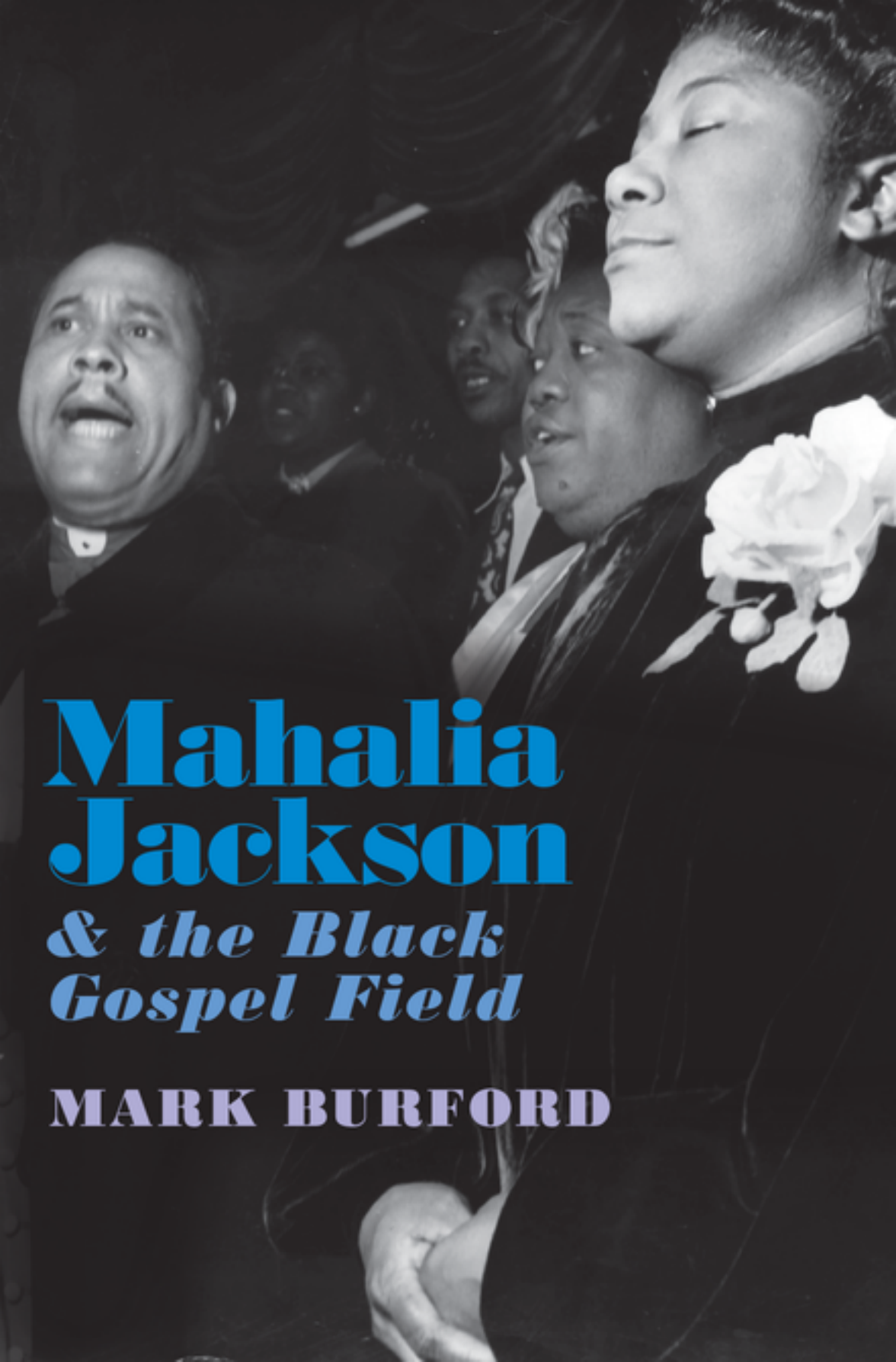

Mahalia Jackson

& the Black Gospel Field

MARK BURFORD

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To Michael, Marcia, Melinda,
and above all Mom

In memory of Corliss Askew Watkins
(1955–2018)

Contents

Preface

TWO DAYS AFTER Christmas 2015, I attended a wedding reception in Oakland, California, for the daughter of long-time family friends. While I was exchanging pleasantries with the father of the bride, he became visibly excited upon finding out that I was writing a book on gospel singer Mahalia Jackson. A musician, an English professor, and a Christian, he asked what my angle was. I told him that I was studying Jackson's career in the decade after World War II, considering how during this period Jackson became an international, multi-mediated celebrity through her increasingly high profile concerts, radio and television appearances, and commercial recordings, all the while maintaining her street cred as an active "church singer," as she liked to describe herself. Having encountered many people who had never heard of Mahalia Jackson—invariably my students, though also, more often than I expected, friends and acquaintances intrigued that I was writing a book on black gospel music but whose faces went blank when I mentioned Jackson's name—I couldn't help but find his fascination gratifying. "It is remarkable, when you think about it," he said, scanning Jackson's luminous career in his mind. "Why her?"

As scholars across the disciplines know all too well, the most fundamental questions, even rhetorical ones, can often be the most fruitful. As I continued to weave together a sprawling body of research material on Jackson and her singular positioning within the history of black gospel music, the question "Why her?" continuously generated complex answers. Taken at face value, "Why her?" seemed to ask how Jackson, among the multitude of extraordinary vocalists who sang gospel music and other religious songs in African American churches across the country, was able to attain such visibility and global resonance as an artist and as a cultural symbol. The capacity for Jackson's voice and prowess as a performer to stir listeners, devout and nonbeliever alike, is an inescapable threshold, but it quickly became clear that this was just a starting point. Jackson's rise to national prominence in the 1940s and 1950s was inextricably and reciprocally bound up with post-war shifts in mass mediation, civil rights aspirations, and early Cold War ideology that gave new cultural-political salience to black vernacular and religious

expression. Preparing the way for Jackson's reception and prestige as a gospel singer even more directly were a personal biographical narrative charting her journey from New Orleans to Chicago in the midst of the Great Depression, her entrepreneurial panache, an interconnected network of influential white, media-connected advocates, and the myriad overlapping organizational structures affiliated with the black Baptist church.

I might have also, however, heard the question "Why her?" another way: How did I find my way to a study of Mahalia Jackson and her transformative place within the black gospel field? These days I am admittedly a backslider, but I was born and raised in the bosom of a close-knit congregation at Philadelphian Seventh-Day Adventist Church in San Francisco. A fundamentalist Protestant denomination popularly known for strict sundown-to-sundown observance of the Sabbath on Saturday and for a "health message" involving a dietary regimen that forbids eating pork and shellfish, Seventh-Day Adventists experienced a recent fifteen minutes of fame when black Adventist neurosurgeon Ben Carson ran as a Republican candidate in the 2016 U.S. presidential election and was eventually appointed secretary of Housing and Urban Development in the Trump administration. Philadelphian was especially welcoming to immigrants from circum-Caribbean countries like Jamaica, the Bahamas, Guyana, and especially Panama, my mother's birthplace before she came, on her own, to San Francisco as a seventeen-year-old "looking for a better life." The rest of the church membership was made up primarily of transplants from the South. My father, for instance, raised Baptist in Columbus, Texas, moved to San Francisco as a young adult and became a member of Philadelphian when he married my mother. I'm not sure how much dad's heart was ever into churchgoing; he stuck it out at Philadelphian for several years and even became a deacon, but he was no longer attending by the time I was born, so my childhood Saturdays unfailing meant church with mom.

My experience at Philadelphian always made me wonder whenever I encountered conventional wisdom and popular stereotypes about the "black church." There was never any question in my mind that I attended a black church, if a West Indian–accented one. At any given time, you could count the white congregants in the sanctuary on one hand, when there were any at all. Still, I was aware that other black churches worshipped on different days and in different ways. Black Adventists are typically buttoned-down church folk. Our pastors delivered the sermon with bookish decorum, for the most part withholding fire and brimstone. Our choir rendered anthems and spirituals accompanied by the piano and Philadelphian's majestic organ and the congregation sang straight out of the hymnal. The occasional visitor from one of those Sunday black churches, hand-waving during the preaching and clapping at the end of musical selections instead of offering the customary hearty "Amen," was usually easy to spot—and if you missed a clue, conspicuous sideways glances from Philadelphian's matrons

would let you know. Except for a brief moment in the late 1970s when a new member tried to organize a youth choir—James Cleveland's "God Is" and Walter Hawkins's "Jesus Christ is the Way" may have been our one and only performance—I have no recollection of hearing anything resembling what I understood then and recognize now to be gospel singing in church, and certainly not at home. When, somewhat as a provocation, I asked my mother if she knew who Mahalia Jackson was, she furrowed her brow and shot me a wry look—"Who doesn't know Mahalia Jackson?"—then went on to describe her as that Baptist woman who "got all whipped up and excited and did all that carrying on" when she sang. For all intents and purposes, black gospel music, in style or in substance, was outside of my experience, a keystone of musical worship for other black denominations perhaps, but not ours.

