting that he regarded them as “nothing but a lot of shouting and were a disgrace to the race.” Edward H. Boatner, a classically trained composer and arranger of Negro spirituals and anthems, recalled that when he first heard black gospel as the senior choir director at Pilgrim Baptist Church, he thought it was “degrading.” “It’s a desecration,” he continued. “The only people who think it isn’t a desecration are the people who haven’t had any training, any musical training—people who haven’t heard fine religious anthems, cantatas, and oratorios.” Boatner, a graduate of Boston Conservatory and Chicago College of Music, committed most of his creative energy to the composition of classical works and Negro spirituals, which he hoped would have “the same status in the world of music as folk music of other races.” His views about black gospel often generated palpable tensions between new migrants and longtime residents in the early days of black gospel. When Mahalia Jackson migrated from New Orleans in 1927, for example, her tendency to “start off shouting” in her performances so offended the religious sensibilities of some of the city’s old-line churches that they often dismissed her from their services. Others refused to allow her in at all. Jackson found respite and welcome in many of Chicago’s storefront Holiness-Pentecostal churches, where she performed regularly and was considered “a fresh wind from the down-home religion.”<sup>38</sup> To gain the respect of the “big colored churches,” Jackson said, she had to make it her “business to pack little basement-hall congregations and storefront churches.” She was convinced they sat up and took notice after that. For Edward Boatner, black gospel music threatened to roll back the progress blacks had made in demonstrating race respectability through the use of classical music as worship music, a practice that had endured since the late nineteenth century. He also had doubts about the religious efficacy of black gospel. “How can something that’s jazzy give a religious feeling?” Boatner inquired. This question became particularly pertinent as many became aware of the man who was most responsible for the spread of black gospel in Chicago, Thomas Andrew Dorsey.<sup>39</sup>

Although black gospel music first appeared in Chicago’s Holiness-Pentecostal storefront churches, it was Thomas Dorsey, “the father of black gospel music,” who brought the musical genre into the African American mainstream.<sup>40</sup> When this African American blues musician embraced and professionalized it, the genre made intractable inroads into middle-class, mainline black Protestant churches. Ironically, Dorsey helped introduce emotional worship to mainline black Chicago churches via a musical style he in large part made respectable. Acknowledging that black gospel did not originate with him, Dorsey stated in an interview conducted late in his life that he “made it beautiful, more noticeable,



Fig. 8. Thomas A. Dorsey. Dorsey pioneered the modern gospel era at Ebenezer and Pilgrim Baptist churches in Chicago during the 1930s. His song "Take My Hand, Precious Lord" remains the preeminent example of the genre. (Source: Vivian G. Harsh Collection, Carter G. Woodson Regional Branch, Chicago Public Library)

more susceptible with runs and thrills and moans in it."<sup>41</sup> In the process, he bridged the religious cultural worlds of southern migrants and established Chicago churches. (See figure 8.)

Before the first of two religious conversion experiences he underwent after migrating to Chicago from Georgia in 1916, Dorsey composed, recorded, and performed numerous sexually suggestive blues songs called "hokum." The most famous of these were *It's Tight Like That*, *Pat That Bread*, *You Got the Stuff*, and *It's All Worn Out*. *It's Tight Like That* was a masterpiece of the genre and sold nearly a million copies, inspiring additional versions by Dorsey and his writing partner, Hudson Whittaker, as

well as other artists. McKinney's Cotton Pickers recorded a version in 1928 with George Thomas and Dave Wilborn on vocals. The double-entendre configuration of these songs was a winning format for Dorsey and Whittaker. Royalties from the recordings garnered a measure of success after a period of financial decline. A blues pianist of exceptional skill, "Georgia Tom," as Dorsey was called, had worked playing for Ma Rainey's band, and by 1924 was well known around Chicago's entertainment circuit. But conflicts between his life's work and his desire to return to his Baptist roots prompted Dorsey to join the Ebenezer Baptist Church in the late 1920s. It was there that he became involved with black gospel music, and within a few years his reputation as a composer and performer of black gospel began to surpass his reputation as a blues artist. But it was a gospel performance Dorsey staged in late winter of 1932, the same year he wrote "Precious Lord, Take My Hand" after the loss of his wife and child, that became a pivotal moment not only in his life and in the black churches of Chicago, but also in the history of black gospel music.<sup>42</sup>

