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She's Right on Time: Dorothy Love Coates and the Transformation of Gospel Music in the Service of the Civil Rights Movements

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SHE'S RIGHT ON TIME: DOROTHY LOVE COATES
AND
THE TRANSFORMATION OF GOSPEL MUSIC IN THE SERVICE OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT.

By

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Introduction

_The Negro Church was, in some respects, legal before the Negro family._
--Taylor Branch, "Parting the Waters"

_Make a joyful noise to the Lord...Come into his presence with singing!_
-- King James Bible, Psalms 100:1-2

Dorothy Love Coates' obituary in the _New York Times_ declared that she provided "a subtle but substantial role in the civil rights movement" ("Dorothy Love Coates"). While widely acknowledged, this fact has scant documentation in the major literature on gospel music. I will examine how the efforts of gospel singer and civil rights activist Dorothy Love Coates (1928-2002) worked as a catalyst to activate modern gospel music to support the American Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and early 1960s. I will argue that Dorothy Love Coates acted as a vital link in the development of gospel music, taking it from a predominantly religious and social art form to a critical tool for the Southern Civil Rights movement of this period. This thesis will examine the development of the Black church after the Civil War and its corresponding religious music, the rise of Gospel in the 1930s, and the Pentecostal church as it relates to Black religious music. While these threads in the Black community are deeply interrelated, it is the central argument of this thesis that Dorothy Love Coates, "Dot," uniquely weaved together the threads of classic gospel music and Sanctified-Pentecostal gestalt and in the process forever changed both gospel music and the civil rights movement.

It is important to highlight at the outset that this thesis does not strive to argue that Coates was the "first" in any of these individual areas. For example, the Golden Gate Quartet was well known for speaking out about social issues in their music as early as the 1930s. Nor was she the first "sanctified" gospel singer. For this we can look to Sister Rosetta Tharpe as an early pioneer. Reverend William Herbert Brewster was well known as a great gospel composer, rivaling Thomas Dorsey, as well as a "political radical" (Castellini 76). One does not need to be the first in a given field to affect transformation. For example, Thomas A. Dorsey (1899-1993), commonly considered the "father" of gospel, was not the first composer to bring a Blues inflection to Black religious music but through his efforts along with Sallie Martin (1896-1988),
the names gospel and Dorsey were almost synonyms. With considerably less notoriety, Coates was also a transformative figure.

This examination is not unlike a detective story. The scholarship around many of the gospel legends, the "soldiers in army," to borrow from gospel legend James Cleveland, is disturbingly limited. All we have are clues, some more direct than others. Gospel historian Robert Darden, in a 2010 interview, estimates that 75% of all recorded gospel music, from gospel’s "golden age, 1945 to roughly 1970," cannot be accessed for either "love or money." The music has never been released, or has not been transitioned from vinyl to digital, or is in a copyright limbo, or simply "ended up in a landfill" (Darden, "A Gospel Journey"). The task at hand is to build a case from the available clues. A convention I choose to incorporate in this text is to offset certain quotes that, to my mind, are the important clues or waypoints in building this argument. While there will be no "smoking gun" at the end—if there were this thesis would be superfluous—a sound argument can be made.

The path of this thesis will be to first present a brief contextualization of the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s through the early 1960s, as well as to place the Gospel Harmonettes, the group that Coates would join in 1951, within this period musically. I will introduce Coates at her first recording session for Specialty Records, where she wasted no time in expressing her vision for the new shape of gospel music through, at first, her style and lyrics, and then later by adding movement as well as her persona. When discussing the creation of music, especially in the Black cultural milieu, as Amiri Baraka will next argue, we need to have a basis for how to approach the music; it is never just notes on a page.

Once that foundation has been laid I will examine the origins of spirituals and then move on to the Black church. Building on those pillars I will show how the Black church, in the years from the American Civil War to the mid-20th century, in the eyes of many failed in its cultural function by shifting its focus away liberation and heritage towards education and assimilation in an effort to combat racism. The failure being not that the Black church was not

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1 Just one example of these valuable archives not being fully released is the seminal The Great 1955 Shrine Concert to which will be examined in greater detail later in this thesis. The liner notes of the 1993 release tantalizingly mention that the "tape kept rolling" for another 40 minutes. Most of the artists were given a second set. The notes indicate that these additional performances were scheduled to be presented on a follow-up CD. That CD has yet to be released (Hildebrand and Nations).
still the vital center of the community, nor that education was not critically important, but rather the shift was at the sacrifice of embracing the community's African heritage. The Black community's identity was being diluted. This shift created a cultural void that set the stage for the radical changes. I will identify and examine some cultural influencers who were pushing against these changes, each in different ways. Inevitably, change came in response to the shift in focus. In this case it was seen in the religious music. If music was one of the fundamental parts of religious expression then this change was seismic. Thomas Dorsey and Sallie Martin were in the vanguard of this change. Developing in parallel to Dorsey and Martin's changes is the Sanctified-Pentecostal movement. After examining the structures of Sanctified-Pentecostal service and where it gets its power, I will show how this model fits exactly on a live Coates performance where the Spirit has descended. One of the reasons Coates' performances was so powerful and influential was from her ability to bring Sanctified-Pentecostal gestalt to bare in a way no other artists was able to successfully match. Another powerful weapon at Coates' disposal was her song writing ability. I will examine three of her mid-1950s songs showing how she was explicitly and metaphorically speaking to the social issues of the day, namely civil rights. Finally I will transition to how Coates' work directly intersects with civil rights.

Dorothy Love Coates was riding a wave of change set in motion by many forces not the least of which are the pent-up energies, both economically and with regard to civil rights, that were released by the termination of World War II. She was uniquely able to take Black religious music, gospel music that vital next step, thereby putting it at the service of the Civil Rights movement. The key to Coates' effort was infusing the styles and rhythms of the Sanctified-Pentecostal church (a movement that arguably also comes from the aforementioned cultural shift in focus of the Baptist church in the post Civil War years) with lyrics and a personal integrity. Michael Castellini argued that:

The close interrelation of form and function between black church services, gospel programs, and mass meetings must be among the least appreciated yet most profoundly significant aspects of the civil rights movement. If it were not for the essentially gospel character of the freedom song repertoire, and the widespread "gospelization" of local movement cultures, it is questionable whether the classical
Southern movement would have been as effective and successful as it turned out to be (72).

The key tenant of my argument is that Dorothy Love Coates was a vital link in the creation of this interrelation.

**Setting the Stage**

*Without these songs, you know we wouldn’t be anywhere. We’d be down on Mister Charley’s plantation, chopping cotton for 30 cents a day.*

-- Cordell Reagon, *Newsweek*, August 31, 1964

An important starting point for this examination is to offer a brief contextualization of the Southern Civil Rights efforts of the 50s and 60s. It was known as Southern Civil Rights because the majority, though certainly not all, of the major protests took place in the southern United States. One the great ironies of this period that one of Martin Luther King Jr.’s highest profile failures as a nonviolent advocate was in Chicago in 1966 ("Chicago Campaign"). The "Chicago Campaign", as it was known, was an attempt on King’s part to extend the efforts of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the organization he helped establish in 1957 to coordinate the civil rights efforts in the south, to bring the same focus on civil rights to northern Blacks that SCLC was bringing to southern Blacks. In this particular effort, King wanted to draw attention to the housing situation for Blacks in northern cities. His stated goal was to attempt to "eradicate a vicious system which seeks to further colonize thousands of Negroes within a slum environment" ("Chicago Campaign"). Through the summer of 1966 tensions rose from a series of "demonstrations and marches" until on August 5th, during a march through an all-white neighborhood, a "racially fueled" riot erupted ("Chicago Campaign"). In a Chicago Tribune article King spoke of the violence against Blacks in the supposedly racially progressive North as "I have seen many demonstrations in the south but I have never seen anything so hostile and so hateful as I’ve seen here today" ("Dr. King Is Felled by Rock").
The difficulties faced by the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s cannot easily be over exaggerated. The above, relatively optimistic, Newsweek quote from a founding member of the Freedom Singers, Cordell Reagon, was coupled with a harrowing description from fellow Freedom Singer Judy Collins as she and the Eastgate Singers approached Drew, Mississippi for a get-out-the-vote effort. A focus on voter education and turnout were some of the primary tools for civil rights advocate groups such as the SCLC, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and Council of Federated Organizations (COFO). While these organizations had very different perspectives and were often at odds over specific tactics, there was a common sense in this period of the 50s and early 60s to focus on grass roots efforts, in particular voter education.

The young singers, under the auspices of COFO, were informed that the police had "withdrawn protection" and the city was "hostile." A common tactic by law enforcement, especially in the Deep South, was to respond very slowly, if at all, to crowds looking to confront outsiders. These civil rights advocates, the "outsiders," were the physical and metaphoric embodiment of the disruption to their established way of life, their culture. Collins was quoted in the Newsweek article, "I knew I was going to be shot at or beaten. My hands were trembling so much I made myself change the guitar strings to keep them occupied" ("Without these songs... "). This anecdote offers just a glimpse at how dangerous it was to be a vocal opponent of Jim Crow in the southern United States. Jim Crow was a "social and legal caste system" that developed in the South in the wake of the collapse of Reconstruction at the end of the Civil War. It was based on an idea called Social Darwinism that holds that white Anglo-Saxons were those most evolved race as evidenced by their "material and cultural accomplishments." As a consequence of this caste system others, including Blacks, were considered inferior (Jackson 10-11). The "modern" Civil Rights movement was primarily in response to Jim Crow. Civil Rights scholars such as Aldon Morris date the modern Civil Rights movement as early as the Baton Rouge Bus Boycott of 1953 (Morris ix) while others focus on the higher profile Montgomery Bus Boycott and Rosa Parks in 1955. These two protests, as well as the countless small acts of rebellion, however, were exceptions to life under Jim Crow as opposed to a wave of civil rights protest. Terry Anderson in *The Movement and the Sixties* argues the first "surge" (41) or
sustained protests started with the lunch counter sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1960. Nathaniel Fredrick seems to support this when he wrote that Greensboro was noteworthy because the active resistance, at this point, was so rare (Frederick 153).

In a world where the act of speaking against the pervading culture could have easily lead to physical violence or death, the notion of "first" to speak out was less relevant than the commitment to speak out, however, wherever reasonably possible. One public figure who was committed to speaking out, "gospel highway's first and most powerful exponent of civil rights" (Heilbut, When Gospel was Gospel), was Odessa Edwards (2004), a founding member and lead singer of the Original Gospel Harmonettes. One of the major stopping points on a network of communities receptive to gospel artists, the "gospel highway," was Birmingham, Alabama, home to all the members of the Harmonettes as well as Coates. The gospel highway was a "circuit," created by Thomas Dorsey and Sallie Martin, of churches and concert halls across the country that welcomed gospel singers (Heilbut, Gospel Sound Introduction). The Harmonettes were formed in 1941 after being inspired by a 1940 performance of one of the leading gospel groups of the time, the Roberta Martin Singers, one of Thomas Dorsey's first protégées, at the National Baptist Convention, which happened to be in Birmingham (Fredrick 32). The Gospel Harmonettes were a well-respected and popular quartet within gospel community. They were unable, however, to break onto the national stage. Their one recording with the record label RCA received lackluster sales and led to the group being dropped after the one release. While this did not diminish their commitment to performing together, they knew they needed to make a change.

The dominant form of sacred music within the Black community in the mid-20th century was the jubilee, which was essentially "arranged spirituals" (Darden, "A Gospel Journey"). The jubilee tradition dates back to the post-Civil War era with the Fisk Jubilee Singers (all but one of them had been slaves (McAllister16)), which was established to raise money for Fisk University, the first Black University, founded in 1866. Jubilee songs had a "Westernized sense of harmony" (Frederick 58) which arose from a desire, post-slavery, to assimilate. In fact, the Fisk Jubilee Singers initially resisted spirituals, or slave songs, in favor of traditional western compositions. Once they started performing spirituals they were catapulted to international
acclaim. Fisk Jubilee Singers’ style and structure was the model that shaped religious music for decades. While women performed in the Fisk Jubilee Singers by mid-20th century, the jubilee quartet was dominated by men and characterized by standing still. Women would dominate the gospel quartet. Both the jubilee and gospel quartets could, and often did, have more than four people, yet as whole they were known as "quartets" (Darden, "A Gospel Journey").

Taking a lead from the male jubilee quartets, which were usually comprised of multiple lead singers (Still Holding On), the Harmonettes decided to add an additional lead singer. In 1951, after hearing her perform on a local radio show, the Gospel Harmonettes invited Dorothy Love Coates to join them (Fredrick 75). Even at an early age, Coates was known as a prodigy on the piano. "Around Birmingham [in the 1940s] she has the reputation as a gifted gospel arranger" (Still Holding On). Coates was not only known for her ability to create music, but also how she performed. Gospel historian Horace Boyer described her attraction to the original members of the Gospel Harmonettes as "a singer with a sanctified timbre and preacher’s deliver" (214). Boyer was even more direct when he observed:

As soon as they heard Dorothy Love Coates they were smart enough to know this is something we don’t have in gospel today. Yes we have a Gertrude Ward. Yes we have a Clara Ward. Yes we have a Willie Mae Ford Smith. Yes we have a Mahalia Jackson. But we don’t have a singing preacher with the force and with the intensity and with the sincerity and with the command of biblical stories but of the Negro idiom (Still Holding On).