Or so I thought. As I got to know gospel in later years, first as a fan and subsequently as a music historian, I came to realize that if gospel was not explicitly a part of my musical landscape as a black churchgoer, it was not wholly unfamiliar. As a listener, I came to gospel by following black singing voices backward in time, reversing my way through influences on the music I loved. In high school and college, my friends and I were avid devotees of roots reggae. Drawn especially to the singing and wondering where it came from, I discovered sublime rocksteady crooners like Alton Ellis, Pat Kelly, Phyllis Dillon, and Ken Booth and, in turn, their indebtedness to 1960s soul. From there, it was an inevitable next step to gospel, whereupon I realized that I had found what was, for me, the mother lode in terms of the vocality that resonated with me most. I began to devour the music, reveling obsessively in a stockpile of compilations of music by male quartets, women's and mixed groups, choirs, and soloists spanning the 1920s through the 1970s, and as I listened I found myself repeatedly saying to myself: "Wait, I know that song. . . . We used to sing that song." My perception of the remoteness of gospel music from *my* black church experience, based on styles of worship, was confounded by a growing awareness of shared histories, evidenced by the circulation of repertory and the familiarity of recognizably African American vocal strategies.

This is not to say that Philadelphian was a gospel church after all. But my recognition of the connectedness of the presumably discrete captures the spirit of this book, which considers black gospel as a field of broad possibilities linking a diverse range of church denominations, personal beliefs, musical styles, individual desires, strategic goals, performance contexts, cultural producers, and economic stakes. I hope to make black gospel more legible in these terms. Jackson, whom her friend Harry Belafonte once called "the single most powerful black woman in the United States," represented one of these possibilities, though one uniquely complicated by a sense of her being at once exemplary of and an exceptional case within the black gospel field.[1] Following Jackson's early career, through scrutiny of the available literature, combing mainstream and black-targeted press,

digging through archival collections, and, most enjoyably, close listening, led me to an even greater appreciation of her extraordinary personal resources and resourcefulness as a vocal artist and as an African American woman in post-war U.S. society, while also revealing the all-too-human qualities often veiled by routine assertions of her iconic status. At the same time, following Jackson, whose star shone so brightly, helps to illuminate intimate spaces of a black gospel field with which her every activity was so densely interwoven, a field that came to make a permanent, metamorphic impact on American music and culture. Why her? The chapters that follow seek to answer that question.

Acknowledgments

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I first owe thanks to my home institution, Reed College, which has been consistently supportive of my research. I don't think I ever heard a "No" from the Dean of Faculty's office when I asked for funding for trips to New Orleans and other archives around the country. I am also deeply appreciative of the Reed College Library, directed by Dena Hutto and her predecessor Vickie Hanawalt, which has been exceedingly generous in acquiring any resources I asked for, especially the complete (and not inexpensive) Proquest Historical Black Newspaper Database that has been essential to my research. A special thanks goes to librarians Jim Holmes, Erin Connor, and Bruce Van Buskirk, who have unfailingly granted my incessant requests for recordings and other media. Lastly, I am grateful to my valued colleagues in Reed's Music Department, Virginia Hancock, David Schiff, Morgan Luker, John Cox, and Denise VanLeuven, from whom I learn something new on a regular basis.

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and Bob Marovich, both whom have forgotten more about gospel than I will ever know, has been a privilege, not to mention a rod and a staff. I know of few people more passionate about black gospel music than Glen Smith, who talked shop with me, shared rare recordings, and opened my eyes to the Historic New Orleans Collection. A byproduct of this project is what has became a love affair with Mahalia Jackson's hometown of New Orleans, where I spent extended periods of time learning as much walking the streets as I did sitting in archives. I am indebted to New Orleans geographer Richard Campanella and Pointe Coupée historian Brian Costello, who took the time to meet with me and share their singular expertise and who gave me insights and leads that greatly furthered my understanding of the region. The hospitality, insider knowledge, and friendship of Jennifer Growden, Stephen Haedicke, Annie Whitson, Tom Worrell, and Sue Mobley made New Orleans feel like home in ways for which I will always be grateful. A very special acknowledgment goes to Professors Randy Sanders of Southeastern Louisiana University and Matt Sakakeeny of Tulane University, who have become cherished friends and interlocutors and who will always be at the forefront of my mind when I think of what it means to miss New Orleans.

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reflected in the pages that follow. I would also like to thank four senior scholars in the field of musicology whose support and encouragement over the years has been particularly meaningful: Walter Frisch, Tammy Kernodle, Jeffrey Magee, and Guthrie Ramsey.

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Mahalia Jackson and the Black Gospel Field

1

Introduction

"Miss Jackson and Her Art (Gospel Singing)"

Hosted by Ed Sullivan, CBS's *Toast of the Town* offered viewers the motley assortment of acts expected of a something-for-everybody 1950s television variety show. In 1948, the network tapped the telegenically awkward Irish American gossip columnist to become the producer and face of what was soon to be renamed the *Ed Sullivan Show*. After tentative beginnings and against stiff competition from NBC's *Colgate Comedy Hour*, the program, the first of its kind on CBS, rode Sullivan's ambition and extensive entertainment industry connections on the way to becoming a "nationwide Sunday night addiction." The January 20, 1952, episode of *Toast of the Town* featured a presentation of the 1951 New York Film Critics Circle awards (*A Streetcar Named Desire* was the year's big winner) and a short set by the Phil Spitalny Hour of Charm All-Girl Orchestra, fronted by Spitalny's "fiddling Frau" Evelyn playing her "magic violin." Filling out the vaudeville-style lineup were an opening number starring Hal LeRoy with a company of dancers hoofing to a medley of George Gershwin tunes and, the entertainment trade magazine *Variety* mentioned in passing, "two quick pace-changers in John Tio's talking parrot and gospel singer Mahalia Jackson."[1]

For the forty-year-old Jackson (1911–1972), a Baptist-born-and-bred but Pentecostal-friendly Chicago resident originally from New Orleans, this was a symbolically important milestone in a career that had already advanced beyond any reasonable expectations. The twelve months leading up to her national television debut on *Toast of the Town* unfolded with an unheard-of string of achievements for a black gospel artist. Jackson managed her regular appearances at myriad stops along the black gospel highway in 1951—the CIO Union Hall in Muskegon, Michigan, Booker T. Washington High School in Norfolk, Virginia, the Atlanta City Auditorium, the seventy-fourth National Baptist Convention in Oklahoma City, and her own twenty-fifth anniversary gala concert at the Chicago Coliseum in October, among a slew of

other programs. But her name and voice had also begun to circulate in ways that indicated something new afoot for Jackson and for post-war black gospel music, a story that this book seeks to tell. Jazz writers on both sides of the Atlantic who were fans of her recordings for Apollo Records developed an enthusiasm for Jackson described by gospel historian Anthony Heilbut as a "cultist following." In March 1951, Jackson received a Grand Prix du Disque, awarded by a committee of influential French music critics, for her Apollo single "I Can Put My Trust in Jesus." In the fall, Jackson was invited to appear at the "Definitions in Jazz" roundtable at the Music Inn in Lenox, Massachusetts, to demonstrate for an eminent gathering of scholars and aficionados the roots of jazz in black religious song. And there were yet other less-than-expected points of contact in 1951: a Chicago concert featuring Jackson and members of the leftist folk song organization People's Artists in April, her second appearance at a sold-out Carnegie Hall in October, and a ranking of sixth on *Jet* magazine's year-end list of the country's "best girl singers," behind only Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald, Dinah Washington, Billie Holiday, and Ruth Brown. Just a month after Jackson's *Toast of the Town* appearance, the Gospel Train, an ambitious package headlined by Jackson and the Ward Singers, kicked off a planned thirty-concert coast-to-coast tour, "the highest priced religious concert unit ever assembled," black newspapers marveled.[2]

But an appearance on the Sullivan show in the still early years of television was another thing entirely. "Everybody in show business had heard about this tremendous Negro singer," Sullivan remembered two decades afterward, perhaps generously, and he "gave her a date immediately." Presenting Jackson also reflected Sullivan's sensitivity to the racial politics of early television.