A few days after Pilgrim Baptist invited Dorsey to bring his Ebenezer Baptist Gospel Chorus to the church to help celebrate J. C. Austin's sixth anniversary as pastor, Austin called Dorsey with an offer to lure him away from Ebenezer. Austin wanted Dorsey to establish a gospel chorus at Pilgrim. The request came as a surprise to Dorsey in view of Austin's reputation and the stoic order of worship he insisted on in his church. Just days before the event took place, Dorsey had been concerned about taking his chorus to Pilgrim, wondering if they should modify their usual spirited display of emotion rather than go "wild." Pilgrim Baptist, under the leadership of J. C. Austin, had been known as one of the most uncompromising among the old-line churches, refusing to adapt their worship styles in deference to southern migrants. Austin had indeed discouraged migration while a pastor in Pittsburgh, considering it "not the best thing for our people."<sup>43</sup> Although he would experience a complete reversal on this point, Austin made sure that Pilgrim's worship services remained some of the "most decorous" of mainline black churches. To ensure against any form of religious enthusiasm in the church, Austin went so far as to relegate preworship prayer services to the basement.<sup>44</sup> This all changed with one visit by Dorsey and the Ebenezer Baptist Gospel Chorus. Apparently, Dorsey, his associate Theodore Frye, and Ebenezer's pastor, J. H. Smith, decided not to change their worship style for Pilgrim, and when they had finished their musical set, "the church was all worked up and the spirit was at its highest pitch," Dorsey reported.<sup>45</sup>

Dorsey accepted Austin's offer and Pilgrim Baptist—not Ebenezer—became known as the birthplace of black gospel music.<sup>46</sup> At Pilgrim, where he stayed throughout his long career, Dorsey perfected his own black gospel style, developed a celebrated gospel chorus, and worked with some

of the most renowned performers of black gospel, including Mahalia Jackson, Sallie Martin, Roberta Martin, and Rosetta Tharpe.<sup>47</sup> The music and worship patterns at Pilgrim changed dramatically. Black gospel allowed those members of Pilgrim Baptist who were inclined toward emotional worship to do so freely. Leola Ware Hartwell, a member of Pilgrim during the late 1930s, was proud of her rural Georgia roots and of being a member of the church's gospel chorus. "I am not like everybody else that is from Georgia that will tell that they came from Atlanta and have not ever seen Atlanta unless it was on the way," she reported. When asked what groups she participated in at Pilgrim, she responded, "I am a member of the gospel chorus. . . . Yes, I love good singing."<sup>48</sup> And it was not only the poor and working-class southern migrants, who were increasingly filling the church's pews, that seized this opportunity. As Dorsey recalled, many of the church's middle-class, educated professionals also learned to "clap their hands and sway their bodies and go on."<sup>49</sup> The introduction of black gospel into the worship at Pilgrim Baptist may even have opened the way for Pentecostal practices that were eventually observed even by J. C. Austin. Apparently, sometime during the early to mid-1930s Austin had a Pentecostal experience in California, wherein he saw a vision of angels and "received the Holy Ghost." After the experience, according to Reverend Aplin of the Sunlight Church of the Sabbath, many in the black community thought Austin and Pilgrim were "going Sanctified." It is not clear why Austin was in California, where the modern Pentecostal movement began, but "visions" and "receiving the Holy Ghost" are direct references to Pentecostal theology.<sup>50</sup> Depending on when exactly the experience happened (Reverend Aplin made his comments in 1938), Austin's Holy Ghost experience may help to explain a number of things. It would explain his willingness to allow black Gospel at Pilgrim in the first place and his change of heart with regard to the migration, as well as the changes in the worship practices at his church. After his California "Holy Ghost" experience, one can perhaps rightly infer that there were no more prayer services in the basement. Though gleaned from the smaller storefront and house churches that surrounded Pilgrim Baptist—many of which were Pentecostal—Dorsey's brand of black gospel spread from Pilgrim Baptist throughout the country by the late 1930s.