Coates’ ideas about performance had been looking for an outlet from an early age. She described her early years in the Emmy award winning documentary on her life, Still Holding On, that as a child she was constantly banging pots and pans and would "have a fit" when they were taken away. As will be later explored in more detail, the gospel performance tradition prior to the 1950s was marked by its lack of motion. Historian Anita Bernadette McAllister, in a series of interviews with Coates, referenced Coates’ junior choir director admonishing her for singing "foot-tapping music." Coates recalled to McAllister that she "couldn't sing without moving. Ms. Marshall said, 'Dorothy, do you have to move your head? And move your hands?' I couldn't sing without moving" (McAllister 28). Coates' performance was an explosion of
energy just waiting for an outlet. She found that outlet with the Gospel Harmonettes. Shortly after joining the group, Arthur Rupe, the owner of Specialty Records, invited the Gospel Harmonettes to an audition recording session in 1951 (Still Holding On). Building the Specialty catalogue, Rupe was looking for new sounds. While he was unimpressed with the Gospel Harmonettes' RCA recording because they cleaved too closely to the "traditional Baptist format," he was persuaded to take a second look with the addition of Coates. He was immediately impressed, so much so that he asked Coates be the lead on some of the songs. What impressed Rupe about this new iteration of the Gospel Harmonettes was that it reminded him of the sounds he "heard in his Brooklyn childhood...[growing up] next door to a sanctified church" (McAllister 34).

While this recording session was the stuff of legend, propelling the Gospel Harmonettes to the upper echelons of the gospel community, second only to the Ward Singers, it was an uneasy birth because Coates' style of performance was "such a departure from tradition" that even members of the group were uncomfortable (McAllister 37). From the very beginning Coates moved to shift the music away the "traditional Baptist sound" which was marked by more subdued hymns, none of the "foot-tapping" music (McAllister 37, 28). Thomas Dorsey helped create a blues-inflected religious music in the 1930s, heavily influenced from his earlier career as a successful blues pianist performing under the moniker Georgia Tom. Coates built off Dorsey and began to take the music the next evolutionary step.

It is valuable to take a few moments to reflect on one of the songs from the first session, "Get Away Jordan", as not only a harbinger but also a reflection of the larger whole, Coates' vision. "Get Away Jordan" is a traditional spiritual that Coates so thoroughly appropriated that it is now considered one of her signature songs. In his text about American Soul music, Craig Werner wryly recalls Otis Redding's response when he first heard Aretha Franklin sing his song, "Respect." "[Redding] could only shake his head in admiration. 'I just lost my song'" (Higher Ground 134). Coates appropriated "Jordan" to the same extent. By adding her own lyrics and intonations, much to everyone's surprise, she was able to not only contemporize the song but also, from the very beginning, staked out the ground of her musical style. Just as Franklin transformed Redding's smooth soul sound into a manifesto for a
generation of women, demanding respect, Coates attacked this traditional song. Cultural
historian Bernice Johnson Reagon remembered Coates’ interpretation as “coming at you like
an explosion...you are sitting in your house but everything stops and that is just the beginning
of the song!” (Still Holding On). Horace Boyer compared Coates’ sharp accents on each word
as, "a kind of pre-rap...I don't know where Dorothy got that from" (Still Holding On). Vocally,
Coates staked out her ground in the beginning of the song, expediting the transformation of
gospel away from both the traditional church, "Dr. Watts" hymns and the smooth Jubilee
sounds towards a sound with the aptly descriptive title "hard" gospel.³ It was at the end of this
song, however, where Coates completes her manifesto, making the song hers by adding the
new lyrics.

Coates was starting to shape the music to her vision. She stepped outside the
traditional frame of the music to speak directly to the audience. Reagon called Coates'
adaptation as being a "preacher" (Still Holding On). Reinforcing Reagon’s reaction, the new
lyrics were often compared to Martin Luther King, Jr.’s final speech, April 3, 1968, the night
before his assassination. King’s speech is commonly known as the "I've Been to the
Mountaintop" speech, in which he seems to be foretelling his own death. While the two are
certainly not directly connected, the comparison is meant to show how she started to act like a
preacher, addressing uncomfortable topics such a death, saying she was not afraid because of
her steadfast faith in God. King ended his speech with: "Like anybody, I would like to live a long
life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will"
("I've Been to the Mountaintop"). Here are the lyrics that Coates used to end "Jordan":

When my feet get cold, my eyes shut,
My body's been chilled by the hand of death
My tongue glued to the roof of my mouth

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² Early hymns were named "Watts hymnals" after Dr. Isaac Watts (1674 – 1748), an English minister and
composer. His hymns were popular in the colonies. Early spirituals borrowed heavily from the Watts
hymnals combined with "scriptures and psalms" as well melodies of "African origin" (Frederick 43).
³ "Hard" gospel, as it was known, first made its appearance in the early 1950s. It is "characterized by
straining the voice...dramatic expression and acting out songs." This is in contrast to jubilee and traditional
"Baptist style of singing which emphasized beauty of tone, precise rhythms and occasional ornamentation"
(Boyer 117). Jubilee quartets’ had been labeled "sweet" because of their harmonizing. There was no sweet
harmonizing in the sanctified gospel sound. In fact, the hardness of the sound was an audible metaphor for
the singer’s hard life.
My hands been folded across my chest
You don't have to worry about the way I fare
God Almighty has told me he'd meet me there
Lift me over on the wings of love
Carry my soul to the heaven up above
They tell me Jordan is deep and wide
But I promised Mother I'd see her on the other side...
Get away, Jordan...

In his text *How Sweet the Sound* Boyer hinted at the intensity of the uncomfortable shift from the traditional Baptist sound of the 1940s that Coates created by when he noted that "when the Harmonettes made their appearances with Coates the audience was unprepared for what they eventually came to love" (217).

Coates' manifesto was not limited to the relatively small Black gospel community. If imitation is the highest form of praise, then Coates' adulations were swiftly received. White quartets such as the popular Sensational Statesmen quickly appropriated both Coates' lyrics and staccato performance style from "Jordan" (*Still Holding On*). "Jordan" was the opening salvo to a four decades career. Her subsequent singing style, lyrics, and voice influences a long list of artists in many musical genres. The list included Little Richard, Ray Charles, Johnny Cash, James Brown, and many, many more. It is beyond the scope of this examination to explore the impact of Coates' artistic ripples, however, it is informative to mention one of the most glaring. In 1959, Ray Charles transformed Coates' 1956 gospel hit "That's Enough," (a song many consider one of her early civil rights songs) into a hit R&B love song. The same rhythms that Coates used to help transform gospel, Charles used to help shape early R&B/soul, while not even bothering to change the title!

Cultural Context

*Black people revitalized their lives with music.*

--Ray Pratt, "Rhythm and Resistance"
Negro music is essentially an expression of an attitude, or a collection of attitudes about the world, and only secondarily an attitude the way music is made.

-- Amiri Baraka, "Black Music"

One of the most strident cultural commentators of the 1960s was Amiri Baraka, previously Leroi Jones. Baraka used his 1959 collection of jazz critiques and reviews, Black Music, as a springboard for an examination the larger Black cultural landscape. Through this collection he built the framework for how Black music can be properly understood. While his vehicle was jazz, he could just as easily be taking about gospel, the blues, or even rap. His concerns are important to keep in mind when reflecting on any artist, but all the more so when considering a Black artist where the recordings and scholarship are as limited as they are for an artist of the stature of Dorothy Love Coates.

He opened the collection with an analysis of the profound limitations of jazz criticism in the period with an essay entitled "1963 - Jazz and the White Critic." The critic, for any genre of the arts, holds the privileged position of judging not only good from bad, but also what is considered the proper expression for that given art-form. This was a dubious arrangement for Baraka because the leading critics were all white while the performers are predominantly Black. He argued that understanding the context for the creation of the music, why the music was created, was inseparable from understanding the music itself. Music was at first a form of expression; a human being was using this vehicle to convey not only a musical expression but also a statement of the physical world that shapes the person (Jones, Black Music ch1). For example, Messiaen’s Quartet for the End of Time, which was first performed in 1941 in a Nazi prisoner-of-war camp, and N.W.A.’s highly controversial 1988 Fuck tha Police are two songs that at first blanch must be placed at the extremes of the musical spectrum. By all standard measures they are. Each song in its own right, when looking through Baraka’s lens, however, is a profound expression of the creators’ experience through the medium of music. When looking at them from this perspective there is very little distance that separates them. Understanding the context, Baraka argued, was vital for understanding the music. In the case of these two
examples, having a proper understanding of the context in which they are written fundamentally impacts our interpretation of the music. Comprehending the music's origin, Baraka concluded, was vital for understanding the music's impact (Jones, *Black Music* ch1). Lawrence Levine in *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* supported Baraka's contention when he noted that "as important as the lyrics were, to leave our discussion without some consideration of the nature of the music and the mode of performance would lose the essence and distort the experience of gospel song" (177).

Baraka decried writers who approach jazz critique with only an "appreciation" of the music, as an expression of notes, with no similar appreciation for the "attitude that produced it." The problem with this limited perspective towards music was that it "strips...[the music] of its social and cultural content. It seeks to define jazz as an art...[with no] social-cultural philosophy" (Jones, *Black Music* ch.1). Baraka went on to observe that if one looks at the notes on the page, "each note means something quite in adjunct to the musical notation" (Jones, *Black Music* ch.1). As will be noted in greater detail with regard to the totality of Coates' performance, and that of gospel writ-large, the history, the context of the performance, its embracing of a dedication to God, and later the Civil Rights movement's appropriation, were all part of the same whole. When Baraka declared "Ornette Coleman's screams and rants are only musical once one understands the music his emotional attitude seeks to create...this attitude is real, and perhaps, the most singularly important aspect of this music" (Jones, *Black Music* ch.1), he could just as easily be speaking about Coates' moans. Anthony Heilbut supported this perspective when he observed, "now when [Coates] sang in church, her moans were very specific. Not merely was this 'a mean old trouble land,' it was a place where 'our children can't go to decent schools,' and a woman like her mother grew middle-aged at thirty" (Heilbut, *Gospel Sound* 165).

**Black Spirituals and Slavery**

They [Negro folk songs] are the music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world of misty wanderings and hidden ways.
When the first Africans were brought to North America in the 1600s, historian Robert Darden observed, "as best we can tell, they arrive singing, and, as best we can tell...they are singing one of two things. They are singing religious related material or they are singing work songs" (Darden, "A Gospel Journey"). Most likely they were singing some combination of the two. In this light, songs such as Michael, Row Your Boat Ashore, Darden continued, takes on a new – Baraka would argue clearer – meaning. This is a song that incorporates both the work song as depicted in the title coupled as well as the religious exclamation "Hallelujah!" at the end of each line. While it is outside the scope of this effort, it is interesting to contemplate the socio-political implications of Darden’s ideas when he expands upon the above statement by arguing that all indigenous American music, save Native American music, can be traced back to this origin. If Baraka’s argument is equally extended, in conjunction, there is fodder for a reexamination of all of American music.

Music, and its foundational rhythms, were the only possessions these Africans were able to bring with them, after being stripped of their homes, religion, community, and families. In fact, for a time, even this was forbidden until it was shown to the slave owners that singing, the work songs or "nonsense songs," made the slave more productive. This early response to the slave owner, more productive work in exchange for singing, can be interpreted as one of the first nonviolent protests (Darden, Nothing but Love 3). It was within this conflict that the African, now forcibly African-American, subculture took root. Just as the Greek epic poems such as the Odyssey and the Iliad were passed down the generations verbally, the same was happening in this community. Literacy was a crime, thus requiring that religion and tradition be passed on through story, poem, and song (Darden, Nothing but Love 6). An inseparable bond had been fused between the music and the culture. Within this musical communication, beliefs were also transmitted, whether intentional or not, argued Nathaniel Fredrick II, which in turn, "shapes identity" (4).

This transmission of culture, at first, had to happen in secret and then somewhat more publically via the only formal organization available to Black Americans: the church. The first
secret meetings were known as the "Invisible Church." At these services Black Americans were, relatively, free to sing, dance, and preach. It was through these meetings that a "social cohesion" was created, thereby allowing them to "distance themselves mentally from servitude" (Fredrick 42). With the spread of Christianity, the Black churches, and their accompanying music, the slaves now had a form of creative expression, their only form of creative expression. Even though Christianity may be their master's religion, the slaves now had a "common form of expression." A common form of expression allowed for communication beyond the plantation's boarder. Ideas, conveyed through preaching and songs could convey "something as radical as 'change to the existing order' could thus be shared from slave to slave, plantation to plantation, town to town, state to state" (Darden, Nothing but Love 9). The rise of Christianity also created another fundamental shift unbeknownst to their slave masters. The teachings of the Bible, on one hand, were used to reinforce the slave's place in society, "Servants, obey in all things your masters" (King James Bible, Colossians 3:22). The New Testament, however, in the body of Jesus, also tells us that God is love. "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. (King James Bible, 1 John 4:16). One of the first Bible verses that any Bible school child learns is John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (King James Bible). For Darden, bringing these ideas together made a critical shift for the slaves. The shift was not that slavery was wrong per se, rather that if the slave believed in God, then he would be loved by God. "Someone worthy of love, despite all his master's teachings and beatings to the contrary...has the potential to be an agent of change." (Darden, Nothing but Love 10).

**The Founding of the Black Church through the early 20th Century**

Not everyone was or had to be a Moses in order to initiate the process of liberation, too many of his kind would result in a revolution rather than exodus.

--Jon Michael Spencer, "Protest and Praise"
It is easy to see how the Black church quickly became the physical center and emotional foundation to the lives of Black Americans. "Church attendance was not discussed as an option because most Black families were identified with some church community...One's identity and family was tied to the church" (McAllister 23). The Baptist church, and later the African Methodist Episcopal, founded by Richard Allen in 1794, quickly dominated the southern Black community in part because of the openness toward a freer, more physical form of worship (Fredrick 46) as well as the low barrier to entry to be a preacher. Both of these points stand in stark contrast to the predominate denominations in the white community, Protestant and Catholic, which culturally shun physical displays of worship and singing. So formalized are the physical restrictions in the Catholic church, for example, that the Order of Service informs the congregation when it is allowed, in unison, to sit, kneel, stand or approach the altar. These denominations also put an emphasis on formal education as a qualification to be considered as leader of the church.