> There had been a lot of comment about her and we always tried to make sure that we'd have Negro representation on the show. At that time the Negroes were in an uproar. They said the whites were monopolizing TV, that producers of TV shows were apparently scared to put a Negro on because of the Southern reaction. Well, the Southern reaction was as great as the Northern reaction toward her and the other ones.[3]

Sullivan had a solid track record of booking black acts. One press report called his show the "biggest single vehicle" for promoting African American talent on television. The Ink Spots, the popular vocal harmony group who were the first black performers on *Toast of the Town*, appeared as early as the second episode and others followed in uncommonly regular succession. Sullivan went so far as to insist that the intimacy of televisual mediation had the potential to become a uniquely powerful mechanism for social justice: "Television subtly has supplied ten-league boots to the Negro in his fight to win what the Constitution of this country guarantees as

his birthright. It has taken his long fight to the living rooms of Americans' homes where public opinion is formed." TV was especially important as a socializing force for "the white children, who finally will lay Jim Crow to rest."[4]

Jackson's performance had further significance for being the first appearance by a black gospel singer on national television. As was so often the case throughout her early career when she was invited to appear in pop-cultural settings, Jackson was presented as both an outstanding individual artist and as a stand-in for the entire black gospel field. Accordingly, her performances bridged members of black church communities for whom gospel singing was a virtual daily presence, those in the broader public who experienced gospel as a piquant musical and cultural curiosity, and all positions in between. With a responsibility to represent, and not simply to provide Sullivan show producers with a diverting change of pace, Jackson was determined to do it right. She was irate when she arrived for the Sunday morning rehearsal to the news that a smoothly flowing production required that she would be backed by music director Ray Block's studio orchestra and not her usual piano and organ. "She was mad as hell" when "I didn't want to give her my only organ," Sullivan recalled, and Jackson stormed past CBS crew members to knock on Sullivan's dressing room door, finding him "in his BVDs" but getting her organ.[5] In light of these contexts, and as a means of introduction, we might not only think about Jackson's performance as part of the slate of acts that Sunday evening, but also imagine how it may have been understood as part of the black gospel field. What would it look like to fully account for and position Jackson's *Toast of the Town* appearance as a gospel performance, and what might it tell us about black gospel music at mid-century?

"*These Are They*"

Coming abruptly out of his plug for show sponsor Lincoln-Mercury, Sullivan's introduction of Jackson was complimentary, but characteristically clunky:

> There's a young singer—not a young singer, it's a middle-aged Negro star. She's acclaimed as the greatest gospel singer in the country. On three occasions she's come into New York's Carnegie Hall by herself. Packs the place. So tonight, we're going to present this New Orleans singer. Her name is Mahalia Jackson. She's going to sing for you a gospel song, "These Are They." Here is Mahalia Jackson. So let's have a nice welcome for her though, would you?[6]

Jackson stood spotlighted in front of the stage curtain, hands clasped, her dark robe streaked with a light-colored sash bound at her left shoulder. Her selection for gospel's big moment in the national spotlight, "These Are They," was written

by William Herbert Brewster (1897–1987), the African American pastor of East Trigg Baptist Church in Memphis for nearly six decades and a prolific sacred song composer.[7] Brewster's learned, Bible-based lyric narrates an episode from the story of the exiled John of Patmos, to whom the voice of God dictated the eschatological vision in the Book of Revelation. This included a promise of being "sealed," a guarantee of grace at the final judgment for those of steadfast faith amid oppressive persecution.

Verse

It was on a Lord's day morning
Out on a lonely isle
In the beauty of the dawning
As John was in exile
He heard a voice resounding
Across the rolling sea
Like mighty billows bounding
John fell down on his knee

Chorus

These are they from every nation
Who have washed their garments white
Coming up through great tribulation
To a land of pure delight.[8]

"These Are They" was a relatively new gospel composition, published only in 1949, though it was surely introduced in performance earlier. Performed with a change in both tempo and meter—its slow triple-meter verse setting up a faster chorus in four—the song was apparently a centerpiece of Jackson's repertory at the time: along with "Move On Up a Little Higher" and "Just Over the Hill," "These Are They" was one of the three songs that she programmed for her gala twenty-fifth anniversary concert at the Chicago Coliseum three months earlier.[9] Soon after it appeared as sheet music, the song was documented on record by a cluster of performances featuring four respected female gospel leads: Frances Steadman, Queen C. Anderson, Dorothy Love Coates, and Jackson, who recorded the song for Apollo sixteen months before she sang it live for Sullivan's audience. The newness of the song that Jackson chose to showcase on the national stage is significant because it marks a seam linking the familiar and the remote in postwar black gospel reception. "These Are They" undoubtedly would have been unknown to the overwhelming majority of Sullivan's viewers, some of whom may have heard it as a venerable "Negro spiritual," while also giving members of black Baptist circles the satisfaction of recognizing a recent hit that was a roof-raising vehicle for some of gospel's elite divas.

At the same time, Jackson's television rendition of "These Are They" departed from these other recorded performances of the song in subtle but salient ways that focus our ears on various strategies for delivering a gospel song and offer a sense of the field and its performance practices. All four recordings take distinguishable liberties with the melody, structure, and especially the words. The 1949 recording by Steadman with the Mary Johnson Davis Gospel Singers bypassed the verse entirely and launched directly into the chorus. By contrast, the performances by Anderson with the Brewster Singers in 1950 and by Coates in 1951 with her own group, the Original Gospel Harmonettes, included at least part of Brewster's verse (Coates only sings the second half), making the mid-song shift in character an essential feature of both records. The Anderson-Brewster performance, accompanied by piano, organ, and drums, dramatically exaggerates the song's tempo change, exploding out of the gate at the arrival of the chorus and nearly tripling the tempo from 58 beats per minute (bpm) to 172, abruptly transforming a stately gospel ballad into a driving "shout" number. Coates and the Harmonettes also emphasize a pronounced contrast while lending the song a distinctly different flavor: powerful supporting choral harmonies and an even slower opening tempo (36 bpm) give the shortened verse an epic grandeur that yields to the irresistible and more modern sounding swing of the chorus.[10]

The Steadman, Anderson, and Coates recordings feature a lead singer supported by backing vocalists, presenting distinct arrangement possibilities. In the chorus, Anderson and Coates both employ the bread-and-butter gospel device of an interpolated vamp or "drive" section, an extended looping passage of call-and-response between the lead and backing singers over restricted harmonic movement that interrupts the continuation of the song's melody and chord progression with a "record-skipping," groove-building stasis. The vamps on these two records include a roll call of "nations," the naming of the twelve 12,000-member tribes of Israel, that Brewster lifted directly from the seventh chapter of Revelation. The singers then drop back into the chorus.

Tribe of Judah . . .
Twelve thousand
Tribe of Reuben . . .
Twelve thousand
Tribe of Gad . . .
Twelve thousand
Tribe of Aser . . .
Twelve thousand
Tribe of Nephtalim . . .
Twelve thousand
Tribe of Manasses . . .

Twelve thousand
Tribe of Simeon . . .
Twelve thousand
Tribe of Levi . . .
Twelve thousand
Tribe of Issachar . . .
Twelve thousand
Tribe of Zabulon . . .
Twelve thousand
Tribe of Joseph . . .
Twelve thousand
Tribe of Benjamin . . .
Twelve thousand
These are they . . .

It is difficult not to fold a black nation into those "coming up through great tribulation" to be sealed, bringing stories of the "burdens they had borne" to God's throne, as Brewster describes in the second verse. Such a connection points toward an interpretation of the song's message as a sermonic, scripture-based call for civil rights.[11]

Jackson's performances of "These Are They" for Apollo and on the Sullivan show stand apart from the contemporaneous Steadman, Anderson, and Coates recordings most conspicuously because she performs as a soloist, but also because of her crafty handling of both the verse's scene-setting narrative and the chorus's exhilarating release and promise of salvation. The absence of backing singers and the slow tempo of the verse leave ample space that Jackson, in understated dialogue with pianist Mildred Falls and the anonymous organist, exploits to phrase the lyric and repeat words as she desires. Jackson's composure on *Toast of the Town* is notable and impressive, as she worked the darkened audience like a confident pro, glancing from side to side with no sign of nervousness. On the Sullivan show, she was the consummate storyteller, subtly gesturing with her hands almost in the manner of a musical theater performer to highlight the isolation of the deserted island, the rolling sea, awestruck John falling to his knees, and most conspicuously the cleansing of the garments, which Jackson depicted with a pantomime of scrubbing clothes on a washboard, an activity she knew all too well. This physical movement seemed to goose Jackson's energy, conviction, and comfort, as she indulged herself the vernacular pronunciation "washin' dey garments." The interpolated hand claps, touch of growl, and brief moment of dancing with herself accentuated the emotional payoff of a line that she clearly relished swinging as forcefully as she could:

Oh, they're comin' on up, comin' on up
Through great tribulay-ayyy-shun-nuh . . . !