Austin's response to Dorsey and the Ebenezer Baptist Gospel Chorus was in some ways a mixture of awe and opportunism. He was certainly aware of the popularity of Dorsey's gospel chorus. It was the only gospel chorus in Chicago at the time and was highly sought after. Bringing the chorus to Pilgrim reflected in large part Austin's determination to observe for himself this new musical genre. Given his general concern for his congregation and his particular concern for the scores of new migrants

joining it, his request that Dorsey leave Ebenezer for Pilgrim is not all that surprising. Austin witnessed the enthusiastic response his congregation gave to this indigenous musical tradition, a tradition deeply reflective of a southern ethos. Clearly, the addition of a gospel chorus at Pilgrim—already one of the most noteworthy black congregations in the city—would only enhance Austin’s preaching, the church’s stature, and its attraction for recent southern migrants. Austin’s son, Junius C. Austin, Jr., confirmed this perspective in an interview with historian Michael Harris. “He [Austin, Sr.] was an outstanding pulpiter, a great orator, a master preacher. Back in those days, the preacher had to have a great attraction to himself. My dad could see times changing and people desiring another type of music. He tried it [gospel music] in his church and, because of his preaching and the music, folk crowded out the church.”<sup>51</sup>

Dorsey’s motivation for leaving Ebenezer to join Pilgrim is less clear. It was not for money. He said himself that the new position “wasn’t payin’ nothing.” It was not for prestige. He had that as the first and only gospel chorus leader in the city of Chicago. And to make sure that any prestige attached to his association with Pilgrim was not to be easily obtained, Edward H. Boatner as the head musician at Pilgrim made sure Dorsey and his gospel chorus were relegated to the back of the church. “And that’s where they were until I left,” Boatner confirmed years later. Boatner, a renowned composer of Negro spirituals, would always resent Dorsey for coming into his turf, bringing a musical genre he saw as “nothing but jazz, the rhythm of jazz.”<sup>52</sup> Perhaps due to Dorsey’s presence at the church, Boatner left Pilgrim in 1933 for New York, where he opened a music studio and trained Josephine Baker and Clifton Webb, among others.<sup>53</sup> One can only speculate that Dorsey saw in Austin a bit of himself, a kindred soul. Both men were energetic, innovative, and daring. When it came to their particular crafts, Dorsey and Austin could rightly be described as crowd-pleasing showmen. They were aware of this in themselves and in each other. Moreover, just as Austin saw in Dorsey and black gospel a courageous new current of religious expression, Dorsey saw in Austin a competitive religious leader unafraid of change as a means to church growth and social outreach. Both men were aware that they were riding a wave of change with black gospel, and Austin was perhaps even more aware of this than Dorsey. As Junius Austin said of his father: “My dad was farsighted, I think. He could see times changing and people desiring another type of music. He said, ‘Dorsey’s music’s going to sweep the country. And I want it in Pilgrim Church!’”<sup>54</sup> (See figure 9.)

Black gospel’s detractors and supporters alike soon realized that among all the musical influences upon the genre, the blues was perhaps the greatest. Support and disdain for black gospel met at this volatile nexus. For all those who, like Edward H. Boatner, rejected black gospel for its obvious





Fig. 9. Junius C. Austin. The invitation Austin, as pastor of Pilgrim Baptist Church, extended to Thomas A. Dorsey to join Pilgrim in 1932 is widely viewed as having launched the modern gospel era. (Source: Chicago Historical Society)

secular sound, there were many more who embraced it because of that. Of course, the blues influence in black gospel can be attributed to Dorsey, who made no attempt to alter the rhythms and cadences of his musical style. Rather, Dorsey consecrated the blues by altering the lyrical content. This is why Farah Jasmine Griffin is right to call black gospel the “sacred sister to the blues.”<sup>55</sup> But Griffin is also right when she insists that “consideration of gospel music complicates our current understanding of working-class migrant culture as having been characterized only by the blues.” For blacks in Chicago, the blues and black gospel performed similar cultural work in shaping their identity and giving expression to their quotidian experiences, concerns, fears, and hopes. Scholars have long noted the extent to which black southern migrants documented their