While the physicality will be the primary focus of this thesis it is valuable to highlight Taylor Branch's observations on this second point, education. While physicality and education on the surface seem at odds, in the particular circumstances of the periods of antebellum, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow, when the Black religious institutions were maturing under these influences, the two become intimately intertwined. Branch emphasized that the Baptist tradition did not have similar educational requirements as their white counterparts in large part because literacy was a crime in many parts of the South. Formal education, not even considering an advanced theological degree, was inconceivable. This response to the conditions of the South "contributed mightily" to the spread of the domination. "Anyone with lungs and a claim of faith could become a preacher" (ch. 1). As consequence of these restrictions, Branch concluded that "religious oratory became the only safe marketable skill, and a reputation for oratory substituted for diplomas and all other credentials" (ch. 1). In an environment where oration was a vital part one's resume, coupled with our earlier discussion that music as the primary conveyance of culture, it is easy to see how performative elements become foundational aspects the church experience. While "all roads converge at the Negro
church" for Branch, it can be equally said that performance and music, along with religion, are part and parcel of that destination.

The Black church, however, was not able to fight its way into formal existence until the late 18th century with the creation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). Up until this point, and for many decades to follow, the majority of Blacks in America received their formal religious service in the balconies or basements of white churches. The first independent Black church, in the urban center of Montgomery, Alabama, for example, was not founded until 1867, 73 years after the founding of the first AME church. The First Baptist Church (Colored) was only a grudging response to the Union Army influence in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War (Branch ch. 1). Freed slave Richard Allen and Rev. Absalom Jones and their associates worked to create AME as an offshoot of their mutual aid society Free African Society which was created in 1787 ("Our History"). Allen was a dynamic figure who was able buy his freedom by working for the Revolutionary forces after convincing his Delaware master that on judgment day his soul would be "weighed in the balance, and...found wanting" because of being a slave owner ("Richard Allen").

The struggles of Blacks in America were underscored by contradiction and hypocrisy. Allen's efforts to create an independent Black church were no different. Allen was invited to preach at Philadelphia's integrated St. George's Methodist Church, where, during his tenure, he made a significant increase in the Black membership. Blacks were required to sit in the balconies. As Allen describes in his autobiography, during confusion over where to put all the Black congregants at one Sabbath worship Allen and Jones arrived at their seats after the service started, during the prayer. Allen, Jones, and the others reflexively knelt for prayer. Much to their surprise, during the prayer, the "trustees" of the church moved to forcibly remove them from the church for the crime of kneeling (Allen 146). "Motivated by this incident and others" Allen and Jones committed themselves to the task of creating an independent church (Darden, People Get Ready! 37). Unsurprisingly they met resistance from the white community but the "idea [was] rejected by 'the most respectable people of color in the city," as well ("Richard Allen"). Despite these obstacles they were able to form an independent Black church. The African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas was founded in July of
1794. A second church, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, was also dedicated later that year although it was not fully independent from its parent St. George's Methodist Church. It was not until 1815, after a series of lawsuits in Pennsylvania State court, that Bethel was finally granted independence from St. George's (Our History). Another hurdle in this process was that Richard Allen was required to become formally ordained as Methodist minister in order to be qualified to spiritually lead a Methodist church. In 1799, he became an ordained Methodist minister, making him "the first African American ordained in the United States" (Darden, People Get Ready! 37).

Almost from the beginning music was a formal part of the church. In 1801 Allen published a collection of hymns titled A Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs from Various Authors. It was not until 1897, however, that the AME’s official collection of hymns included songs composed by Black authors. Separately, it was not until "after Emancipation" were the first Black authors published in a collection of "slave song and hymns for Methodist congregations" by Minister Marshal Taylor. That collection was called A Collection of Revival Hymns and Plantation Melodies (Praise God 56).

In the post-Civil War years, as the newly acquired freedom gained during Emancipation faded to Jim Crow, and the few Blacks that had acquired power saw it stripped away, the Black church also began to lose its way. If the Antebellum years for the Black church could be characterized as a subversive struggle for freedom, the post-Reconstruction church "lost its zeal for freedom and softened its drive for equality" (Frederick 48). The focus shifted towards assimilation through education and an emulation of Euro-centric or "Western" styles. This period, especially in the industrialized north, including Birmingham 4, saw a rise in the Black middle class. There was an emphasis on "'education and restraint' over 'emotion and religion' (and singing)...the music in these churches differed little from the music sung and performed in the white churches across town" (Darden, Nothing but Love 49). This cultural shift was the result of an effort to break the perceived "assumption" that "Black inferiority resulted from impoverished social conditions rather than any qualities inherent in the race" and that Black

4 While Birmingham, Alabama maybe physically located in the Deep South, it acquired many of the same characteristics of the industrialized north. It was a city with significant heavy industry and a dense urban population. These attributes made it a destination in the great migrations of Blacks leaving the rural south looking for better paying jobs in the industry centers.
"accomplishments would help alleviate prevailing discrimination and prejudice" (Jackson 13). Jackson went on to argue, "Baptist leaders increasingly associated such physical and emotional involvement with superstition and ignorance" (12). The focus on education lead to a series of Black educational organizations such as Fisk University (1866). This drive towards education above all else "culminated" in 1895 with the country's largest association of Black Baptist churches called the National Baptist Convention (Jackson 12) with one of its main goals to "encourage and support Christian education" ("Mission & Objectives").

The embracing of western oriented education and restraint as a means of combating racism lead to a tragically ironic conundrum for the Black church. Education had long been an intellectual foundation for discrimination. Feminist Elizabeth Grosz argued that since the creation of philosophy itself in ancient Greece there had been an inherent somatophobia, or fear of the body. "The body has been regarded as source of interference in, and a danger to, the operations of reason" (5). Cogito Ergo Sum ("I think therefore I am"), philosophy's most well-known aphorism coined by René Descartes, is only the most famous example of this perspective. The body was seen as something primitive, frail, something that could be easily deceived whereas the mind was something that could be refined, educated, and could acquire objective truth. Descartes arrived at his conclusion by first asking himself, how do I know I really exist, what proof do I have? He concluded that the information that his body provided through the five senses could all be deceived. His mind, however, was something different. The fact that he was thinking, an act that he viewed as totally independent from the frail body was sufficient, in fact, the only proof of existence. Only the mind could provide truth. The mind must therefore control the body. This was problematic because a framework that was based on the belief system that a corporeal connection was necessarily disconnected from reason "disenfranchises" whole classes of people and perspectives (Albright 6-7). In other words, while education succeeded in fostering economic empowerment, which in turn helped to build a vital Black middle class, it did not solve the fundamental problem of racism. A culture or group of people that was believed to have a close connection to physicality must then be unable to be based in reason as well as not completely in control of their body. This construct
has been the basis for the dehumanizing racist caricatures that have been projected on Blacks since emancipation and continues to this day\(^5\).

This cultural shift in focus, away from the liberation towards education, or what would be later become known as the "deradicalization thesis" (Lincoln 209), would have many ripple effects in the Black community. One of the first manifestations of the philosophy, post-Civil War, arose in how hymns were sung during the church service. Since Black congregations were predominately illiterate because of the restrictions imposed by slavery, hymns were sung by a process called "lining." The preacher, leading a hymn, would line-out a song by singing the first line and then the congregation would repeat the line. The preacher would move onto the second and the process would repeat for the entire hymn. For what this convention lacked in elegance, its simplicity allowed an egalitarian access to worship. With the move towards education came a focus on hymnals instead of lining. Hymnals become a wedge, separating churches that could afford hymnals and those who could not. Even more powerfully it became a barrier to worship. It restricted a fundamental part of the worshipping, singing, to only those who could read. Those who could not were marginalized. Historian Jerma Jackson articulated the impact of this change from lining to hymnals by highlighting the 1897 poem "De Linin' Ub De Hymns" by Daniel Webster Davis (1862–1913). Prior to the hymnals being introduced members of the community "wushuped wid de soul [sic]." The hymnals "changed all dat [sic]" and as a consequence they were required to "seb God wif 'telligence [sic]." Davis, a schoolteacher, understood the value of education but had deep reservations about how the "use of hymnbooks altered the social dynamics" particularly for the "unlettered elders" (14-15).

Another of the ripples caused by a focus on education lead towards a desire for "assimilation" into the dominant white culture, away from traditional "Black heritage." This was especially prevalent within the church establishment (Castellini 20). As this assimilation and education lead to a modicum of economic stability, there arose a distinct "conservative

\(^5\) Adam Alter's 2013 examination of the hidden forces that affect all of us, *Drunk Tank Pink*, reported that "researchers found that newspaper articles that referred to Black defendants in death penalty cases [used] ape-related words (ape, monkey, and gorilla) four times as often as they did when referring to white defendants...Black defendants who were ultimately sentenced to death attracted twice as many ape-related descriptions as Black defendants who were spared the death sentence" (ch. 6).
strain" in the Black community (Castellini 20). Put another way, once economic gains were achieved, however limited, it created a sense of security for these new members of the Black middle class. From this arose a conservative bias to not disturb the status quo, the desire to avoid anything that might put those gains at risk. This inertia showed up again in the early years of the Civil Rights movement with a hesitation to speak out against Jim Crow at the cost of a job, home, or a recording contract. It should be remembered that it was college students who first sat at the lunch counters in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1960; it was the children marching off to jail that turned the tide in the Birmingham protests of 1963.

Baptist social reformer Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918), in 1909, was one of the growing choruses expressing concern with the church's move away from social issues in the name of education. His concerns were not solely a reaction to a risk averse culture; rather, they were coupled with a response to the Gilded Age at the dawn of the twentieth century, which was characterized by great wealth, as well as equally great poverty, poverty that the over crowded "tenements" would come to symbolize in the urban centers or "sharecroppers" in the rural areas. Rauschenbusch's concern was that the church had lost its way by directing its "hymns, prayers, and sacraments" towards a "private redemption" as opposed to a collective "social redemption." "Now that this is upon us," Rauschenbusch declared, "we need these social expressions of emotion and purpose. If [we] cannot find them, [we] must create them" (Spencer 61). Rauschenbusch's concern was that the church's focus was on some distant "future life" (salvation) as opposed the immediate problems of the day. James Cone, author of The Black Church and Black Power went even farther by saying, "the passion for freedom was replaced with innocuous homilies against drinking, dancing and smoking; and injustices in the present were minimized in favor of a kingdom beyond this world" (346). For Rauschenbusch, his initial efforts towards reform started with music6, however, he soon realized that that was not sufficient and turned his attention to what was being prayed and what was being taught from the pulpit (Spencer 63, 78).

6 While Rauschenbusch died in 1918, the change he initiated towards a shift in social oriented hymns was "largely successful...between the years 1897 and 1954 the number of socially oriented hymns in the AME hymnal double[d]" (Spencer 78, 71 n29).
While Rauschenbusch's individual efforts were stymied by the start of World War I in 1914, he was certainly not alone in striving to provide new leadership. The NAACP and the National Urban League were founded in 1909 and 1910, respectively, to address national social and civil rights issues for the Black community. Organizations such as these and others were important, but there was still a sense of disenfranchisement within the Black community as a result of a "social stratification" (Frederick 46) of churches. Some churches were for the more affluent and others were not. The "better educated, middle-class African Americans...[attended] sedate 'high church'" in contrast to the "low-down folks, so-called common element attended 'storefront' churches" (Darden, Nothing but Love 50). One characteristic of these storefront churches was that the congregants had no interest in emulating their white neighbors, at least in terms of religious expression. These churches were characterized by a more physical and boisterous expression. Robert Darden called it a "religion which soar[ed] to a shout...ecstasy" (Darden, Nothing but Love 50). These new, smaller churches provided a home for poorer blacks by not only "fostering a sense of community and identity for Black American migrants in the large cities", but also resonating with the southern religious experience that allowed for "dancing and shouting" (Frederick 54-55). It was within this more expressive culture that Thomas Dorsey, who fundamentally changed Black religious music, and Dorothy Love Coates found their early homes.

**Thomas Dorsey and the Gospel Blues**

*The most expressive Negro music of any given period will be an exact reflection of what the Negro himself is. It will be a portrait of the Negro in America at that particular time.*

-- Amiri Baraka, "Blues People: Negro Music in White America"

If there ever was a right person at the right time in the right place it was Thomas Dorsey in the early 1920s in Chicago. Dorsey grew up in Atlanta, Georgia. His parents, a Baptist minister and church organist, gave him a strong foundation in the church and its music. A
product of the first Great Migration Dorsey, "Georgia Tom," landed in Chicago where he found almost immediate success working with Ma Gertrude Rainey and her Wild Cats Jazz Band ("Thomas Dorsey"). Through these early years of his career in the 1920s Dorsey wavered between the secular and the sacred, "delighted to have either Bessie Smith or [Sister] Clara Hudmon perform his compositions" (Heilbut, Gospel Sound ch.3). In 1926, during a years-long convalescence from illness, Dorsey began his final transition to the sacred. A neighbor had also taken ill with an undiagnosed acute appendicitis; by the time the neighbor was taken to the hospital the next morning it had advanced past the point of recovery. The disparity in illnesses had a deep impact on Dorsey, inspiring him to pen his first gospel hit "If You See My Savior, Tell Him You Saw Me" (Heilbut, Gospel Sound ch.3).