After taking her time in the verse, Jackson, exhibiting her characteristically idiosyncratic handling of the words, cut to the chase in the chorus, abandoning the final line and thus the end rhyme of Brewster's poem to instead sing "Well, we're gonna march all around my God's throne," a lyric borrowed from a very similar gospel song, Charles Bridges's "I Am Bound for Canaan Land."[12] Her delivery of the chorus most closely matched the ministerial authority of Coates's performance in its propulsive swing, which Jackson liked to call "bounce." In this sense, the rhythmic commitment of Jackson's darting attacks and cutoffs and her strong, sustained notes in the television performance more than compensated for the dynamic solo-group interaction on the Steadman, Anderson, and Coates recordings and surpassed even the more regular phrasing on Jackson's Apollo side. On record, Jackson simply repeated the chorus, but on the Sullivan show she drifted slightly toward the audience, as if tempted to "walk the floor" like she might at a church program, and sang a new verse drawn from Isaiah 63. Jackson used word repetition to further ratchet up the rhythmic energy before bringing the song to a close with a dramatic slowing down in the final line:

Well, well, you know Isaiah said he saw
Saw the Lamb of God, Mary's holy baby
He had his dyed, his dyed, dyed garments on, dyed garments on
He was comin' on up, comin' on up through great tribulation
Well, we've got to march all around my God's throne, yeah

Jackson was in extraordinary voice that Sunday night. "She gave a tremendous performance," Sullivan remembered. "My personal reaction was that she should be in opera." The sheer muscularity of her singing and her total command of the performance space—cameras caught the almost flirty glance shot heavenward at the line "He was comin' on up"—produced a document of Jackson's artistry at the height of her power and of a national coming out of sorts for black gospel singing.

Exceptionalism

Like all nationally mediated black performances in the early television era, Jackson's appearance on *Toast of the Town* mattered significantly to African Americans. One of Jackson's closest associates, singer Brother John Sellers, who was mentored by Jackson, characterized her performance on the show as a dividing line in her career. By 1950, "a lot of people would see Mahalia, but they,"

Sellers remembered, referring to the broader entertainment industry, "didn't pay attention to her. . . .She was really big among the church people—but she hadn't did the *Ed Sullivan Show* then." In an interview three years later, another Jackson friend and gospel-singing protégé, Princess Stewart, told a newspaper reporter that her ambition was "to reach the heights of Mahalia Jackson and to sing on Ed Sullivan's *Toast of the Town*." In September 1952, popular Dayton, Ohio, disc jockey Harold "Brother James" Wright was praised for his "expert promotion" of a Jackson concert when he billed the gospel singer as a *Toast of the Town* artist, "reminding the public of her successful appearance early this year on the nation-spanning Ed Sullivan telecast." An emotionally overwhelmed Jackson was greeted in Dayton with a parade that reportedly drew 50,000—dwarfing the recent reception for President Truman, locals said—and a sold-out concert at the city's largest venue, 5,000-seat Memorial Hall.[13]

The black press also recognized the moment as newsworthy. A captioned photo in the *New York Amsterdam News* showed Jackson shaking hands with Brooklyn Dodgers infielder Jackie Robinson, who broke the color line in Major League Baseball in 1947: "Real point of the get-together here is because Jackie Robinson wanted to congratulate Miss Jackson on her recent debut on television via the Ed Sullivan Show. Her appearance was the first time a gospel singer has appeared on a nationally televised video show." Commentators on Jackson's television engagement ranged from *Baltimore Afro-American* columnist E. B. Rea, who simply noted "Mahalia Jackson, gospel singer, made her coast-to-coast debut on Ed Sullivan's *Toast of the Town*," to S. W. Garlington, managing editor and entertainment writer for the *Amsterdam News*, who offered a more extensive postmortem. Perhaps recognizing that opportunities to showcase black talent via a powerful new medium were precious, Garlington, though willing to cut Sullivan some slack, expressed disappointment that the host failed to grasp the significance of being the first to introduce not just a "tremendous Negro singer" but an entire stylistic category, black gospel singing, to a national television audience.

> Mahalia Jackson, the Queen of Gospel Singers, was seen on the Ed Sullivan "Toast of the Town" variety presentation Sunday: but Ed, who is usually very nice to his guests, didn't treat her right. His introduction of Miss Jackson and her art (Gospel singing), and the way the cameras worked on her, and the general lack of build-up certainly did her no good. Since Sullivan has heretofore been an O.K. guy, here's hoping he will have her back and give her a proper build-up, so that the general public (those who do not understand Gospel music) can have a fair chance to judge what makes Mahalia truly great in her respective field.[14]

Sullivan's description of the forty-year-old singer as "a middle-aged Negro" and his hurried transition to Spitalny over the sustained applause for Jackson's performance without acknowledging her in any way must have struck some as a bit gauche. But Garlington's dissatisfaction with Sullivan's prepping of the audience for what they were going to see and hear betrayed his recognition that *Toast of the Town* was presenting both an individual and a heavily racialized musical practice. Curiously, Garlington makes no mention whatsoever of Jackson's cracking performance, leaving one to wonder if flattering production and Sullivan's imprimatur were a prerequisite for white Americans being able to "understand" the music. We can almost discern his lack of confidence that the art of gospel singing and Jackson's "truly great" ability as a practitioner of the art had a "fair chance" of standing on their own feet in the shadow of stereotypical notions about black musical performance, or perhaps his anxiety that the performance *would* speak for itself, but with a less than comely dialect. Nonetheless, Garlington's sense that a "proper build-up" of Jackson and the reception of black gospel singing by the "general public" were joined at the hip is a provocative lead worth following.

The Sullivan show might seem like a counterintuitive place to begin a book on Mahalia Jackson and black gospel music, but as my unpacking of her appearance on *Toast of the Town* hopefully shows, this moment, approached with a commitment to accounting for as much as we possibly can, introduces a bounty of issues that help illuminate post-war gospel: the production and circulation of gospel repertory; the documentation of gospel music on record; gospel's various ensembles and performance approaches; how biblical scripture becomes gospel song and how, through performance, this shared repertory becomes personal testimony; the professional aspirations of gospel singers; the reception of gospel singing by African Americans beyond the context of the black church; questions of race, representation, and mediation; the salience of both collective protest and individual prestige in the black freedom struggle; and, not least, the place of U.S. popular culture *within*, not in opposition to, the black gospel music field. Jackson's nationally televised performance also suggests two avenues for thinking about her career and the field of black gospel music in the decade following World War II. Both of these trajectories are linked to perennial claims of exceptionalism about black gospel music and about Jackson.

By "black gospel music" I refer specifically to a repertory of songs, distinct from traditional "Negro spirituals," that began to be consciously promoted in novel ways by African American musicians and entrepreneurs around 1930 and proliferated more extensively after World War II; to the improvisatory, Pentecostal-influenced singing style that became popularized by singers of both these songs and earlier repertory; to the institutions and agents, both church-affiliated and independent, that supported their production and circulation; and to the black

religious subjects and fan base that shaped the aesthetic, evangelical, cultural, and entertainment ideals that gave the music its value. I intentionally tend toward a definition that emphasizes production, dissemination, and reception. A host of other writers have productively detailed musical components commonly associated with African American–identified singing styles that Pearl Williams-Jones has called "in large measure the essence of gospel." Williams-Jones and Horace Clarence Boyer, both of whom were gospel singers, have highlighted such elements as expressive use of vocal timbre, melodic ornamentation, pitch fluidity, a flux between a sharply chiseled pulse and elastically rendered rhythm, quasi-sermonic phrasing, and textual interpolation.[15] The cataloguing of these features has served an important function, often forming the basis of a reading of black gospel as a register of West African cultural retentions that result in an African American vernacular distinctiveness, as a "crystallization of a black aesthetic" and a "symbol of ethnicity," in the words of Williams-Jones and Mellonee Burnim, respectively. Historian Penny Von Eschen communicates this commonly held view when she describes gospel musicians as "artists whose performance style is emblematic of black particularity."[16] The reviewer for *Variety* represented gospel singing—along with Tio's talking parrot—as a "pace-changer," which in vaudeville terms suggests a performance that breaks the established routine, adds variety, represents a discernible shift from what came before, and serves as preparation for something to come. But black gospel singing as a "change of pace" also suggests a performance perceived as separable from its broader context, as something to be enjoyed almost like the earmarked pleasure of an *amuse-bouche* set off from the meat-and-potatoes familiarity of what are often perceived to be conventional cultural forms. Sonically and experientially, black religious performativity is something else.