experiences through the lyrics of the blues, often privileging the secular life of blues artists as authentic renderings of the socioeconomic process of migration and urbanization. The content of the blues has served as a lyrical map of the African American urban world, from the experiences of Big Bill Broonzy's "Keys to the Highway," "Going to Chicago," and "I'm a Southern Man" to the navigation of city life in Robert Johnson's "Sweet Home Chicago."<sup>56</sup> The gospel music of Chicago, however, revealed a similar lyrical map with a similar take on the African American experience in Chicago. The music of Chicago musicians like Rosetta Tharpe, Sallie Martin, Sister Calley Fancy, and Mother McCollum attempted to document city life and the confrontation of a southern religious sense with urban life in much the same way as their blues-stylist counterparts. They were just as much the new working-class orators of the black experience and of modernity, with equal authentication.

Chief among these working-class orators of modernity were two gospel artists that predated Thomas Dorsey. Recorded between 1929 and 1931, the songs of "guitar evangelists" Mother McCollum and Sister Calley Fancy demonstrated a more keen awareness of modern life than those of any other genre of black music at the time. Little is known of the two women other than that they were from the rural south, possibly the Mississippi delta, and that they recorded their songs upon their arrival to Chicago. They both were members of the Holiness-Pentecostal or "Sanctified" Church, the term that would later be used first by Zora Neale Hurston to unite all African American churches that developed from the Holiness and Pentecostal movements.<sup>57</sup> The instrumentation and the vernacular vocalization both women employed echoed rural southern culture, but their lyrics were rooted in modern life and possibly reflected urban existence. Though their songs were fundamentally evangelistic and apocalyptic, they made metaphoric use of the vestiges of modern life and contemporary culture to disseminate their message of salvation and warning. Both artists made repeated references to trains, train stations, automobiles, airplanes, and other relatively recent technological inventions. Mother McCollum's "Jesus Is My Aer-O-plane" and Sister Calley Fancy's "Everybody Get Your Business Right" serve as a prime examples:

"JESUS IS MY AER-O-PLANE"

(chorus)

Jesus is my Aer-O-plane  
 He holds this world in His hands  
 He rides over all  
 He don't never fall  
 Jesus is my Aer-O-plane.

(verse 3)

You can run to the East  
Run to the West  
You can't find no soul to rest  
Some of these mornings He's coming again  
Coming through in a Aer-O-plane.

“EVERYBODY GET YOUR BUSINESS RIGHT”

(chorus)

Everybody get your business right  
Everybody get your business right  
Everybody get your business right  
God told me to tell you to get your business right.

(verse 1)

I'll be standing at the station  
With my ticket in my hand  
When the saints of God go marching in  
I mean to join that band.

(verse 2)

That train that runs to glory  
She runs on scheduled time  
Now is your time to get your business right  
Or you'll be left behind.<sup>58</sup>

Sister Calley Fancy, in particular, seemed to be inspired as much by the pages of the press as she was by biblical text. Many of her songs indicate that she was a keen observer of world events, domestic government, and international politics. Her song in two parts, “Death Is Riding Through the Land,” is the only gospel song known to make reference to the First World War.

“DEATH IS RIDING THROUGH THE LAND”

(verse 1)

President your life is in God's hands  
This message is for you Jews  
And governors remember when you're sinister men  
My God is watching you.

(chorus)

Death is riding through the land  
He's a riding through the land  
He's a riding through the land  
He's bringing vengeance on beast and man.

(verse 2)

Death is bringing down your great airplanes  
 Overturning automobiles  
 He's wrecking trains causing hearts to fail  
 Oh, nations don't you fear?

(verse 4)

You mothers who claim to know God  
 God is giving you a chance  
 Some of you haven't prayed a heartfelt prayer  
 Since your son returned from France.

(verse 7)

You promised God in the World War  
 If He would save your land  
 You would change your lives and live for Christ  
 Now you've gone back on Him.<sup>59</sup>

The songs of these “guitar evangelists” may have been restricted to Sanctified churches or to performances during street preaching. Their forceful and edgy voices would suggest as much. But as a genre, black gospel music had become the church music of choice in Chicago among mainstream Protestant churches by the 1930s, reflecting southern evangelical traditions, while its emphatic delivery and subjectivity underscored the exigencies of modern city life.