It is tempting to romanticize Dorsey as a conquering hero, effortlessly changing Black church music. His path, despite his early success as a blues performer, was anything but easy or preordained. At the turn of the century, Dorsey's inspiration, Charles Albert Tindley (1851-1933) started making music in reaction to the "banal sentiments" of conventional church music by adding "folk images, proverbs, and Biblical allusions familiar to Black churchgoers for over a hundred years" (Heilbut, Gospel Sound ch.3). Tindley, and later Dorsey, were speaking to the common man. Dorsey called Tindley the "first gospel songwriter" (Heilbut, Gospel Sound ch.3) for helping to create a new musical perspective long before gospel was even on the horizon. Tindley and Rauschenbusch were responding at the same time to a church that seemed to not be fully serving the true needs of the people. Tindley's most famous song, "I'll Overcome," which would later be refashioned into the Civil Rights standard-bearer "We Shall Overcome," was unique at the time in that it, and all his songs, because they were, "specifically addressed to the poor and downtrodden" (Heilbut, Gospel Sound ch.3). Spirituals evolved as an "interpretation of the oppression" of slavery. Tindley's music, building off the essence of

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7 Tragic events inspired Dorsey again. In 1932, while on the road, Dorsey's wife and child became ill. He was unable to return in time to see them before they died. During his mourning he penned what would become his most famous song, "Precious Lord." Near-death experiences similarly inspired Dorothy Love Coates to produce some of her best work. After recovering from a dangerously high fever she penned her first gospel song which would go on to become a gospel standard, "(He may not come when you want him but) He's Right on Time." A few years later, after walking away from what should have been a fatal car accident, Coates and the Gospel Harmonettes got on a bus to make a performance which became one of their most memorable recorded performances, The Great 1955 Shrine Concert.
spirituals, was an "interpretation of the oppression" of Blacks newly migrated from the farms to the urban centers hoping for a better life (Frederick 56).

Dorsey built on the work of Tindley by adding a blues element⁸. Black church music in the 1920s was "characterized by Jubilee songs and groups who sang traditional spirituals" (Frederick 57). His music, in contrast, "combined the good news of [church music] with the bad news of blues in a form...called gospel blues" (Heilbut, Gospel Sound ch.3). The church establishment initially rejected this new form of music. "I have been thrown out of some the best churches in America," recalled Dorsey ("Thomas Dorsey"). This new music was rejected for its association with a music that focused on the "worldly temptations of man," the blues (Frederick 162). Gospel, therefore, appeared as a prima facie rejection of the very foundations of church doctrine since Emancipation. Salvation, for Dorsey's music at least, came at the National Baptist Convention after years of fruitless efforts. After being inspired to write sacred music after his first brush with death, he borrowed $5 to send sheet music of his songs to five hundred churches. He received no response for three years when at the 1930 convention in Chicago when "a girl from St. Louis, [with] a good heavy voice...was laying them in the aisles singing 'If You See My Savior, Tell Him You Saw Me'" (Heilbut, Gospel Sound ch.3).

Dorsey was given the opportunity to start exploring his ideas at Pilgrim Baptist church when the grip of the Depression started impacting the community. The Pilgrim's minister, Junius C. Austin, asked Dorsey to form a chorus. Austin was looking to "strike a new balance between restraint and emotion" in worship. He understood that there were some members of the congregation for which expressing emotion provided "a more meaningful articulation" of religion (Jackson 56). The chorus was immediately popular, attracting new members to Pilgrim.

This new chorus' popularity did not diminish the resistance to Dorsey's music. It did, however, create a catalyst for a "more sustained public discussion about the meaning of religion" (Jackson 58). Since the church establishment was putting barriers in his way, Dorsey chose to bypass the establishment by selling his sheet music directly to choirs and individuals. He had little success until Sallie Martin told him, "'Really you have something here but you

⁸ Heilbut tells us that Dorsey did not set out to upend church music by injecting the Blues into religious music. Rather he attributed it to divine intervention. "You see," said Dorsey, "when a thing becomes part of you, you don't know when it is gonna manifest itself. And it's not your business to know or my business to know" (Gospel Sound ch.3).
don't know what to do with it. '...Dorsey challenged her to do better and paid her four dollars a week" (Jackson 59).

Sallie Martin was a singer with "deep roots" in the sanctified church. She saw, in 1932, that the musical "landscape" was changing and wanted to be part of that change. Initially Dorsey did not offer her a slot in the chorus because of the "roughness of her sanctified sound" but her persistence eventually bore fruit and was allowed to join. With the "groundswell" of support generated by the chorus, its expansion turned into a "movement for expressive worship with gospel at its core." Martin wanted to extend this movement beyond Chicago and asked Dorsey let her travel. She sang at churches and sold sheet music afterwards. She also worked to establish community choruses around this country (Jackson 50, 59). Gospel historian Robert M. Marovich notes that one of the values of a community chorus is that you did not need to belong to any particular church in order to participate. This is in contrast to a church choir where you needed to be a member of the church to participate (Darden, "Context and Commentary"). This was valuable for Martin's efforts because it not only allowed her to circumvent the church structure but it also allowed for a mixing of denominational styles. The music was able to thrive on its own merits as opposed to being sanctioned by the church.

Black religious music, with the infusion African heritage that came with the blues, now served a new function. The music was directly addressing and thus in turn helping "negotiate a balance between continuity with the past, the discontinuities of the present, and the prospects for the future" (Darden, Nothing But Love 73). Never was this solace more in demand than in the 1930s and 1940s with seismic cultural shifts prefaced by the Great Migration, underscored by the Great Depression, and a looming second world war. If gospel as a whole was speaking to these larger issues, it was Dorsey and Martin's efforts to speak to people on a more fundamental level that allowed them to get their start at a time of great need. The church "couldn't reach the people... 'I wrote to give them something to lift them out of that Depression. They could sing [traditional hymns] at church but the singing had no life, no spirit. The preacher would preach till his collar would melt down around his neck but there wouldn't be no money in the oblations.'" Dorsey and Martin's music "livened up the churches" and filled the coffers (Heilbut, Gospel Sound ch.3).
When naming this new style of music, Dorsey, as we will see with the Sanctified church, looked to the scriptures for inspiration. He believed that "gospel" referenced the four first books of the New Testament, the "gospels." "The term 'gospel' referred to the 'good tidings' conveyed by the divine acts (of the first four books)...[he referred] to gospel music as 'good news!'" (Jackson 64). Dorsey's good news music with its up-beat rhythmic style was reflective in the title he gave to the music.

It was at this stage when gospel music began to converge with another trail blazing force, the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), also known in different variations as Pentecostal, Sanctified, or Holiness church. For the purposes of this thesis it is sufficient conflate these variations into the simpler Sanctified unless referring specifically to the Pentecostal tradition. The Church of God in Christ started in earnest in the late 19th century and developed musically on a "parallel" path to Dorsey's music (Jackson 51) by connecting rhythm, religious expression, and heritage. The Sanctified community "never envisioned themselves as pioneers of gospel music between 1890 and 1930." They understood that their form of worship was different from the hymnal based musical expressions of their AME and Baptist colleagues, but for them music was not another element of the religious expression, rather music and dance was "synonymous with worship" (Jackson 25).

**The Sanctified Church**

_Everybody decided because I sing, because of my moves, and I dance with the music, or whatever, that I am Pentecostal... 'You're saved, you're Pentecostal, you're one of us!' Yes I'm saved. 'You're Sanctified!' Yes, I'm Sanctified. 'What's your church?' Evergreen Baptist Church. [laughs] It just slays them!_

--Dorothy Love Coates, *Still Holding On*

Advocates such as Davis and Rauschenbusch may have been looking to find a balance between traditional worship and education but there were others who "rejected this strategy outright." One group who chose not to look for a balance in favor of forging their own path,
(which would directly lead to the creation of the Church of God in Christ) were itinerate minister Charles H. Mason and Baptist minister Charles P. Jones from Mississippi. They chose to focus their efforts on a bible-centric form of worship they called "bible religion." As they explored the Bible more deeply, Jones had the epiphany that the early Christians believed "ecstatic worship" to be a fundamental part of religious expression in the same way had "African Americans during Slavery" (Jackson 16). Mason and Jones, along with others, believed that music, dance, instruments, and most importantly shouting, were a critical part of religious expression as well as a fundamental aspect of African heritage; the two, expressive religion and African heritage, were, in effect, opposite sides of the same coin.

As Mason and Jones developed their ideas they found a kindred spirit with the predominately white Holiness movement. The Holiness perspective held the belief that the "Holy Spirit [dwelt] within a believer." This movement originally found a home within the Methodist community in the 19th century but eventually separated over a divide between the Methodist desire to "embrace religion as ritual and custom rather than out of deep-seated conviction." An additional advantage for Mason and Jones to align with Holiness was that the Holiness perspective focused on the believer as an individual, not letting race force a distinction (Jackson 17).

The zenith of this relationship came in the form of the Azusa Street Revivals between 1904 and 1909 in Los Angeles. These revivals were lead by Black preacher William J. Seymour, one of the first Pentecostals, who "emphasized a process of being 'born again' through 'the Holy Spirit'" (Frederick 47). Another noteworthy part of the revivals was the speaking in tongues, which was what marked the beginning of Pentecostalism (Jackson 17). One final aspect of these revivals worth highlighting was a change in the physical configuration of the sanctuary. Religious scholar Douglas J. Nelson noted that the minister was moved from an elevated position in the front of the room to the center of the room, surrounded by the congregation. Not only was the minister part of the congregation but there was no separation by race in the seating arrangement (Jackson 18). These changes had an electrifying effect in the worship service; for once, all who chose to worship God were together with no barriers. The racial integration that this type of service offered, however, was still before its time. The
social conventions based in Jim Crow were still too strong to allow for integrated services. The experiments of the Azusa Street Revivals led to the radical idea of centering the religious practice not on race but on identity. This idea would travel far beyond its Los Angeles birth (Jackson 18).

Introduction to Black Gospel’s power and its relation to the Recording Industry

This heritage of emotional frenzies that were usually concomitant with any African religious practice...this heritage of emotional religion was one of the strongest contributions that African culture made to the Afro-American. And, of course, the tedious, repressive yoke of slavery must well have served to give the Black slave a huge reservoir of emotional energy, which could be used up in his religion.

-- William M. Chace, "Justice Denied"

Jon Michael Spencer, in his text Protest & Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion, devoted a chapter to examining first the structure of the Sanctified service and then to individual elements that are characteristic forms of expression within the service: testifying, shouting, dancing, and finally being "slain in the spirit." I will examine each in turn. These elements, the foundational components to a Sanctified service, are worth examining because the same conventions became the foundation for Coates and Harmonettes' performances. Coates offers a stylized church service at her performances. These services were not recognized as such because they were based on a different church model, that of Sanctified, which as we shall see is very different from the conventional Protestant or Catholic services which requires the congregation to "seb God wif 'telligence." This is not to imply that the Sanctified service was built on any less of an intellectual foundation, rather it was different because its mode of worship was more expressive. It offered an opportunity for God to be "wushuped wid de soul." Any church "order of service" is quickly made superfluous in a Sanctified service. Coates was able to show, through the Sanctified model, that the power of the Holy Spirit could be brought to bear outside the conventional church in the service of civil
The power of the Holy Spirit provided the strength to continue on when "Bull" Connor and his dogs or when fire hoses were quite literally on the church's doorstep. It is the central argument of this thesis that Coates, with a firm foot in both religious traditions, Baptist and Sanctified, was able to bring the lessons of one to the other. In doing so, she showed that the Black church can more than just a community organizing tool for the movement. She showed that a performance rooted in church themes, magnified by the Sanctified structure, could bring strength and hope to the darkest moments of the civil rights movement. Ironically, she brought church themes and styles to performance outside the church, which was in turn brought back into the church in the form of the mass meetings. And just like a performance is nondenominational, all who have a love for the music can attend; the same was true for the mass meetings. They too are nondenominational and open to all who cared about civil rights. The mass meetings Castellini argued (see page 3), were one of the primary reasons for the success of the Southern Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and early 1960s.

When turning a critical eye towards performances by the Original Gospel Harmonettes as they relate to Sanctified service we must first take a moment to examine why there are so few options to more broadly test the argument that a Harmonettes performance mirrors a Sanctified service. Quite simply, there are almost no commercially available "live" performances from which we can examine Coates when she was caught up "in the spirit." There is a fundamental difference in the anthropological value of examining a live versus a "studio" recording for any artist but for gospel artists the distinction was decidedly more pronounced. The studio was a place where time was measured in dollars; there were costs for the space, equipment, and various technicians and producers. There was ample incentive to record the music as quickly as possible, in as few "takes" as necessary. Besides the limitations of the recording venue, the medium for distributing the music imposes its own limitations on the artist. In 1948 Columbia Records introduced the 33 1/3 RPM long play "LP" record that gave an artist about 20 minutes of performance time per side. In 1949, RCA Victor released its own record, the much smaller 45 RPM record that allowed for just a few minutes of music. The

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9 "In the spirit" in this context was one of the many euphuisms to refer to when the Holy Spirit, through Sanctified-Pentecostal service, descended on a performer or worshiper. When an artist was "in the spirit" he or she could, and usually did, "wreck the house" by bringing a congregation to the point of spiritual ecstasy.
"45" and the "LP" as they came to be known each had their niche but the much cheaper former had a powerful influence on the more expensive latter. The briefer 45 became the primary vehicle for individual songs, or "singles" to be released. The brevity of the 45 led to the convention of the 3 to 4-minute song that is still the rough standard today. Put another way, an artist who recorded her songs longer than the convention could expect to see less, if any, air-play on the radio, which, in turn, meant fewer record sales. Fewer record sales, while a financial burden for the artist was also a primary bar by which record label judged artists. Any artist with poor record sales was soon an artist without a record contract. Another, more direct difference between the live and studio recording was that during a live performance the artist had an audience to work with and respond to whereas in the studio it was often an impersonal booth or small room large enough for only the artists.

The majority of the commercially available recordings of Dorothy Love Coates and the Gospel Harmonetters fall into this latter, shorter, studio category. Even her live records at the Newport Festival (1966), for example, remain within this rubric. It took time, time for which the 45 does not allow, for the gospel artist to engage with the audience and for the spirit to descend. Fortunately, there is one extended live Coates performance, on The Great 1955 Shrine Concert album, available in which all the stars align and the spirit descended on both Coates and her audience. Further scholarship would be valuably spent examining just this one concert album and its constellation of stars. It is to this 19-minute performance that I will start to examine how Coates' performance connects to the Sanctified gestalt.