Because of this exceptionalism, Garlington urged, it took dedicated work to equip "those who do not understand Gospel music" with a frame of reference that would give them a sufficiently "fair chance to judge" the music. This fascination with the exceptionalism of black religious musical performativity extends as far back as the arrival of black Africans in the Americas and in many ways has never left us.[17] For many listeners, part of the work of "black gospel music" has been to conjure difference, whether for the purpose of legitimizing oppressive, racialized hierarchies of power and subordination or to marshal politically progressive cultural nationalist energies. The question of why practices of African American church music have been continuously present and audible throughout U.S. history yet often remain knowable to many observers only through the *frisson* of cultural distinctiveness is one of the curiosities that intrigues me about black gospel singing, which began to circulate within U.S. popular culture in new and transformative ways after World War II.

Some readers will undoubtedly and perhaps justifiably question my choice to address black gospel apart from white traditions of gospel music, in particular

those styles identified since the 1970s as "Southern gospel."[18] Among those calling for a less segregated history of gospel music is musicologist Stephen Shearon, a historian of Christian sacred music who was a major contributor to the recently revised entry on gospel music in the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, a cornerstone reference source in the field. In light of the "confusion" caused by the fact that "gospel music" was already in circulation in the United States as early as the second half of the nineteenth century and the perception that "many fans of African American gospel are convinced absolutely that Thomas A. Dorsey is 'The Father of Gospel Music,'" Shearon argues, "it becomes clear that we have a problem." It is essentially a problem of nomenclature that "reflects the contemporaneous understandings of persons in the Christian music industry, *not that of historians*" (emphasis in the original). As a remedy, Shearon seeks a more "coherent narrative of gospel music history in America," one that acknowledges gospel's "various cultural and stylistic manifestations and the relationships between them." Making the claim—an extraordinary and debatable one, I think—that "prior to the mid-1970s few, if any, distinctions appear to have been made between the music of the various gospel music cultures," Shearon calls upon music historians to solve "the obvious problems inherent in the present historiography" by adopting the umbrella term "Gospel music phenomenon." Such a corrective "likely would mean that the term 'gospel music' would be reserved for the phenomenon as a whole, and additional qualifiers or more-specific terminology would be developed to refer to specific traditions and styles in a way that explains, too, the relationships between them."[19] Black gospel matters, some say? *All* gospel matters, Shearon seems to counter.

Shearon's plea is legitimate and well meaning, though its hoped-for intervention strikes my ears and sensibilities as curiously muddying both the spirit and letter of gospel music historiography. First, the "problem" of Dorsey's identification as the "Father of Gospel Music" is an unnecessary straw man. Surely this honorific is intended not to credit him with inventing "gospel music" from scratch but rather to convey Dorsey's central role in catalyzing the modern black gospel song movement, above all for his leadership in establishing gospel choirs in Chicago's Baptist churches and cofounding the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses in 1932. As late as mid-century, many African Americans still considered "black gospel" a new and modern music phenomenon, and not because they didn't know their history. Kenneth Morris, a respected Chicago-based composer, arranger, and publisher who was influential among black church musicians, undoubtedly had Dorsey in mind when in 1949 he noted "the enormous popularity and public reception" of modern gospel music, "due in a great part to the exemplary efforts of the pioneers in this field, who have sacrificed their time and efforts to make this new type of music popular." Black newspapers also lauded Dorsey, who "blazed the trail, pioneered the field, made a new market,

and brought to the churches throughout America new life and spirit through his gospel songs."[20] It is indeed true, as Shearon reminds us, that the eclectic Connecticut-born composer Charles Ives incorporated "gospel songs" into some of his modernist compositions, most of which were written before 1918. But in a field of musicology already overwhelmingly white in constituency and Eurocentric in orientation, the far greater benefit for fellow scholars and our students would be to shed *more* clarifying light on Dorsey's distinctive achievements and influence—No, he was not a Swing Era trombonist—instead of casting his reception as a conundrum in need of being solved by a heroic cavalry of music historians.

Shearon's call also strikes me as rooted in a problematic distinction between what he calls the "fundamentals of gospel music history" and historiographical concoctions. It is a distinction that privileges the intellectual abstraction of style history over the messiness of cultural politics and that too conveniently shunts the vagaries of racial separation, partially reflected in the "various cultural and stylistic manifestations" of gospel music, onto the music industry. To be sure, stylistic categories are more often than not the product of market-driven fiction—if a fiction that musicians have had to apprehend to make their livelihood—but no more or less so than the belief that shared musical features and repertory trump lived social realities. Because of *de jure* and *de facto* segregation, African Americans and whites across the nation did, and still do—despite concerted efforts toward "racial reconciliation" within Christian ministries in recent decades—by and large, worship separately.[21] Yet African Americans resourcefully developed publishing and performance networks so that gospel songs penned by black composers could see the light of day. Singers cultivated styles of performance that spoke both to the evangelical aims of this repertory and to the expectations of audiences who often made sense of the cultural specificity of these activities by understanding them as somehow articulate of the experiences of black people living in the United States. Thinking laterally among traditions of American gospel music and bringing to light heretofore obscured stories about race, region, and religion, as Shearon hopes to do, is a notably valuable, even valiant, endeavor. But doing so need not efface the still much needed work of critically assessing how African Americans negotiated their identities as Christian subjects and as raced U.S. citizens in the process of developing a recognizably distinct style and practice—black gospel music—that has had enormous global impact. Whatever the interrelationships that constitute the broader "Gospel music phenomenon" and notwithstanding the discursive complexity and potentially new questions we might bring to interrogating "black gospel music," the latter, precisely because of its dogged exceptionalism, both real and imagined, presents itself to me as a viable and essential object of independent study. What the hurts of history have put asunder cannot so unproblematically be joined together.

Jackson's live performance of "These Are They" on *Toast of the Town* invites us to consider a second exceptionalism: Jackson's own situatedness with respect to

the black gospel field more broadly. "When Mahalia appeared on national shows, she would sing songs that everyone knew. Spirituals or inspirational songs like 'I Believe,'" said Heilbut, an influential gospel historian, critic, and producer. "But in one of her earliest appearances on national television—on, of all places, the *Ed Sullivan Show*—she sings with the power that had wrecked churches in Chicago."[22] Holding up Jackson's *Toast of the Town* performance as a rare instance of the real Jackson singing real gospel where you would least expect to find either—thus distinguishing the black-cultural Jackson known among Chicago church folk from the pop-cultural Jackson "everyone knew"—Heilbut calls attention to the persistent question of how to assess Jackson's performances over the course of a near half-century-long career within the broader field of gospel.

What did people mean when they called Jackson the "Queen of the Gospel Singers"? What exactly was she the "Queen" of? After migrating from New Orleans to Chicago in late 1931 at the age of twenty, Jackson sang in the choir at Greater Salem Baptist Church and in a pioneering gospel group, the Johnson Singers, before going on to perform almost exclusively as a soloist. Jackson built her reputation gradually on the Chicago church circuit and as a traveling song-plugger for Dorsey. She made her first commercial recordings for Decca in 1937 but her true breakthrough came in early 1948 with the unprecedented response to her double-sided single for independent label Apollo Records, "Move On Up a Little Higher," which outsold Apollo's better promoted jazz, rhythm and blues, and pop releases on the way, reportedly, to becoming black gospel's first million-seller. Between 1946 and 1950, Jackson was presented by New York gospel promoter Johnny Myers in a series of concerts at Harlem's Golden Gate Auditorium and at several additional local concerts scheduled to meet the overwhelming demand. Jackson's name was still largely unknown among white audiences, other than discophile connoisseurs, but the enthusiasm generated by her Apollo recordings and her New York triumphs brought her extraordinary acclaim as a soloist among black gospel fans nationwide (Figures 1.1 and 1.2).