Beyond churches like Ebenezer and Pilgrim Baptist, the popularity and dissemination of black gospel in Chicago can be attributed principally to the growth of black-oriented radio. By the mid-1930s, black-oriented radio became the primary mechanism for the dispersion of the new musical style, as nearly all of Chicago's radio stations either added black gospel to their regular playlists or dedicated special segments exclusively to gospel music. But more than just being a mechanism for the spread of black gospel, black-oriented radio itself became a major actor in transforming the cultural life of the city's African American population.<sup>60</sup> As the influx of migrants began to alter the religious culture of the city, that change was reflected in both the programming and the content of black-oriented radio. By the mid-1930s black Chicagoans could tune their radios to hear not only recordings of black gospel music but also recorded sermons and live broadcasts of emotionally demonstrative religious services. In the same way that African American mainline Protestant churches began making concessions to the religious sensibilities of southern migrants, Chicago radio stations that targeted a black audience augmented the format and personnel of their stations to appeal specifically to the tastes and concerns of lower- and working-class Chicagoans. They

rightly surmised that the majority of these would be new arrivals. The clear effect of the programmatic changes implemented by black-oriented radio stations was not only the commodification of southern migrant religious inclinations but also the final triumph of a vernacular religious ethos over Chicago's African American religious culture.

In some sense, many radio stations decided to target southern migrants for practical market reasons. Literacy rates among poor and working-class southern migrants were the lowest in Chicago, suggesting that this group would be more likely to listen to radio. (By the mid-1930s more than 80 percent of American homes had radio sets.) Poor and working class blacks read the black press infrequently compared with middle-class blacks. Moreover, the black press increasingly became associated with the lifestyles and interests of the black elite and middle class, a plight many local black newspapers did not survive. Circulations declined and some African American newspapers ceased to exist, not only because of low readership, but also because they did not reflect the experiences of ordinary black Chicagoans or depict their lives in the most flattering light. Ironically, even the *Chicago Defender*, which had done so much to spark the Great Migration, declined among Chicago's newest residents and had obtained the alternate name, "The Chicago Offender."<sup>61</sup> Also, by the late 1920s Chicago was already a city of migrants, with the largest share of the black population having been born out of state—83 percent—and the poor and working-class portion of that population being the largest (as much as 65 percent in the decade of the 1930s).<sup>62</sup> So with special features, large segments of black gospel, sermons on record, and live broadcasts of spirited worship from storefront and mainline churches alike, black-oriented radio also became a harbinger of the new sacred order in black Chicago.

Religious broadcasts were not the exclusive means by which Chicago black-oriented radio stations attempted to appeal to southern migrants. Jack L. Cooper, a former lightweight boxer and vaudevillian actor turned disc jockey, utilized drama, folklore, and comedy as well as religious performances in his radio show, the *All Negro Hour*. It was one of the first such programs in the nation. Cooper, himself a southern migrant from Tennessee, came to Chicago in the late 1920s and was a regular fixture on several Chicago stations by the 1930s. Although some scholars have portrayed Cooper and his radio program as representative of the black elite with a "bourgeois perspective and uplift agenda," much of the programming cooper produced suggested his target audience was working-class black Chicagoans, particularly southern migrants. He produced three comic acts involving southern migrants that appeared frequently on his program. "Luke and Timber" was about the antics of two boys from Memphis who found themselves in the urban north. "Mush and Corinda"

(also called “The Alabama Sunflowers”) and “Horseradish and Fertilizer” were the names of two couples who had recently migrated to Chicago from the South.<sup>63</sup> These were all done in dialect and the programs became enormously popular in Chicago at a time when pejorative depictions of black life and speech done by the likes of Jack Benny’s “Rochester,” and Gosden and Correll’s *Amos N’ Andy* were hotly debated and castigated by many northern blacks.<sup>64</sup> Unlike these shows, Cooper’s didn’t simply find in southern black stereotypes rich fodder for entertainment purposes. While he was concerned that recent migrants hear black characters and experiences they could recognize, he wanted the radio to serve as a network of communication for his listeners. It was Cooper who established the *Search for Missing Persons Program* in 1938, a free service offered over the radio. By the 1950s, the popular program had reunited with their families numerous southern migrants who had lost touch with one another during the chaos of migration.<sup>65</sup>