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10 The "A side" was reserved for the more popular song while the "B side" usually had a less popular filler song from the album. A series of singles was usually introduced on 45s over time in order to generate interest in the later to be released LP which often had about 10-15 songs, depending on song length. Tantalizingly, Baylor University's Black Gospel Music Restoration Project (BGMRP) put out a 2011 press release saying that it has "discovered" that some gospel artists (likely only on the smaller independent labels because the higher profile labels were always motivated by the potential of losing profits from offending the southern audiences (Castellini 19)) used these throw-away B-sides to convey civil rights messages and songs. BGMRP's early findings show that "the lyrics portray violent civil rights protests and tributes to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., demonstrating that Christians other than Mahalia Jackson and Dorothy Love Coates were very involved in the civil rights movement." BGMRP's findings were not available for this thesis. They will likely be the centerpiece to Robert Darden's forthcoming volume 2 companion to his 2014 Nothing but Love in God's Water. Darden was kind enough to provide an advanced copy of his chapter about Dorothy Love Coates (Interlude 2: Death in America). (www.baylor.edu/lib/news.php?action=story&story=88329)
In *Protest & Praise* Spencer presented the above diagram by anthologist Bruce Reed as the foundational structure of the Sanctified service. This cycle represents a "creative regression" which breaks down the worshipper, washing away the troubles of the week thereby allowing her to be rebuilt through God in preparation for the coming week and its incumbent trials. The cycle starts with "intradependence," the individual. The service starts with individuals greeting each other, and sharing an opening song. Next is the regression or breakdown with the testimony section. The rebuilding process begins with extradependence, which is the affirmation of the reliance on God for "confirmation, protection, and substance." It is only through the process of rebuilding that one acquires the strength to not only survive until the next service but also to "eliminate inner disorientation, weakness, and pain." It is in the transformation section where the community is brought back "into its selves as it reenters the atmosphere of the structured world of intradependence." The community becomes "reintensified" through the repetition of this cycle; a cycle that can be considered the "breath of God." "Worshippers seeking escape are inhaled into (through creative regression) and exhaled out of extradependence (transformed) without realizing the dynamics of God's breathing" (177-179).

Theologian Robert Williams concluded that the result of the testimony/preaching cycle through extradependence and intradependence inspired the "more enduring experience of sensing that we are being upheld and cradled by strength that is not of our making, something...that gives to life a quality of integrity and meaning which we could never
generate" (Spencer 179). This breakdown and renewal is a visceral, physically and emotionally consuming experience. Spencer calls it a "rite of intensification" in which a "rebirth occurs each week when the churched gather...through singing, testimony, and shouting to sing, speak, and act the good God has done for them...thereby strengthening their faith and community" (177).

It should be highlighted here that this cycle of a breaking down and rebuilding may be of individuals but can only be completed as a community experience. This is not the "private redemption" that caused Rauschenbusch distress. Anthropologist Victor Turner viewed this process as creating an "essential We...'communitas' that higher form of community relation...entered through testimony, which initiates the antistructural movement out of the structured community...and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency." Turner adds that this heightened state often leads to a temporary "spontaneous communitas," a momentary sense of a community that "has something 'magical' about it...there is in it the feeling of endless power" (Spencer 183).

Testimony is the first step in the building of the "essential We" and happens early in the service, usually after the welcome period and a song. Amiri Baraka, in Blues People, retold an African dictum, which said, "the spirit will not descend without song" (Jones 41). Song and then testimony are conflated into the same step because they both attempt to verbally express the glory of God. Testimony begins the cycle because, before there can be a collective "We", the "I" must be broken down. Testimony can be viewed as one of two powerful symbols. The first type is the willingness to be vulnerable and exposed to God; the "I" the individual stands alone in front of the group to say, I am weak and cannot go on alone. Alternatively, Spencer argued the second type is: I am willing to publically stand alone and declare the Lord is God. This act of standing up for God symbolically connects the worshipper back to their heritage by bridging them to the "first" Black spirituals. "'Who will be a witness for my Lord?' and someone among the marginal people answered, 'I will be a witness for my Lord'...testimony service, throughout its historical evolvement, has functioned to prepare the religious community to endure the ways of the world by shaping and rejuvenating its common consciousness" (Spencer 177). Both of these forms of testimony take the individual away from her own self-dependence, instead looking to a connection to a larger group or heritage.
Shouting is based on the 20th chapter, verse nine, of the Old Testament book Jeremiah, "His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones...and I could not hold back." One is compelled to shout from an "anointing from the Holy Ghost." For Spencer, shouting is part of the initial "conversation crisis" or testimony. The two can be considered "different moments in a single experience" which means that shouting is, if the spirit so moves, a fundamental part of the "creative regression." "Shouting forcefully stories the ultimate gospel [which] is evidenced in the fact that shouting is usually twice and trenchant and thrice as long as the introductory singing-testifying" (Spencer 194-195).

The next step on the continuum of worship is dancing. This is a "physical transmutation" of the "ritual celebration." Considered one of the purest forms of the celebration of God, dance is "more symbolically substantive than song whose words inadequately represent the power of the spirit." "Singing the music...strengthens the community bond, but dancing the music is more religiously essential because it allows the worshipping community to realize its spiritual power" (Spencer 195).

Spencer called the final stage "slain in the spirit." The collapse as a result of this stage symbolizes the start of the rebirth. "As the worshipper lay slain, it is said that they are experiencing the euphoric afterglow of the anointing—God is refilling them...giving them eternal peace." Being slain is also the final symbolic "entering out" phase. It is a "powerful spiritual experience with [a] divine spiritual imperative...it is to revitalize the worshipping community with even greater power than if one had 'entered out' by one's own accord" (Spencer 197).

Experiencing the glory of God through the lens of the Pentecostal service is made up of four key steps: song and testimony, shouting, dancing, and finally being slain. Stepping back and looking at this continuum of religious expression we see the full spectrum of the human ability, and ultimate failure to express the true glory of God. The simplest or basest form is song and testimony. Song and testimony are still clearly anchored in an articulate and structured human experience. These two forms are an important first step because they help create the community bond. Once the community is created the service moves to the next form of digression from the bonds of humanity, a further letting go of cultural, social, and
physical conventions by shouting. Speaking in tongues, the defining characteristic of the Pentecostal movement, can happen in this phase. Dancing becomes the ultimate expression of God because it is literally the embodiment of God, as much as a corporeal being can embody a deity. A "primordial bond" (Spencer 195) with God is created through dance. G. Norman Eddy, a Black Pentecostal minister, beautifully describes this ultimate supplication to God: "A man has not become truly religious until he has humbled himself before the Lord by rolling on the floor, unashamed in the dust and dirt" (73-74). The end point of the cycle is also the starting point. It is God's gift in return. Just as it was with the story of Jesus, it is only with death, being "slain," can rebirth happen.11

The Great 1955 Shrine Concert

As she sang, jerked, jumped, shouted, waved her arms, and moved through an audience, the lyrics of the song she was singing sprang to vividly to life. On several occasions at the end of a song, the group would have to lead Coates back to the stage because she was completely out of herself, having given herself over to the master12....As the supreme hard gospel singer, Coates could "take the house" and have everybody standing up, swaying, shouting, and crying, or fainting like no one else.

--Horace Boyer, "How Sweet the Sound"

11 Anthony Heilbut recounted the story of how the spirit can be "called up" through only song and dance in a Sanctified Church. One Sunday "the choir sang so fervently that the guest preacher couldn't speak. Each time she rose to give her message the fire descended...Ten minutes later she tried again...I'm feeling good this evening. Somebody's here now...must be the Lord,' and she found herself shouting too. The song long forgotten—each round of shouts seemed a spin-off from the one preceding, until the spirit...and the community became the message. After an hour of periodic shouts, the congregation became subdued, softly praising God with blue-noted hums and unknown tongues...By now the guest preacher's bus had arrived. She gathered her flock; some marched out still shouting, and she apologized with grace. 'I couldn't speak to you this evening, beloveds, but that's alright. We've had some good church”’ (Heilbut, Gospel Sound introduction).

12 As mentioned earlier, Coates influenced a generation of R&B and Soul singers. One of James Brown's signature moves was to collapse onstage as if having given himself over totally to the song. Two of the musicians would put a cape over his shoulders and slowly lead him off stage, patting him on the back in sympathy, as the music played on. Just before getting off the stage Brown would burst back into song, full of life, as if he had received a divine bolt of energy.
They always came out with their robes on and still do. I feel that is a part of the church when you do that. It lets the audience know right away that you are about the Lord's business.

--Rev. Claude Jeter, interview with Anita Bernadette McAllister

"★★★★★" is the best review Rolling Stone can give; this was the rating it gave The Great 1955 Shrine Concert for the 1993 Specialty Records release (Dyson 75). While it earned top marks, it did not merit the space usually afforded for one review, instead it shared the one review space with two others. Robert Darden noted earlier that he and his colleagues at the Black Gospel Music Restoration Project estimated that 75% of all recorded Black gospel music is unavailable. In a 2005 New York Times Op-Ed he went so far as to say "it would be more than a cultural disaster to forever lose this music. It would be a sin" (Darden, "Gospel's Got the Blues"). Darden had such strong feelings on the subject because, if, as he argued, Black music is "at the heart of all of American music", than we had lost an important part of our cultural heritage. In a 2010 interview he used an archeological metaphor, "if you are an archeologist you do not want to leave out the Cretaceous Period and if you are a musicologist you do not want to leave out what springs from America, and that is from this music" (Darden, "A Gospel Journey"). It is hard not make archeological references when examining the Shrine Concert because not only is it a unique performance archive to survive the period, but for all its value there is virtually nothing written about it. If Wikipedia is a ubiquitous cultural touchstone, it makes a statement when an important archive such as this does not even have a Wikipedia entry. Rolling Stone's brief review, three doctoral dissertations examining discreet sections of the concert, and the liner notes represent the vast majority of the written analysis of this great recording. As mentioned earlier, this is fertile ground for original scholarship.

A traditional live gospel performance, on a stage opposed to in a church, typically featured a series of ensembles. Each was given two songs. The custom was for the artist/ensemble to first perform a slower "devotional" song and then follow-up with a second more upbeat "drive" song (Darden, "Context and Commentary"). With two noteworthy
exceptions, the Shrine Concert followed this format for the seven performing ensembles over 14 tracks. According to the liner notes the impetus of this recording for Specialty Records owner Art Rupe was to create a vehicle for "his hottest attractions – the Pilgrim Travelers, Brother Joe May, the Soul Stirrers, and the Original Gospel Harmonettes." The artists for this performance were part of a "loose knit tour" (Hildebrand and Nations).

Liner notes notwithstanding, in the relative paucity of analysis around this album it is easy to imbue significance to what might be arbitrary choices; it is nonetheless valuable to observe choices that stand out as they relate to the general themes in this thesis. The first observation is that there was only one Jubilee quartet.13 As discussed on page 5, the Jubilee quartet, once the dominant form of religious music, by the mid-1950s has significantly receded garnering only the opening slot on the program for Specialty's Pilgrim Travelers.14 Michael Castellini pointed out that by the mid-1950s, "virtually all Black churches had a gospel choir" (14). In this context Castellini was referring to the Dorsey based, blues infused, physically inflected style of music, which was at once a form of religious expression as well as a statement of Black heritage. This style was in stark contrast to the arranged spirituals and hymns. So complete were the changes brought by Dorsey and Martin that in under two decades virtually all Black churches had made the shift to a form of expression that was "once considered by many Baptist church leaders as a sign of primitive, backward behavior...[to what now] came to be seen as a vital component of black culture and history" (Jackson 65).

The gospel choir may have firmly taken hold in the church but it would take another eight years, in 1963, until James Cleveland brought the form to the masses on vinyl with his best-selling Peace Be Still.15 Gospel historian Robert M. Marovich says that this album "helped

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13 It can be argued that the Soul Stirrers were an all-male quartet in the same mold as the Pilgrim Travelers. They certainly came from the Jubilee tradition, however, by the time of this performance they had musically and stylistically moved so far away from the arranged spiritual that was at the core of Jubilee and had moved towards Soul which was to be their future that it is incongruous to put the two groups in the same category. Sam Cooke's eight minute "Be With Me Jesus" can only be described as a gospel/Soul masterpiece.
14 It is interesting to note that while Jubilee quartets may have been waning in the eyes of the Black church community, Doo-Wop, which could be considered a secular cousin of Jubilee was still very much on the rise by this point in the mid-1950s. Darden noted that "popular Jubilee groups...gradually moved to gospel by singing the songs of Dorsey, Tindley, Campbell, Brewster, and others" (Darden, Nothing But Love 90).
15 In 1955 live albums were still a rarity. David Brubeck's 1954 Jazz Goes to College was the first, breakthrough, best-selling live album. Conventional music industry wisdom before Jazz Goes to College held that audience reactions were a distraction (Anderson, This Is Our Music 35). The Shrine Concert liner notes
usher in the era of live gospel recordings” (Darden, *Interlude*:2 7). James Cleveland, soon to be crowned the "King of Gospel," for the Shrine Concert, however, was still part of Albertina Walker's The Caravans. Sam Cooke, like Cleveland, was also on the cusp of breakout fame though Cooke would move to the secular Soul arena. For this concert he was still singing gospel. The rising influence of the Soul Stirrers at this concert can be reasonably inferred from the fact that they were one of only two ensembles allowed to break the two-song convention. The Soul Stirrers were allowed three songs, presumably forcing the lesser-known Annette May (daughter to Brother Joe May), who immediately preceded the Soul Stirrers, to only be afforded one song.

The second exception to the two-song convention was for the Original Gospel Harmonettes. If we could infer that the Soul Stirrers were given three songs at the cost of May's set, it is reasonable to assume the same of the Harmonettes and Ethel Davenport, who preceded the Harmonettes with only one song. It also seems safe to assume that the Harmonettes were originally given a three song set, however, at this remove it is impossible to confirm the predetermined structure, especially since their set was nothing like the rest of the concert.