In the fall of 1954, Jackson left Apollo to become a radio, television, and recording artist for the CBS network and its subsidiary Columbia Records. Major label production and coast-to-coast distribution dramatically heightened Jackson's visibility among audiences beyond her black church base. Yet over time, the rub of Jackson's church roots and pop-cultural celebrity made her a field-straddling anomaly: a singer who was recognized as an extraordinary artist and marketed as the premier exemplar of black gospel music yet whose commercially successful religious albums for Columbia often featured a production style and a repertory of middle-of-the-road religious pop that made some dyed-in-the-wool gospel lovers, and at times even Jackson herself, long for the good old days. Thus in some accounts, we find Jackson cast as both representing and misrepresenting the black gospel field, selling gospel to the world while selling out herself. The

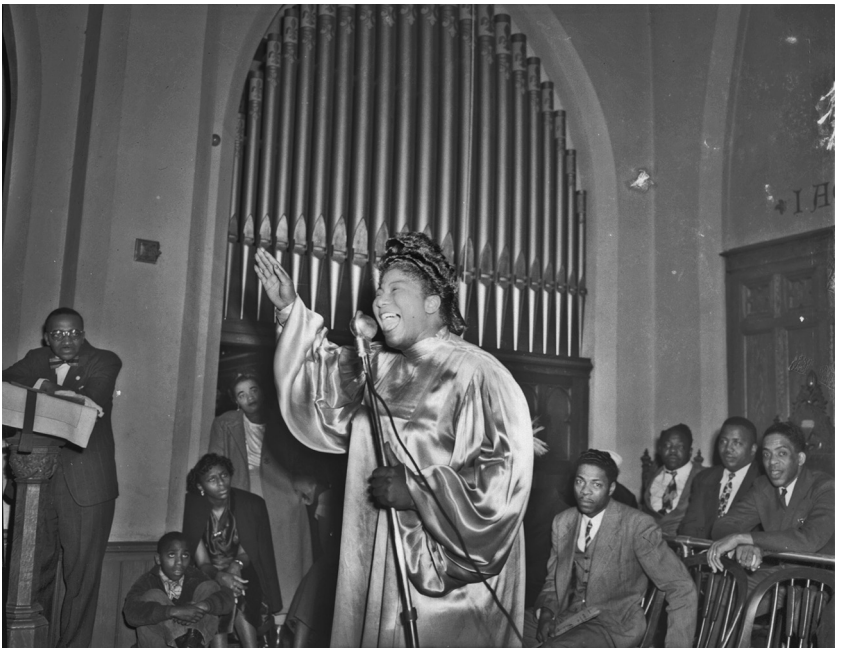

FIG. 1.1 Mahalia Jackson singing at Gillis Memorial Church in Baltimore, February 1949. Gillis pastor Rev. Theodore C. Jackson listens in the far left background. Photograph by Paul Henderson. Maryland Historical Society, HEN.00.A2-254.

Queen's "regal status had obviously isolated her," Heilbut argues.[23] The long arc of Jackson's career, and in particular its exceptional dimensions, has, in short, both affirmed and been complicated by what is indicated by the signifier "black gospel music."

Black Gospel Scholarship in Word and in Sound

For many of her admirers, Jackson's eminence as a gospel singer is taken for granted. Publicity materials for a 2015 symposium in her hometown of New Orleans proclaimed: "Mahalia Jackson defined gospel music in the 1940s and she went on to become the most powerful voice in the history of sacred music in America."[24] But the meanings of Jackson's qualitatively distinct fame as a gospel singer—success that places her, it would seem, in an exceptional position within the black gospel field—remains an unsettled and looming question in gospel literature, a body of work that presents a wealth of opportunities for future scholars. With its still thriving practice and its transformative impact on popular music since the 1950s, black gospel singing has generated an ample bibliography. The

FIG. 1.2 Mahalia Jackson in performance at Gillis Memorial Church in Baltimore, February 1949. The predominance of women in the pews is striking. Photograph by Paul Henderson. Maryland Historical Society, HEN.01.11-053.

past forty years have seen a number of historical studies[25] as well as monographs and edited collections on individual singers, groups, and composers,[26] and on individual styles of gospel music, especially male quartet singing.[27] There have also been a healthy number of studies focusing on local gospel traditions[28] and on the cultural-historical interpretation of black gospel.[29] Ethnomusicologist Mellonee Burnim deserves special mention for her prolific research and publications on various aspects of black gospel music history and practice.[30]

Somewhat paradoxically, because of the sheer number of groups that were recorded by independent labels and the relative inaccessibility of these limited-release records in the present day, recordings—and their fastidious collection—have been the lifeblood of documenting pre-1980 gospel and they too belong to this body of scholarship. Devoted gospel discophiles in the United States and in Europe continue to play an indispensible role in knowledge production about black gospel music. Fans and scholars have been heavily reliant upon those record collectors who have spearheaded a steady stream of compilation releases organized by artist, region, record label, or personal taste. Most influential have been those focusing on gospel music recorded in the two decades following World War

II, a period commonly celebrated in literature and in commercial marketing as the "Golden Age of Gospel," during which black gospel attained unprecedented productivity, visibility, popularity, and, some gospel aficionados insist, artistic heights. Opal Louis Nation's Pewburner Records has offered the broadest and most systematically organized catalogue of reissued material, but it is only one of many introductions to recordings from black gospel's "Golden Age."[31]

Radio shows with hosts spinning "vintage" or "classic" black gospel records have also provided important opportunities for exposure to historical recordings and connoisseurial expertise. Foremost among these are Linwood Heath's *Precious Memories* on WNAP in Philadelphia, Robert Marovich's *Gospel Memories* on WLUW in Chicago, Kevin Nutt's *Sinner's Crossroads* out of WFMU in Jersey City, New Jersey, and Mike McGonigal's *'Buked and Scorned* on KXRY in Portland, Oregon. Launched for the purpose of "reinstituting gospel's central place within the history of American popular music," Gospel Roots of Rock and Soul, an ambitious project funded by the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage and involving Heath, Marovich, and other prominent advocates of the music, will culminate in a national radio documentary, scheduled for 2019.[32] A significant recent development in recording-based "Golden Age" gospel scholarship is the Black Gospel Restoration Project at Baylor University, directed by Professor of Journalism, Public Relations, and New Media Robert Darden. Darden established the archive in 2005 "to identify, acquire, preserve, record and catalogue the most at-risk music from the black gospel music tradition" with an ultimate goal of housing "a copy of every song released by every black gospel artist or group" from 1940 to 1980.[33] Cedric Hayes and Robert Laughton's massive discography of black gospel recorded since World War II, now in its third edition, has become an indispensible tool for gospel researchers faced with the onerous task of establishing the dating of and personnel on often obscure releases.[34]

By a considerable margin, writers have devoted more attention to Mahalia Jackson than any other single black gospel figure, though even in her case the pickings are slim and increasingly dated. Jackson has been the subject of three book-length studies: *Movin' On Up* (1966), an autobiography written with journalist Evan McLeod Wylie; *Just Mahalia, Baby: The Mahalia Jackson Story* (1975), published shortly after Jackson's death by journalist and personal assistant Laurraine Goreau; and filmmaker Jules Schwerin's *Got to Tell It: Mahalia Jackson, Queen of Gospel* (1992).[35] The as-told-to autobiography would seem to offer the unique value of the singer's perspective on the contours of her own career, though the reader must proceed with caution in light of Jackson's reported frustration with Wylie's misinterpretation of her oral history and introduction of misinformation. Despite the scant scholarly literature, Jackson has been a strikingly popular subject for biographies targeting younger readers.[36] She has also been the focus of at least seven staged musicals.[37] Jewish African American singer Joshua

Nelson has marketed himself as the "prince of kosher gospel" on the strength of his performances as a Mahalia Jackson vocal impersonator.

Goreau's 600-page book is by far the most comprehensive account since the author, who identifies herself as "Jackson's personally chosen biographer," interviewed over a hundred family members, friends, and associates whose memories were fresh, even raw, because of Jackson's recent death. Indeed, Goreau (1918–1985) reproduced the signatures of eight of Jackson's kin on the back cover as confirmation that the book was "stamped with approval by her closest blood relatives." Judging from the transcripts of her interviews, Goreau was not knowledgeable about gospel music beyond what her informants told her, and the lack of either citations or an index makes the volume a tricky one to navigate. Reading *Just Mahalia, Baby* can also chafe because of Goreau's writing style. An aspiring dramatist, Goreau, who was white, used self-consciously colloquial language, fragmentary phrasing, ungrammatical syntax, and deliberate misspellings to mimic the manner and spontaneity of Jackson's speaking voice—a rare instance of vernacular *non*fiction—resulting in a narrative voice that confronts the reader with the nagging distraction of authorial performance. A passage from the book describing Jackson's early years in Chicago is representative.