Al Benson, a contemporary of Cooper’s, imitated the format Cooper established and in the process also captured a huge following among Chicago’s lower and working-class radio listeners. Shortly after making his radio debut on a religious broadcast from a storefront church over station WGES in 1945, Benson, a preacher whose given name was Arthur B. Learner, decided to become a disc jockey. While Cooper used dialect only in theatrical performances, Benson introduced southern vernacular to black-oriented radio in his standard radio personality. In conjunction with the “down home blues” that formed his exclusive playlist, Benson spoke in a “hukster” style and filled his speech with “black idiomatic expressions.”<sup>66</sup> From the 1930s to the 1950s both Cooper and Benson were among a small coterie of entrepreneurial deejays who spearheaded a revolution in black-oriented radio in Chicago, making the city in the opinion of many the “black radio capital of the world.”<sup>67</sup> But even more than that, the way in which these deejays and Chicago’s black-oriented radio stations reconfigured their playlists to include religious programming, black gospel, and other special features in deference to lower- and working-class blacks further indicated the growing cultural primacy of southern migrants in Chicago during the Great Migration.

The live religious broadcast format best exemplified the primacy of black southern migrants in the religious culture of Chicago during these years. Recorded sermons, which had been popular among black Chicagoans since the 1920s, gained in popularity in the 1930s in most cities with large black populations. By the end of the 1930s, the number of African American preachers on recordings had jumped from six to seventy, and 750 sermons had been recorded by that time. In 1925, William Cook recorded a number of sermons and spirituals with his choir at Metropolitan Community Church under the direction of J. Wesley Jones for Paramount

Records, “the popular race record.”<sup>68</sup> But live religious broadcasts brought for the first time entire worship services into the homes of Chicago’s radio listening African Americans. The forerunners of this format were Reverend Clarence Cobbs and Elder Lucy Smith. Although Elder Smith pioneered religious radio in 1933, by the next year both she and Cobbs were on the air weekly on station WIND. Cobbs was able to attract to his congregation people from the ranks of the city’s black middle and even elite classes because of his flashy personal style and promises of prosperity, but it was the emotionally demonstrative worship of his live radio broadcasts that made him a “mass hero” among Chicago’s poor and working class.<sup>69</sup> Smith’s broadcast, *The Glorious Church of the Air*, also generated a huge following among the city’s poor and working class. Unlike Cobbs, Smith often used her radio program to make appeals for material help on the part of the city’s poor. But like Cobb’s broadcast, *The Glorious Church of the Air* was primarily a showcase for All Nations’ highly demonstrative worship services. It also showcased Smith’s “faith healing” and southern vernacular preaching style. Smith, who frequently referred to her church as one administered without regard to race or class, understood that an important basis of her appeal was that she endeavored to meet both the material and spiritual needs of Chicago’s poor and working class.<sup>70</sup> And although many among Chicago’s African American middle class reviled both Smith and Cobbs, the success of their live broadcasts demonstrated that they were both products and producers of the new religious climate. During the Great Migration, ministers such as they signified new urban religious rituals and practices in Chicago that gave priority, foremost, to the material needs and religious sensibilities of the city’s lower- and working-class southern migrant population. Their live broadcasts heralded this new religious culture.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Jack L. Cooper personally supported and engineered much of the live religious broadcasting in black Chicago. Program schedules from the 1940s featuring live talent, all of “a religious nature,” included a number of male and mixed quartets usually hailing from the South. In many cases, their stage names indicated from where they migrated. For instance, there was no question as to the home origins of “Alabam and Georgia” and the “Arkansas Four.” Also, Cooper was particularly concerned that many different types of churches fill the half-hour Sunday morning live slots on WSBC. This concern may have reflected Cooper’s awareness of a widening and diversifying religious culture during the time. By the early 1950s, an eclectic array of churches broadcast their messages over the airways—churches as diverse as Greater Salem Baptist, St. Paul Church of God in Christ, and the First Church of Divine Science. Cooper responded to one complaint about the diversity of his airplay with a letter stating, “the half hour of time given to the churches of Chicago