The Harmonettes started out, not with the devotional song, but rather with their energetic hit song, "When I Reach My Heavenly Home." Barely one minute into the set they changed course again when Odessa Edwards, the group's leader at the time, segued into a sermonette (also a first for this concert) while the others sang quietly in the background. Heilbut wrote that Edwards' sermonettes were known to "wreck houses" (*Gospel Sound* ch. 10). This sermonette was a morality tale wrapped in a very personal story. Edwards used this moment to talk about their drive to California for their appearance. En route, the group reminded us that the recording technology was not advanced enough to meet the challenges of live recordings. Because of these limits only one strategically placed microphone was able to be used. Recording a large group of people such as a choir was a considerable challenge. Rupe, to his credit, made attempts as early as 1952 with Brother Joe May and Sallie Martin. The Shrine Concert, however, "constitute[s] the first-ever all-star live gospel album from the genre's so-called Golden Age" (Hildebrand and Nations). It is all the more amazing that this recording was not released for 38 years.

16 The album's liner notes incorrectly label the opening song "You must be born again." The actual opening 60 seconds of singing are "When I Reach My Heavenly Home." "You must be born again" closes the set.

17 "A sermonette is a bridge between singing and preaching. It is a morality tale usually told by the lead singer while the rest of the singers hum or sing softly in the background...In this way the gospel narrator is virtually a stylized representation of the preacher" (Frederick 76, 138).
"suffered a very serious accident...Tore up our car. Bystanders...just knew that the people in the car were dead." She used the story to proclaim God's glory, recommitting herself and the group not only to God but also to gospel singing. "'Well, He left us here, and He left us here for a purpose. Maybe we don't know what the purpose is', I said, 'but, Girls, let's sing and sing and keep on singing. So we came here—baggage and bag on the bus, but we're here... 'Lord, it's good to be here!' 'cause you never know what day or hour it'll be when God shall call your name, and it's best to be ready...." (Coates, "Medley"). The group effortlessly segued without pause to their next song.

Shakira Holt, the one scholar who devotes attention to the Gospel Harmonettes' performance, made the case that, after the sermonette ended, as Coates headed to take center stage to sing her variation of "Get Away Jordan" that this was when the Spirit began to descend on her. When the spirit descends it motivated her "to display her ample talent for riding its groove to the point of transcendence." (Holt 330). A close listening to the beginning of the album, however, shows that the spirit began to descend and take control of Coates by the concert's fifth song. (Sanctified) Brother Joe May's opening "It's a Long, Long Way" was a slow, hard-driving blues inflected song. His moans, which last for six long beats, start off expressing anguish and then seemed to resolve by saying hallelujah. The performance deeply moved his fellow performers, who were presumably onstage as well because their responses were picked-up by the sole microphone. The responses we hear to his moans were chuckles and clapping which seemed to say, "yes we know what you are saying!" There were also more than a few shouted "Shut-up Joe!" Coates, on the other hand, had a different response. With her distinct voice and punctuating rhythms, the listener can clearly hear her rhythmically singing, "sing it" as if she was starting to fall into a trance.

In her dissertation Holt coined the phrase "Theory of Convergence" as one way to fully understand Coates. Holt's theory is based on the liberationist theory which holds at its center the "belief in the innate equality of all humankind...Coates throughout her life and career

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18 Shakira Holt noted in her dissertation the seemingly-unintended irony of the lyrics underscoring Edwards' sermonette. The group suffered a serious car accident while "journeying up the King's highway" (248). Edwards did not elaborate on the cause of the accident but Heilbut wrote that singers on the gospel highway were always at risk of accidents, in part, because they drove with "maypop" tires. "Maypop" tires, he informed us were tires that "may pop at any moment" (Heilbut, Gospel Sound Introduction).
downplayed her own specialness, emphasized her oneness with the people" (Holt 338). Through this theory, Coates only feels complete when she was fully connected with the people around her. Her fame, and her music were just one of the many ways for her to connect and support others as opposed to enriching herself. One example that Holt offered (citing Heilbut), in contrast to some of her gospel "compatriots, Coates—except for her brief stay in the North—would maintain residence in the South throughout her life....As long as racism permeated the nation...it was ludicrous to behave as though the grass were any greener on the other side" (340). Holt concluded that Coates "lived for the moments, when in total convergence with those who suffered as she did for the same reasons she did—blackness, poorness, femaleness—she could become a channel for the restoration of hope and healing both she and they desperately needed" (347). This theory supports the idea that many authors expressed about Coates but was best summed up by Heilbut in Gospel Sound when he said, "for thousands of black people she is the message singer, the one they can trust" (ch 10). It was at this moment and in this context, as "Get Away Jordan" began, that Coates started fully "converging" with the audience already fully within the spirit.

Coates and the Harmonettes's set modeled what I argue is a Sanctified service model which I outlined on page 28. Their church service began first with a greeting: the comfortable, well known, popular song "When I Reach My Heavenly Home." Next came a testimony: Edwards' sermonette started off speaking about a near-death experience. This trauma did not shake their belief in the Lord, rather it reaffirmed it; she stood-up for the Lord. Edwards used her moment, unlike all the other artists on the program who only sing religious songs, to move outside the typical concert framework. She stopped the singing and said to all who could hear that even in death she was committed to the Lord. "I'm ready to walk that last mile; I'm gonna walk it 'cause Jesus, gonna walk it with me...I won't have to look for Jesus 'cause I know that He's gonna be there. Then I'm gonna stand and put one foot on the chilly banks of Jordan and say, "Get away, Jordan, now. I wanna cross over to see my Lord" (Coates, "Medley"). The extradepedence step began with the singing of "Get Away Jordan." With the support of the Harmonettes singing back-up Coates began by using rhyming couplets that Holt described as "corporately owned by the gospel community, they, in various incarnations, travel the universe
of gospel and are bound to show up in any gospel song at any time" (Holt 331). Again we see Spencer's build-up starting with a reconnection to what the audience was most familiar: singing lyrics that the community "owns." As the song progressed, the audience clapping and cheering its approval, Coates moved to the final verse, her verse which Bernice Johnson Reagon described earlier as being a preacher. While singing her lyrics the Harmomettes stopped singing in the background. Only the piano is playing and, it too, faded quietly into the background as the verse progresses, in the same way singers faded in the background during Edwards' sermonette. By mid-verse Coates' only accompaniment was the clapping audience and an occasionally shouted "Sing, child!" or "Shut-up girl!"; it was just Coates and the audience. The Harmonettes joined back in for the first line of the chorus but this is all the verbal communication Coates had left. Since this is only an audio recording, with one microphone, we can only piece together what happened next from the verbal cues of the audience. The Harmonettes continued repeating the chorus but Coates was by now running through the audience, "in full abandonment to the song" (Holt 332). We hear Coates punctuating the beats with shouts as she ran. "The audience is the only signal that Dot is being herself. The attendees are overwhelmed; calls, shouts, and claps come from the floor. The effect is gripping gospel that compels the listener to attend to every word, note, key change, and audience response" (Holt 332).

The remaining Harmonettes signaled the end of the song and the audience applauded, however, the moment was not over; the audience was not quite ready for a transition. There are 10 seconds of rhythmic clapping and stomping which fades to cheering. We can only assume this was when Coates rejoined the Harmonettes onstage. Edwards next began speaking with only the piano playing in the background. This was not a sermonette with singers softly singing in the background, rather this was the preaching/transformation part of the Sanctified service. This brief section could be placed in any Baptist church, save the fact that a woman was doing the preaching.19 Edwards started off preaching, "...it is a good thing

19 Sexism in gospel is an important topic that is unfortunately outside the scope of this thesis. Frederick recounted a story about Coates that showed she cared about women's rights as well as other social issues. "While rehearsing for a performance, Dorothy Love Coates of the Gospel Harmonettes was admonished for her preaching. The pastor of the church where she performed that evening made his displeasure known. He stated, 'Dorothy, I don't mind you singin', you can do that all you want, but I don't want no woman preaching..."
though that we don't know when we got to go," clearly picking up from her earlier sermonette; the audience responded with approving "Amens" (Coates, "Medley"). Coates, on the other hand, is not able to make this transition. As with the minister Heilbut told us about earlier (see page 31 n11), so overwhelmed with the spirit that the minister was unable to speak to her congregation, Coates too was incapable of speaking. "In the background, Dot is having a hard time going on with the program....in a private conversation made public, she bursts out with, 'It's alright now, Jesus'' (Holt 348). Edwards kept preaching but Coates could not restrain herself making repeated outbursts. Holt observed that Coates "has obviously worked herself up, past the point of good manners...she sets in on an old Baptist moan: 'Fire keep on burnin'...Reading the spirit and the intense need of the moment, Edwards graciously steps aside, with a 'Help yourself, Dot.' It is clear that Dot, at the moment, is powerless to do anything else" (348).

The album labeled this next song as "The Fire Keeps on Burning," however, this was not a song in any traditional sense, no matter how much the Harmonettes try singing in the background to support Coates. 20 seconds into this effort they gave up, leaving off in a glorious shout. Again, as in the Sanctified service, words become insufficient. "As though in a trance, she launches into a slow burn testimony that is part moan, part sermon, and part prayer" (Holt 348). Coates' words have the feeling of a stream of consciousness as opposed to any deliberate, cohesive effort. She was attempting, and failing, to articulate the spirit. Coates ended this section with just repeated lines of "You been so good. You been so good. You been so good...I say again thank You, Jesus" (Coates, "Medley").

The entire congregation is caught up with her in this moment of absolute transcendence and convergence. There is no clear divisibility between Dot and the Harmonettes, or between Dot and the audience. They all have a "road from whence they came." They all have circumstances, pains, and dangers which they have "been through." Given the quality of that road and the ferociousness of those experiences, their very survival is nothing short of miraculous. When all has been set against them, when everywhere there has been conspiracy to utterly undo them,
Jesus has been there, making a way out of no way. Her "I thank You, Jesus," is as much theirs as it is hers. The release she seeks is as much for them as it is for herself (Holt 349).

Finally, the spirit released Coates, allowing her to move beyond extradependence to the transformation/preaching section. The cycle was not yet complete, however, until the congregation was transformed back to themselves: intradependence. This last phase was the critical final step that allowed the audience to endure the pain they would inevitably suffer between when they leave the great Shrine and when they were able to come back again, as a community, to celebrate and worship God.

At this stage, words had returned to Coates, the Harmonettes, and the audience. Coates was preaching now. She leads off with "In Alabama where I come from...," Edwards follows next with "Help yourself now Dot!" The audience following along moves from "scream[s] and shout[s] in high-pitched shrieks" (Holt 349) to choruses of "Yes!" and "Shut-up!" If the connection to the Sanctified had not been made totally clear, Coates reinforced the connection by talking about the "moaners bench." "And the sinners used to line up on the moaners' bench and the Christians would come around and pray for them and worry their souls until they had to get up and run and cry" (Coates, "Medley"). Coates' preaching built to another crescendo with the lines "then somewhere in the amen corner I could hear my mother say, 'It is getting late in the evening..."' (Coates, "Medley"). This final line was another moment that was clearly "corporately owned by the gospel community" (331) as Holt elegantly described it. At these words the audience digressed back into an unstructured assemblage of shouts and cheers. Coates too seemed again overcome, having fallen back to a series of lines that feel more like a stream of consciousness as opposed to coordinated speaking. "It is late in the evening, it is late in the evening, it's all right now Jesus, I don't know about you but I can feel the fire burning!!" (Coates, "Medley"). Herbert "Pee Wee" Pickard, the group's 22 year old masterful pianist, had kept pace with Coates all along; finally, gently, he have Coates a

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musical cue to move to end the service. As Coates, ever the professional, began to sing, supported by Pickard, the rest of the Harmonettes fall right in line. This final song, a name that was appropriate this moment, was "You must be Born Again." The audience brought through the Sanctified cycle by Coates and the Harmonettes had been slain and were now born again. By the middle of the song, Coates returned to the audience but this time there was a feeling of celebration, a release, as opposed to transcendence. We clearly hear her singing in the audience. The audience can be heard clapping, delightedly laughing at whatever Coates was doing. For Coates the convergence was complete; she and the audience were one in celebration of their rebirth.

Dorothy Love Coates and the Civil Rights Movement

Art creates realities and worlds. People perceive and conceive in the light of narratives, pictures, and images. That is why art is central to politics...because [artists] create something different from conventional perceptions, works of art are the medium through which new meanings emerge.

--Murry Edelman, "From Art to Politics"

The Great 1955 Shrine Concert was recorded on July 22, 1955. Rosa Parks' famous refusal occurred just a few months later on December 1. Five days later the Montgomery Bus Boycott began, lasting just over a year until December 20, 1956. For Black artists this protest and the civil rights movement in general created a catch-22. One of the original members of the Drifters, Bill Pinkery, recalled in an interview with Nathaniel Frederick how difficult it was for performers to speak out against Jim Crow. "That was a time when the white man was making you what you wanted to be...you could [speak out], yeah, you could but if you did you could hang it up" (78-79). Michael Castellini painted a considerably less rosy but likely no less accurate portrait when he added that for the gospel community "open resistance was largely avoided, and for good reason...drawing the ire of local racists was a life-or-death matter" (17). Coates likely struggled with these same concerns. Since the documentary evidence is so limited
we can only speculate as to when Coates would start showing her true feelings; when she would publically became the strident, outspoken social critic that we would see by the mid-1960s as evidenced with her 1963 “The Hymn” and “I’m holding on,” or the 1966 Gospel at Newport performance.

The first place to start looking for evidence is in her song lyrics. Anita Bernadette McAllister credited Coates with writing over 300 songs (41). “Coates was unique for her song-writing ability...[her songs] reflected her religious faith and social and political [view]” (Frederick 75). Coates herself said that she was “writing about a changing condition, a changing world” (Still Holding On). Craig Werner’s observation that “the hundred percent Coates demands renders the distinction between spiritual and political meaningless” (A Change is Gonna Come 96) only reinforced this idea that there was no separation between how Coates viewed her spiritual life and the external social-political world in which she lived.