> Weekends, catch the train with Dorsey, sing, meet the people, make it back in time for school. No homework. Thank You Jesus! And Ike a peaceable man. Bad enough with the snow and now Big Alice to be seen to, feel so bad. Watch her medicine, the doctor said. They did, Halie and John between them. Big Alice grew worse. Pneumonia, the doctor said. Stay with her then—school have to wait. Halie's anyway; she made John keep on.[38]

A reader might also be troubled by strong hints of Goreau's racial fascination, suggested, to give just one example, by an observation about how "a grin lit her smooth brown skin" as Jackson shared anecdotes.[39] Nonetheless, gospel scholars are deeply indebted to Goreau for a book full of extraordinary detail, insider information, and vital leads salvaged from likely oblivion. *Just Mahalia, Baby* has been the single most valuable source on Jackson's life and career to date and it is indispensable reading for any serious researcher working on Jackson. The recent recovery of Goreau's papers by the Hogan Jazz Archive, including most of her recorded interviews and transcripts, presents fresh opportunities for direct study of her sources in a form closer to their own words.

Schwerin's book on Jackson represents the author's "personal impressions and reactions to the curve and events of her life," inspired by his "lifelong obsession" with her voice. The book is not without merit, drawing on interviews that Schwerin conducted with Jackson for the purpose of making a documentary film. Beyond Jackson, Schwerin's principal sources are two figures that were

particularly close to the singer early in her career, Brother John Sellers and Studs Terkel. Commendably, the author devotes considerable attention to Jackson's longtime accompanist Mildred Falls. Over the course of the book, however, Schwerin's credibility crumbles in the face of an often misguided, shoot-from-the-hip representation of Jackson and her character. This is most alarming when Schwerin discusses Jackson's appearance in Douglas Sirk's 1958 remake of the 1934 movie *Imitation of Life*.

The plots of both films focus on the relationship between two single mothers—one white, the other black—and the fate of the "tragic mulatto" daughter of the latter. In the earlier version, black actress Louise Beavers plays Delilah Johnson, who works as a maid for Bea Pullman, the white protagonist played by Claudette Colbert. Not surprisingly for its time, Beavers is asked to deliver a performance trafficking heavily in mammy and Aunt Jemima stereotypes. Delilah's character, renamed Annie Johnson and played by Juanita Moore, is revised significantly in the later film, which is built around a more socially level relationship with her employer Lora Meredith, played by Lana Turner. According to Moore, producer Ross Hunter pitched the role of Annie to Jackson and persuaded her to audition, but Jackson rejected the part. Jackson did make a cameo appearance in the final climactic scene, singing the traditional spiritual "Soon I Will Be Done with the Trouble of This World" at Annie's funeral. Schwerin's bizarre analysis lays bare the inescapable conclusion that he did not bother to watch the film. He is unaware of Sirk's makeover of Delilah and incorrectly reports Jackson's role and the song that she sang—apparently at her own funeral—yet moralizes self-righteously about Jackson's "decision" to play a demeaning character.

> Mahalia's role was that of the Louise Beaver update, a segregation-era caricature of the happy "colored" servant. For the big, pivotal scene, the studio hired a Hollywood church and added a mob of screaming extras. Mahalia was persuasive when she sang, delivering a robust rendition of the 23rd Psalm from the pulpit. In the funeral scene she cried, magnificent and voluptuous, on cue.
>
> I never did get the chance to ask her whether she thought that the Hollywood money justified her ill-advised performance in the movie.[40]

It is difficult to decide which is more infuriating: that Schwerin, in a book on a major figure of twentieth-century American music, would approach the delicate question of racial representation with such cavalier negligence, or the fact that, having not seen the film, he simply *presumed* that Jackson would play the "voluptuous" mammy-fied maid—perhaps revealing Schwerin's "impressions" of Jackson—and then cast aspersions on Jackson's personal ethics for doing so. This is particularly troubling because, as I discuss in Chapter 9, the real-life Jackson

had to carefully negotiate historically situated anxieties of some African Americans that she might be perceived by white observers as fulfilling this very stereotype. To corroborate his reading of the film, Schwerin goes on to claim, again incorrectly, that in 1957 Jackson was "costumed as a rocking-chair, bandana-head Mammy" in a television appearance with Bing Crosby and Dean Martin. In fact, on the show, Jackson, who sang her often-performed medley of Gershwin's "Summertime" and the spiritual "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child," is not wearing a headscarf, her only "costume" is a dark-colored dress, and Crosby and Martin are also seated in rocking chairs. Elsewhere, Schwerin writes: "Mahalia was no reader so she *could not* have read the seminal novel of Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*"—meaning, presumably, that she "could not have read" the Bible either. In another example of Schwerin's underestimation of his subjects, he recycles the stubbornly resilient canard about the dedicated and formally trained civil rights activist Rosa Parks: "Until the evening of December 1, she was a non-political woman. But this evening she was especially tired."[41]

I delineate this remiss—Schwerin's paternalistic tone and blithe comfort with making things up as he goes along—because his book, now a quarter of a century old, is the most recent monograph on Jackson, pointing to the urgent necessity for more critical, more original, and less impressionistic scholarship on Jackson and on black gospel music, driven by more intellectually ambitious questions. Gerald Early concluded his review of *Got to Tell It* for the *Washington Post* with a caustic but on-the-mark rejoinder on the behalf of subjects who deserve better: "It is, frankly, time to end such nonsense and get down to the business of the serious study of important black artists."[42] Undermining this serious business has been the issue of verifiable sourcing that continues to bedevil gospel scholarship. Despite their respective strengths and contributions, without which the present book would not have been possible, none of the five cornerstone sources on Jackson that present-day researchers have come to rely upon—Goreau, Jackson and Wylie, Heilbut, Schwerin, and Boyer's *The Golden Age of Gospel*—have any citations whatsoever, forcing researchers to take the author at his or her word on often crucial issues. It is encouraging to see the recent appearance of new interpretive and historical work on Jackson, but more is needed.[43] This book endeavors to continue closing that gap.

The Legacy of The Gospel Sound

Occupying a center of gravity within black gospel scholarship is what undoubtedly remains the most influential book on gospel music. Reckoning with its enduring legacy helps to clarify the present book's project. First published in 1971, updated over the course of four editions, and still in print, Anthony Heilbut's *The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times* can be counted among a cluster of foundational

books published during a conspicuously fecund period in the 1960s and 1970s that fundamentally shaped existing narratives about American popular music.[44] Born in 1940 in New York to a family of German-Jewish émigrés from Berlin, Heilbut received his PhD in English literature from Harvard in 1966, writing his dissertation on the prose works of D. H. Lawrence. It was during an appointment as assistant professor at Hunter College and New York University that the precocious thirty-year-old wrote *The Gospel Sound*. He has since published books on the cultural impact of German refugee artists and intellectuals in the United States and on writer Thomas Mann, as well as a recent collection of essays on U.S. popular culture with penetrating studies on Aretha Franklin and on the gay and lesbian closet, hardly a closed one, within the black gospel world.[45] As a resource on the history of black gospel music, *The Gospel Sound* is rivaled only by Boyer's *The Golden Age of Gospel*. The latter book, by virtue of Boyer having been both an accomplished gospel performer in the 1950s and 1960s and a productive scholar during his long tenure as a music professor at the University of Massachusetts–Amherst, has also been distinctly influential, particularly among academy-based music scholars.[46]

Along with his deep familiarity with the music, Heilbut's close and sustained personal and professional relationships with the artists themselves—relationships that make the gospel figures he discusses feel more like fully formed, three-dimensional people—are the most valuable currency and source of authority in his writing. In his view, this position made him a singular and singularly valuable commentator on the music. "When my gospel book appeared," Heilbut has written, "I received hostile glances from black cultural nationalists, who viewed me as an interloper, and white intellectuals, who thought I was slumming. The singers themselves were more welcoming."[47] As a teenager, Heilbut "graduated from R&B to gospel," making himself a regular at gospel programs in Harlem. He later launched a still active career as a gospel record producer responsible for albums by several of the heroes in his book as well as compilations of historic recordings that are important contributions to black gospel discography. His most recent is an important collection of rare live recordings by Jackson. The nexus of writing and record production was central to Heilbut's work from his initial foray as a gospel scholar. Publication of *The Gospel Sound* was accompanied by the release of two companion double-LPs for Columbia Records, the first co-produced with John Hammond.[48]