each Sunday morning is given without discrimination. . . . I have no pets. I treat them all alike and must to the best interests of the people continue to do so.”<sup>71</sup> Although the time slots were not “given” to the churches, Cooper charged a minimal fee and personally subsidized many of these programs. Grateful acknowledgments of his financial help and support for various churches comprised a considerable portion of the correspondence he received. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, however, the word came from WSBC management that Cooper should tighten the reins on some of these churches, asking that they contribute more for the support of their own broadcasts. This was true for the Sunday morning broadcasts, as well as the late-night hour-long shows.<sup>72</sup> In many cases, the churches met the increasing costs; in some instances, they could not and were forced to take their programs off the air. In December 1948, Cooper wrote to Reverend Mildred R. Barnes of the First Church By the Way of the Cross Spiritual Shrine informing her that the cost of her weekly broadcast would increase in the new year. Reverend Barnes’s broadcast had aired each Monday from 11:05 p.m. to midnight. She wrote back to Cooper, “Because of the financial structure of my organization I find that I will be unable to continue my radio activities with your station. . . . We regret that we have to take this action at this time but we believe it to be the best of all concerned.”<sup>73</sup> Barnes eventually pulled her services from the air but only after Cooper had apparently done everything in his power to prevent that from happening.

A number of social and economic factors influenced the structure of some of the more prominent live late-night religious broadcasts. Elder Smith, Clarence Cobb, William Roberts of Roberts Temple Church of God in Christ, and (before her broadcast ended) Mildred Barnes conducted their services at the eleven-to-midnight hour on weeknights because it was cheaper to do so. These broadcasts went without corporate sponsorship, necessitating the many appeals made for money over the air. Every broadcast included appeals for financial support. Without the appeals, programs were in jeopardy. Smith made this point abundantly clear on more than one occasion. In a related way, these late services happened because the daytime hours were reserved for programs that could attract advertising support. Since churches carried no corporate sponsorship (and could not by law), the valuable daytime slots remained the domain of mainstream programming. Al Benson made his conversion of sorts from his original name, Reverend Arthur Learner, because WGES would not allow him to sell advertising space to support his fifteen-minute Sunday-evening preaching and gospel music slot due to the religious nature of the program. Also, many stations reduced their overall wattage at night. Indeed, live broadcasts cost less because they required less wattage. Finally, the Radio Act of 1927 did not create a favorable climate for conservative



religious broadcasting generally. As Tona J. Hangen asserts, “liberal Protestants were favored by the emerging national radio networks” while “fundamentalist” programs (which characterized Chicago’s African American radio programs) were relegated to the margins.<sup>74</sup> As a consequence of the lateness of the hour, however, many of these programs became integral parts of Chicago nightlife, as black Chicagoans on their way to or from some other entertainment venue chose to be among the live audience.

Live religious broadcasts from First Deliverance Spiritualist and All Nations Pentecostal Church, as well as the preponderance of other religious programs airing on black-oriented radio during the migration, signaled in the most expansive format available that a definite shift had taken place in the city’s African American religious culture. But if the changes to Chicago’s religious culture were restricted to churches like Cobb’s, Smith’s, and storefronts, then the profundity of the transformation of Chicago’s religious culture would not be fully appreciated. It was the way many of Chicago’s mainline black churches began to reconfigure their institutional priorities and worship services in deference to poor and working-class southern migrants that provided evidence of the most crucial changes. By the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, it was clear to many mainline black Protestant churches that their relevancy as religious institutions, as well as their commitment to social change would be measured by their response to the growing numbers of southern migrants around them. The alliances the churches built with social service organizations and black businesses and the adaptations they made to their worship patterns indicated their understanding of the rapidly augmenting religious culture. This new sacred order placed the concerns and spiritual inclinations of the city’s growing lower-and working-class southern migrant population as the highest institutional priority. No longer would the black elite and middle class hold exclusive cultural authority over the religious culture of Chicago. Ironically, religious modernity emerged by way of an “emotional folk orality” and was disseminated by a religious diaspora of black southern migrants.<sup>75</sup> For churches that were less willing or less prepared to face the transformations to the city’s African American religious culture, the consequences could be dire, as the story of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Chicago will reveal.