The point here is not to argue that all gospel songs have socio-political overtones; they do not. There are certain qualities, however, that are part of the fabric of gospel from which it is impossible to separate. Gospel served the "dual purpose of transmission and ritual." The transmission was the religious component. Within this religious component was a "message of hope" which by its very nature had a "social awareness" aspect. The second component of gospel was that of "community maintenance." Gospel is a community activity and in its expression it creates a community bond (Frederick 166). So while a particular song may not have been political, how it was used within the community infuses a political perspective. This was all the more potent with gospel since the "act of singing instills social and political significance" (Frederick 166). This too, applied to the music of Coates and the Gospel Harmonetettes. In a 2007 interview with Nathaniel Fredrick, founding member of the Original Gospel Harmonettes Mildred Howard shed light on some of the context in which they performed:

We didn't [sing at rallies often], but the promoter would have the program and it would be named as a civil rights program and I used to go around and sing at home, at the rallies. [We would sing] regular songs. Songs with soul. Songs with meaning...Always did [feel like I was connected to something bigger than myself]...that movement meant so
much to so many of us. And we had to, people would just go every night, every time, if there was any kind of meeting, they would go. They would just go in droves, to this church or different churches. It made me want to go and Odessa's mother and daddy didn't miss a one. Sure didn't (13).

When examining the lyrics of Black spirituals and gospel it is critical to highlight the double meanings. Songs are not just songs. As discussed earlier, there has been considerable scholarship examining these double meanings. W.E.B. DuBois in the *Soul of Black Folk*, first published in 1903, articulated this point most poetically when he said, "Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretense or revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism" (133).

Some of the clearest evidence of Coates' penchant for infusing a social consciousness started appearing at the same time as *The Great 1955 Shrine Concert*. I will take a brief look at three songs from this period to highlight how a deep social consciousness is clearly prevalent in her lyrics: "Jericho Walls," "Lord, Don't Forget About Me," "That's Enough."

"Jericho Walls", while a song presumably written by Coates, was based around a theme used many times in religious music, gospel or otherwise. Robert Darden provided a fascinating reflection on the use of the Biblical story of the fall Jericho at the hands of Joshua, under God's direction. The story comes from Birmingham's Communist Party's magazine the *New South* in the March 1938 edition. As noted earlier, Birmingham, the Harmonette's hometown, was an industrial center more in line with the urban North as opposed to the typically agrarian South. As a result, the Communist party, as in other industrial centers, attempted to gain a foothold focusing on Unions, workers' rights, and racial equality. Darden called Birmingham's Communist Party "small but active." Clearly it was certainly active enough to have a regular periodical. This particular article praised the "throbbing note of protest...found in the [African-American] spirituals." Darden wrote that the article goes on to state, "spirituals were 'living prophecies of deliverance.'" As proof the article's author cited the song "'Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho'...[as] really a 'camouflaged call for battle against the plantation owners'" (*Nothing But Love* 71).
Coates' "Jericho Walls" *explicitly* addressed race as an issue, not only in the South but in the North as well. As if that was not enough, the timing of this song in addition to its accompanying metaphors commenting on the current events playing out when the song was released could have only been considered a clarion call to action on Civil Rights. While there is no publically available documentation about when this song was written, Coates and the Harmonettes record the song on "Andex Gospel (1957-1958)"; the original liner notes are unavailable. If this song was recorded as late as 1958, it was likely written sometime in 1957, months after the successful conclusion of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which was just 92 miles from the Harmonettes' home in Birmingham. A wall had fallen there; when would the next fall? The song is rife with metaphors that can easily be seen as speaking to the Bus Boycott. *God sent a soldier: Martin Luther King Jr.; Joshua had walked*:

- The Bus Boycott involved considerable walking, especially in the last month when the courts ruled that the churches' car-pooling was illegal. Additionally, it must be remembered that God required Joshua and his people to walk around Jericho seven times; *The walls are so high, so strong: Jim Crow seemed so entrenched that its barriers could only come down with God's help; I heard the children shout:* while the young did not play a dominant role in civil rights until the 1960s, most notably in Birmingham in 1963, this line could be read as children talking to their parents, not understanding why they were treated differently. Rosa Parks spoke of when she was a child wondering why the Black children had to walk and the white children got to ride the bus to school. "The bus was among the first ways I realized there was a black world and a white world" (*"Rosa Park's Bus").

Notice also the interplay between Coates and the Harmonettes. The Harmonettes' sections are in parenthesis. There is certainly a "call and response" interaction in how they speak to each other. This interplay, however, was used to best affect in the last line of the chorus "(Joshua, the Jericho) Walls (Must come down!)" where the Harmonettes sound like a crowd demanding change and in the middle Coates can punctuate the critical point "wall" or in

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21 "God told Joshua, The walls are waiting" and "When will the walls, Built like the walls of Jericho, When will they come down?"

22 As if the "walked" reference is not obvious enough, Coates shouted, "walked!" She shouted twice in this song: "walked" and "down here."
the last chorus "down here," as in, down here in the South, the focus of the civil rights movement.

God told Joshua (The walls are waiting)
He said Joshua (Joshua, the walls are waiting)
Joshua (Joshua, the walls are waiting)
(The walls) The walls of Jericho
(You know they must come down!)

(The Jericho walls) Come down
(The Jericho walls) Oh
(Joshua, the Jericho) Walls (Must come down!)

God sent a soldier to look for Joshua
They did not know where he had gone
But Joshua had walked close to the wall so he could see what was going on
That Jericho wall, he took notes
And he brought back to God a full report
He said they're so high! (So high!)
I can't get up! (I can't get up!)
(But they're) So long (So long)
I can't get under (Can't get under)
They're built (Built)
Strong (Strong)
And they're (sturdily) bound
But with your help (Your help) Joshua
We'll bring these (Walls down!)

(I heard the children shout, bring the walls down)
(I heard the children shout, bring the walls down)
(I heard the children shout, bring the walls down)
God we're depending on you, Joshua (Joshua)
Joshua (Joshua)
Joshua (Joshua)
(God's faithful servant)

(The walls) The walls of Jericho
(You know they must come down)
(The Jericho walls) Come down
(The Jericho walls) Oh
(Joshua, the Jericho) Walls (Must come down!)

I got a Jericho wall (Built in these years)
I got a Jericho wall (Built in the North)
I got a Jericho wall (Built in the South)
(Keeping some a check and keeping others out)
Jericho walls (Built between nations)
Jericho walls (Built between races)
I just wanna know (I wanna know)
I wanna know (I wanna know)
I (I wanna know) I wanna know
(When will the walls) Built like the walls of Jericho
(When will they come down?)

(The Jericho walls) Come down
(The Jericho walls) Oh
(Lord we want the Jericho walls) Down here (To come down!) (Coates, "Jericho Walls")

The 1957 Specialty Records release of *The Best of Dorothy Love Coates and the Original Gospel Harmonettes* included "Lord, Don't Forget About Me." In the first two stanzas of this song, Coates came right out to speak directly to the pain and suffering in the mortal world. The suffering of the world seemed almost too much to bear. These lines can be seen as grounded in the Bible, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (*King James Bible*, Matthew 27:46) or "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me?" (*King James Bible*, Psalm 22:1). As will be discussed in more detail momentarily, always being grounded in the Bible was critical for Coates. We must also consider Amiri Baraka's requirement (see pages 10-12) that the context in which the song was written is critical for a complete understanding of the song. Without considering the context, we strip the music "of its social and cultural content" (Jones, *Black Music* ch 1). Coates herself added to this by saying "the writing comes out of whatever condition I find, that I am surrounded with...I can give hope, and more or less guarantee it through God because I have lived in...despair and I was delivered...I can talk about depression and oppression because I have lived that too" (*Still Holding On*).

How much longer, must we suffer?
Life everyday only seems bring sorry, pain, misery, and trouble
Nowhere do there seem to be a place for me, oh Lord!

Sometimes I feel, the least among all men
Someday, somewhere, somehow, life's troubles for me must end
When you bless my brother, and think about others: me!
Oh Lord, don't forget about me! (Coates, "Lord, Don't Forget About Me")

Finally there is Coates' 1956 hit "That's Enough." Robert Darden considered Coates to be "uncompromising [in her] support of the civil rights movement." "That's Enough" provided some of the evidence for Darden. He argued that this song "was one of the first songs to tackle sensitive subjects head-on" (Darden, People Get Ready! 253). With regard to this particular song Coates added that she wrote it in response to "having to fight so many things to just perform" her music (Still Holding On).

Robert Darden goes on to argue that "most of Coates' innovations" could be found in her lyrics. She was able to combine the "literary allusions" of her idol W. Herbert Brewster along with her "folks idioms" which immediately connected with her audiences. "Coupled with her blistering rhetoric and spirit-filled (some would say "spirit-possessed") performances, Coates was a true original" (Darden, People Get Ready! 255).

Songs such as these are important to note because they clearly highlight that Coates' passion for social issues was at the foundation of her music; it permeated her music in a way that it did not for her peers. While Coates was one of the few "active duty" soldiers for civil rights, according to gospel historian Robert M. Marovich, "most artists recognized the importance of lifting their voices in song to help the cause" (Marovich, A City Called Heaven). In an interview with Marovich, he agreed with Bill Pinkery's observations (see page 40), that almost any expression of support for civil rights could have been swiftly attended to with economic repercussions, or much worse (Personal interview). As the pain of Jim Crow boiled over into outright protest in the 1960s, Coates and her fellow gospel artists became more explicit in their condemnations. After a short hiatus from 1959 to 1961, Coates and the reformed Gospel Harmonettes returned, still very much keeping their eyes set on God, but their views on civil rights would no longer be obfuscated. "Now, Dorothy's compositions took-on the urgency and push for civil rights...her message to African-Americans was put in a very simple song that sold close to a million copies: hold on to your faith and don't let go" (Still Holding On). This song was Coates' 1963 "I won't' let go of my faith" ("I'm holding on")."

Reflecting on this song Horace Boyer said:
I'm holding on. I'm holding on and I won't let go. Now that 'holding on,' of course has a reference to religion but it also means in this struggle for equality, in this struggle for justice, in this struggle for recognition as another human being, I am not going to let that go until it comes...it was a double entendre, where you are saying one thing and you are actually applying it to something else. Dorothy became a political activist through her singing...when it sounds clearly like a reference to the Bible or the religious life there is a social aspect to this as well (Still Holding On).

Conclusion

[Coates] used her celebrity to usher social causes that were important to the broader black community.

--Idella Lulaname Johnson, Development of African American Gospel Piano Style

If the first "major battle" in the modern Civil Rights movement was the Baton Rouge Louisiana Bus Boycott in June of 1953, it was also the least sophisticated according to Aldon Morris. Prior to the Montgomery boycott in 1955-1956 there was no structure for a movement, mass or otherwise. The Baton Rouge boycott was noteworthy for Morris in terms of its organizational structure: the organizers of the boycott were "practically invisible to the larger black community" (56). This was significant because the community, the people who would be most directly impacted as well as who have the most to gain or lose from the effort, were not directly invested in the effort to bring about that change. This strategy may have been sufficient for the seven-day Baton Rouge boycott but as the stakes would inevitably get higher, the organizations needed to rise to meet the new challenges. This next step was the mass meetings.

The mass meetings grew out a number of factors at play in the mid-1950s. The civil rights strategy at that stage was largely lead by the NAACP. Their strategy was characterized as the "lawyer approach," taking on specific, winnable cases, in an effort to chip away at the walls
of Jim Crow. Dr. Benjamin Mays, then the president of Morehouse College, described the NAACP’s tactics in comparison to the SCLC: the NAACP was made of lawyers and lawyers "don't march in the streets," rather the lawyers believe that the "the first thing you've got to do is have the United States Supreme Court declare this thing [rational segregation] illegal, and that's logical" (Morris 36-37). Besides the fact that this was a slow, financial and labor-intensive strategy, the NAACP was under direct attack by the white power structure. These attacks happened on many different fronts such as a 1959 Arkansas law making it illegal for "any state agency to employ members of the NAACP" (Morris 32-33). These attacks not only forced the NAACP to spend considerable resources to defend itself which, in turn, created a "protest vacuum making room for ministers (the leaders in the southern NAACP) to create new church-related organizations designed to implement the mass movement approach" (Morris 38).

This new type of organizational structure for protests allowed for deeper community connections. It also had the advantage of being centered in the church, which had a built-in organizing structure along with being at the core of the community's life. Social historian Lerone Bennett pointed to the egalitarian effects of a church based structure to the mass meetings. All classes of people, "professionals, porters, doctors, maids, laborers, housewives, even drunks...abandon their claims of, rank, class, and creed, while reaching out to each other in new hope and new faith" (Morris 47-48). For the purposes of this thesis, Civil rights leader E.D. Nixon's reflection about the mass meetings highlight our path when he advised that in order to keep a large group of people interested and engaged you must "put something into the program that these people like. A whole lot of people came [to the mass meetings]...for no other reason than just to hear the music, some came to hear the folks who spoke" (Morris 47).

I shall address these two points, speaking and music, in turn because they represent the core of what made the mass meetings as an organizational structure successful. The mass meetings, in turn, were one of the key reasons for the success of the Southern Civil Rights movement.

Reverend Andrew Young, who worked closely with Martin Luther King Jr. spoke about how King reframed the civil rights message and its issues through the lens of a preacher. There was no disagreement on the urgency of these issues but for many, like Jericho's walls, they
seemed insurmountable barriers. When King spoke, however, he used allusions of God's people "leaving the slavery of Egypt and wandering in the wilderness of separate but equal and moving into a promised land." This imagery "somehow . . . made sense to folk. And they may not have understood it; it was probably nobody else's political theory, but it was their grass roots ideology. It was their faith; it was the thing they had been nurtured on... when they heard that language, they responded" (Castellini 37). "In the mass meetings that resembled church revivals," King transformed biblical "otherworldly" messages, through the use of "elaborate and eloquent rituals of song, prayers, and sermons [creating] a new message of social justice in this world"(Castellini 37). King's public speaking on civil rights and his preaching were almost inseparable in terms of delivery; they are both grounded in the "highly stylized manner" of the church service. While Taylor Branch notes (page 15) that religious oratory had been a highly prized skill for almost as long as there had been a Black church, King was building on this oration traditional, making the mass meetings to where they were more than just a modified church service. King, like Coates before him23, was bringing together different elements of the church service to create a performance, a revival.24 The Azusa Street services were transformative not because they were the run-off-the-mill church service but because they were revivals. Ray Allen, author of Singing in the Spirit: African-American Sacred Quartets, along with Victor Turner, pointed to the "spontaneous communitas" that comes from "a ritualized experience of intense human interrelatedness and lack of social hierarchy." For Allen, like Spencer noted earlier, communitas came from a "message...delivered [such that it] stirs the emotional temperament of the worshippers to a point where they actually feel, and possibly experience (if the Spirit descends), the truth of those teachings" (Castellini 28-29). While Allen's comments were referencing a gospel performance, communitas in this form can

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23 Coates and King were only separate in age by a year, born in 1928 and 1929 respectively, however, their careers started at very different times. Being appointed pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1954 was King's first professional endeavor. By this time Coates had been performing for years with the Harmonettes and with other groups, made up of family members, prior to that. Evelyn Hardy left the Harmonettes, also in 1954, because she was exhausted from the "thousands" of performances (Still Holding On).

24 The quintessential '60s protester, Abbie Hoffman, reminded all would-be protestors in his how-to manual for street protest, Steal This Book!, that "those who say a demonstration should be concerned with education rather than theater don't understand either and will never organize a successful demonstration, or for that matter a successful revolution" (283).
come through preaching. King, as a gifted orator, had the ability to deliver this kind of message. In fact, it was the power of oration by King and others that inspired and gave legitimacy to the movement. These orations, more often than not, were delivered from a pulpit.25

If the speakers gave the intellectual legitimacy to the movement, the singers gave the spiritual inspiration. Jon Michael Spencer in *Protest and Praise* observed that singing, for both the gospel singers on the road26 and the community, whether in church or on the front lines of the protests, "was not only a source of courage, it was a means of responding to events and audaciously "talking back" to the establishment" (91). The leaders of the movement, in its various forms, understood the critical value of the preaching and the music as both an "organizing" tool and as a way of "removing fear from the masses" (Morris 56).

The mass meeting was one of the innovations to come from the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The innovation was bringing together of the organized and coordinated oration from the pulpit along with the critical support music provided (Darden, *Nothing but Love* 134). The mass meeting was a choreographed performance with the church pulpit for the stage. This boycott in particular, according to Reverend Wyatt Walker, was the "granddaddy of all singing movements" (Castellini 44). The two were inseparable for the success of the movement and both were based in performance.

Cordell Reagon argued, "music is what held the movement together" (Castellini 44). In time, however, with the assistance of Guy Carawan and the Highlander Folk School the church gospel songs would be modified to more directly address the movement's needs. In 1960 Carawan brought "We Shall Overcome" to the founding convention of the Student Non-Violent

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25 Taylor Branch gave a gripping account of the "secret" Holt Street Baptist Church mass meeting on the eve of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. King, in reaching the second emotional climax of his speech said, "If we are wrong the—the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong. If we are wrong—God Almighty is wrong"...the crowd seemed to explode...Wave after wave of noise broke over them, cresting into the farthest reaches of the ceiling." When King ended his speech, the "crowd retreated into stunned silence...the ending was so abrupt, so anticlimactic. The crowd had been waiting for him to reach for the heights a third time at his conclusion, following the rules of oratory" (Branch 136-141).

26 Gospel singers brought a unique perspective on racism to their music. Singers on the 'gospel highway' experienced racism overtly and covertly on a daily basis. Just like Coates knew that the grass was not greener in another community, gospel singers were constantly exposed to it. In your home community, living in the supposedly "separate but equal" world, it was often possible to keep to yourself and your community to avoid direct exposure to racism. This was not the case when on the road. Just getting gas at side-of-the road filling station could be a life-threatening experience (Darden, *People Get Ready!* 225).
Coordinating Committee (SNNC) in Raleigh, N. C. It had a deep impact on the movement (Harold and Stone). "We Shall Overcome" was a variation of Tindley's "I'll Overcome" as discussed earlier (see page 21). Bernice Johnson Reagon defined the freedom songs as "a mixture of traditional spirituals and popular music that were revised for each event during a civil rights campaign" and first gained wide acceptance at the Albany Georgia protests in 1961 (Lenart 50). However the music morphed to suit the needs of the movement, the Black religious music, namely gospel, would remain at the core.

I would think that a movement without music would crumble. Music picks up people's spirits. Anytime you can get something that lifts your spirit and also speaks to the reality of your life, even the reality of oppression, and at the same time is talking about how you can really overcome; that's terribly important stuff.

--Reverend C.T Vivian, "People Get Ready!"

It is almost a philosophical absurdity to try and separate what one is or what one believes from what one does. If [Coates] is really going to sing about the Biblical story, how can one not talk about deliverance and freedom and those things that bind the human spirit?

--Reverend Erskine Faush, Still Holding On

Faush's observations about Coates create a frame, around which we can piece together the clues to Dorothy Love Coates' legacy beyond that as an artist. The picture that comes to focus is one of Coates being a central actor in the shaping of gospel in the early 1950s building

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27 Nicole Lenart in the The Gettysburg Historical Journal credits Bernice Johnson Reagon with creating the Freedom Songs at the Albany, Georgia protest. "None of the blacks had ever walked around the City Hall and they were thus afraid. To break the tension inside of the church, one of the SNCC workers asked Reagon to sing. She stood up to sing "Over My Head I See Trouble In the Air," but when she began singing, the word "trouble" did not seem to suit the occasion, so she immediately changed "trouble" to "freedom," thus expressing more hope. She felt that she had the authority at that moment to change the lyrics because she had already done something forbidden by simply walking around the City Hall. Changing song lyrics to fit the unique circumstances of each city quickly became an accepted practice" (51). In contrast, however, Spencer credits the first Freedom Song to Martin Luther King Jr. at the Montgomery Bus Boycott. He cites Baynard Rustin's "Montgomery Dairy" of February 22, 1956 when King altered the lyrics of "Give Me That Old-Time Religion" to include lines such as "We are moving on to victory/With hope and dignity" (Spencer 85-86).
on the innovations of Dorsey and Martin. Gospel music was a critical element of the Black religious experience. Not only was religion the central spiritual and social tenant of the Black community, but the church, its home, became the organizing structure to the Civil Rights movement. These clues can be coupled with the clues that Coates cared deeply about the community and the issues that impacted the community. In fact, we have seen through Shakira Holt's Theory of Convergence (see page 35) that Coates felt incomplete when she was not deeply connected to her community. Michael Castellini pointedly asked, "Can it not be reasonably assumed that the same communal cohesion found in Birmingham's exceptional Black gospel community was also to manifest in the city's local movement that forever changed America in the early 1960s?" (56).

Four points exist to support the contention that there was a deep connection between Birmingham's gospel and civil rights communities. First, as Anthony Heilbut noted, Odessa Edwards, founding member of the Gospel Harmonettes, was "gospel highway's first and most powerful exponent of civil rights" (Heilbut, When Gospel was Gospel). Second, Cleo Kennedy, who joined the Harmonettes in 1959, was active in the Birmingham civil rights movement. In fact, Kennedy was so active in the movement that she sang two of the four songs recorded by Candie and Guy Carwan at a historic Birmingham mass meeting at the height of the Birmingham movement ("Lest We Forget"). Third, the final song at that same mass meeting was Carlton Reese's "freedom song" variation of Coates' 1957 hit "Ninety-nine and a Half Won't Do"("Lest We Forget"). Fourth, Harmonettes' Mildred Howard's comments (see page 41): "That movement meant so much to so many of us. And we had to, people would just go every night, every time, if there was any kind of meeting, they would go. They would just go in droves" (Fredrick 13).

Given these clues, despite the lack of more direct documentation, how can one reasonably assume the Coates was not involved in the movement from its earliest stages? The task at hand, however, is to go beyond simple involvement. The argument is that not only was she involved but that she shaped the very music at the core of the movement, thus shaping the movement itself. The fact that she was actively involved, at the mass meetings or protesting in the street or going to jail, as some argue, is ancillary to this argument, a
byproduct rather than an influencing force. Borrowing from Reverend Faush, it is a "philosophical absurdity" to believe the former, Coates as an influencing force, and not the latter, Coates' active involvement.

If we go back to Coates' early years, Anita Bernadette McAllister tells us (see page 8) that Coates was admonished by her junior choir director for singing "foot-tapping music" and for the fact that she "couldn't sing without moving" (McAllister 28). This is the music of the Sanctified movement, music that came from the soul and was expressed as much through the body as through song. Coates was so deeply religious that her first response after a near death experience while pregnant with her first child was to pen the words to the song "(He may not come when you want him but) He's Right on Time" (Page 21 n7).

Coates, joining the Harmonettes at age 23, matured quickly in a time of convulsive change in America. A second world war had just ended with the creation of a device that could easily end the world, the atomic bomb. Allies were now enemies, creating the Cold War, and America was at war again, this time in Korea. There are so many analogies to describe this era but William Manchester's description of the early 1950s fad "paint-by-numbers" gave a colorful voice to the period. "There is nothing unfathomable about enumerated art. It was a kind of crib for the inartistic, allowing them to pass themselves off as painters without creating anything. In a decade remarkable for its high incidence of sham, it served as a cultural weathercock" (645). Is it any wonder, living in a community under the oppression of Jim Crow, as well as a period marked by a "high incidence of sham," that Coates stayed deeply entrenched within her religious community? In the documentary "Still Holding On," Coates says that she was offered a contract with Columbia Records. They wanted her to "sing rock 'n roll," that she was as good as "Aretha [Franklin] or anybody else" but she turned it down because the music did not speak to her the way gospel music spoke to her (Still Holding On).

What spoke to Coates was a Sanctified expression of music and religion. While she remained a life-long Baptist, she expressed her music within the Sanctified frame. This choice is not surprising because as we saw from her early years, in the years before Dorsey's music achieved wide acceptance, her church did not allow space for the kind of musical expression that was part and parcel of who she was as an artist. Where else was there for her to go, aesthetically, if
her twin priorities were expressing herself in a highly physical manner and to stay rooted in the Southern Christian religious community?

After reviewing Jon Michael Spencer's examination of the Sanctified religious service (see page 28) we can see how this model perfectly maps onto the Harmonettes' performance at *The Great 1955 Shrine Concert*; here, Coates was allowed to stretch out beyond the three-minute song framework that the 45 RPM records dictated. There are a few dozen studio recordings of Coates and the Harmonettes commercially available, of which the vast majority of songs are under five minutes, not nearly enough time or the right place (not in front of an audience for which she can interact) for the spirit to descend. The other few live recordings, such as at *Gospel at Newport*, are equally restrictive both in terms of time and audience.

While these archival documents recorded a musical legacy and were a vital connection to Coates and the Harmonettes, they did not even begin to express the true impact of Coates and the Harmonettes. Evelyen Hardy left the group in 1954 because of the "difficulties of life on the road and the thousands of one-night performances" (*Still Holding On*). The true documents of Coates and the Harmonettes' impact on the Black community lies not in the commercially available recordings, which are just a cosmetic representation of a Sanctified performance, but rather lie in these thousands of anonymous one-night performances, with the musicians suffering the same poverty and the same discrimination as the people in the audience. Odessa Edwards recalled, "[Coates'] songs were so touching to audiences because the audiences could relate. Her songs indicated the life and her life in the raw" (*Still Holding On*). It was during these countless performances that Coates used the church service model in her performance, like at *The Great 1955 Shrine Concert* to imbue the passion of the Spirit outside the church. These were not just performances, to the ability that Coates was able to repeat the full effort night after night, these were Sanctified church services.

In the final analysis Coates succeeded in bringing the Sanctified experience to the masses, and then eventually to the movement, in a way that her "sister" predecessors such as Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Sallie Martin were not able to because she was able to find the
balance of achieving a level of popularity, for a gospel artist, while retaining the legitimacy of the agent of God. Tharpe certainly attained the former but eventually lost legitimacy. Martin retained legitimacy but did not achieve break-out success as a performer. Her legacy lies with the vision and skills to take Dorsey’s music and used it to help transform the Black religious expression. Tharpe opened doors, Martin legitimized the musical vernacular, setting the stage for Coates to transform the music through the Sanctified aesthetic, innovative lyrics, and a personal integrity. Many of her peers had some or even all of these elements but none had them in sufficient quantity with sufficient fame to create a transformation.

Just as Coates was the tide that shifted the sands laid down by Dorsey, Martin, Tharpe, and so many others, Guy Carawan and countless other civil rights leaders would be the tide that shifted the sands laid down by Coates. In service of the movement, they started to shift the music, through the lyrics away from the church. While standing on a gospel foundation, their interests were fully secular.29 The movement and the music started to shift again by the mid-1960s. Jon Michael Spencer recalled a story that would portend the next tide. After James Meredith’s shooting, Martin Luther King Jr. and other SNCC leaders such as Stokely Carmichael, who went on to rise to prominence in the Black Power movement, took up the task of completing Meredith’s “March Against Fear.” “Along the way King halted the company to sing ‘We Shall Overcome,’ but upon the verse ‘black and white together’ some of the marchers stopped singing. They later explained to King that they had embarked on a new day and no longer sang those words” (96). Words, or the lack thereof, have power.

29 It would be a fascinating examination to see how this institutional shift of the church toward secular matters, in the service of the movement, impacted the church’s role as the religious anchor for the community. Is the foundation chipped away by this shift, especially in the turbulent 1960s with the death to King and the rise of Black Power?
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