The Gospel Sound is built from individual chapters on influential "Golden Age" gospel singers—almost all of whom, with the possible exception of Mahalia Jackson, undoubtedly remain unfamiliar to most Americans today—and contextualizing excursions on the Holiness church, life on the road, and the gospel radio and recording industries. As reviewers noted upon its publication, *The Gospel Sound* was the first full-length study of black gospel music. In some ways, this was not surprising: in sharp contrast with jazz, blues, and country, the modern black gospel

movement was among the least reliably documented and journalistically covered vernacular musics in the United States. But one of Heilbut's core arguments was that the neglect of gospel music communities was far from coincidental. A host of factors conspired to prevent gospel's master practitioners from receiving the attention they deserved: the fundamental insularity of the black church, principled rejection of modern trends by the truly faithful, the "impenetrable mystique" of Pentecostal styles of worship, intellectual disdain for traditional gospel on the part of African American youth, the failure of gospel fans to support their own, exploitation by music industry profiteers and derivative crossover singers, and, underlying it all, the general disregard for and social invisibility of poor, urban black people.

Unfamiliarity with black gospel beyond African American communities and white insiders like Heilbut made the music "the best-kept secret of ghetto culture," but it also revealed a tragic side of the story. *The Gospel Sound* is both an unapologetic expression of fandom—Heilbut describes himself as a "gospel monomaniac"—and an unflinching manifesto. Black gospel music is "the most important black musical form since jazz" (xxix) and "gospel voices are easily the most phenomenal outside of opera" (xiii). The two dominant forms of popular music when the book was written, soul and rock, were inconceivable without gospel, Heilbut insists. And yet its artists, especially the music's pioneers, soldiered on, unacknowledged and unremunerated: "A few gospel publishers and promoters have made fortunes, but for most of the singers, gospel pays like unskilled labor" (257). Emphasis on the poverty of black gospel singers, "the most underpaid" artists in America (xi), and the rugged hardship of gospel singing as a means of subsistence is in many ways a lynchpin of the book's rhetorical strategy, enabling Heilbut to pursue several narrative threads. Bessie Griffin and Dorothy Love Coates are identified, respectively, as "the barefoot girl" who "was one of the best black singers in America" (137) and as "a poor black asserting herself against all odds" (169). Running in parallel with Heilbut's praise of the singers he most admires is commentary on the injustice of true artistic talent unrewarded, the aesthetic bankruptcy of popular music's lucrative paydays, the paradox of gospel's obscurity despite its omnipresence, and black gospel as a vital "hidden transcript" of ghetto life and politics.[49]

Heilbut's view of black gospel as a critique of modern bourgeois society is detectable in his open admiration for the noble asceticism of gospel's most devout singers, who, though deserving economic prosperity, in the end inspire others to distrust worldliness and contemporary trends. Sallie Martin, one of the earliest organizers of the gospel singing movement in Chicago in the 1930s and later in Los Angeles, "apparently has little faith in modern ways, politics or gospel," Heilbut concludes in his opening chapter. "Sallie will keep being herself, singing the old songs, criticizing the new ways, pushing people to live right" (17). In this

regard, Heilbut also betrays his impatience with late-1960s iterations of black nationalist politics. Soul? "We invented it," an unidentified witness sniffed. "All this mess you hear calling itself soul ain't nothing but warmed-over gospel" (xi). At its best, gospel is organic, not processed, "a world complete unto itself" with "a distinctive language, special rhythms, [and] a complex sense of ritual and decorum" that are emblematic of "its own very superior aesthetic standards."

For Heilbut, there are clear boundaries that call for censure, or at least elucidation, when they are crossed. When Alex Bradford, leader of one of the most popular gospel groups in the 1950s, refers to his "magnanimous Savior," Heilbut explains how Bradford occasionally "gets worldly on you, throwing around a large vocabulary" (145). Sallie Martin and fellow gospel pioneer Willie Mae Ford Smith insisted that studying church-produced literature is central to their spiritual practice: "Reading? That's all I do," said Martin, with Smith adding: "Holiness is like going to college." Heilbut was dubious. "One suspects the publications are a bourgeois trapping, curiously contrary to the anti-intellectual bias of the earlier saints," he determines, projecting a different sense of virtue. "The very considerable wisdom of the saints clearly doesn't come from books" (180–81). Arguing passionately and persuasively for the sublime artistry and far-reaching influence of gospel singing, and for Heilbut's own social outlook, *The Gospel Sound* seeks to educate readers about a sequestered music's innovators and cultural settings while also, confronted with the contagion of flawed American taste, urging sharp discrimination between originals and pale imitations, transcendent folk artists and pop-cultural decadents, the steadfast and the sell-outs, the gospel church and "the world."

The Gospel Sound merits special attention because it is difficult to exaggerate how central the book and its author have been in the production of knowledge about black gospel music for nearly a half-century. For readers and listeners new to the music, and even some already familiar with it, Heilbut was perhaps the first commentator to delineate the meaningful distinction between quartet and gospel singing in print. *The Gospel Sound* highlights star quartet lead singers, including Ira Tucker of the Dixie Hummingbirds, R. H. Harris and Sam Cooke of the Soul Stirrers, Julius Cheeks of the Sensational Nightingales, and Claude Jeter of the Swan Silvertones; the gospel groups of Clara Ward, Alex Bradford, Dorothy Love Coates, and DeLois Barrett Campbell; as well as such respected soloists as Willie Mae Ford Smith, Mahalia Jackson, Marion Williams, and Bessie Griffin, among other prominent artists and songwriters. Heilbut's projects as a gospel music producer have paid homage to, and in some cases revived, the careers of several of these singers. His astute, if sharply opinionated, critical commentary continues to be cited by writers verbatim and obituaries for major gospel artists still often quote Heilbut clarifying their significance.

Heilbut's ability to stimulate and sustain conversation about black gospel has been particularly impressive. When *The Gospel Sound* first appeared, he claims,

"the assertion that gospel singing supplied the roots for much of contemporary music was not widely accepted; today it seems a received truth" (vii). His most recent book earned extensive national attention for its bold rebuke of what he perceives to be the hypocrisy of black churches that vigorously denounce homosexuality from the pulpit while building its institutions on the financial success of the music of queer men and women who have been the backbone of gospel music.[50] Heilbut's body of work as a writer, producer, and public intellectual has been a powerful, taste-shaping epistemological touchstone, offering listeners valuable guidance toward what they need to know about gospel. My own discovery of the Heilbut quartet compilation *Kings of the Gospel Highway* still stands as a personally impactful encounter with the music. Heilbut is fully aware of his improbable stature as a power broker of gospel knowledge and seems to relish the role. "People are amazed that a German Jewish atheist would be supposedly the world's expert on gospel music," he reflected in a 1996 interview. "And because nothing had ever been written on the subject, I had the pleasure of being able to define things."[51]

Indeed, *The Gospel Sound*'s most inescapable accolade, and a basis for its ongoing authority, is that it is "definitive." The book is rarely referenced without being identified in these terms. In 1991, music critic Robert Christgau wrote that *The Gospel Sound* was "still the definitive—and damn near only—study of the subject twenty years after it first came out." In a 2012 National Public Radio interview, R. J. Smith made the case better than Heilbut himself ever could: "You wrote the definitive overview of gospel music, *The Gospel Sound*, in 1971. You shaped the official story, and the book is still considered something of a standard text." This consensus on the legacy of *The Gospel Sound* can, however, mask certain respects in which its influence and reputation are as complicated as they are extensive and well deserved. Most obvious is a question pertaining less specifically to Heilbut than to the problematics of "master-narratives" identified by Jean-François Lyotard and other postmodernist critics who questioned the tidy power of sweeping definitive accounts, particularly the heterogeneity of human activity that is often sacrificed to the "official story" of metanarratives, a point to which I will return shortly.[52]

The more relevant implications of Heilbut's densely knotted personal musical tastes, commercial activity, and public identity as "the world's expert on gospel music" extend beyond the question of constructing a canon. Heilbut's gospel writing reverberates with a skepticism toward most popular music, particularly in light of his insistence that the very best features of post-war popular music are directly indebted to black gospel. "Singers today still live off the mannerisms developed by the gospel pioneers," Heilbut writes. "Meanwhile, soul radio is booming with decadent versions of the joyful noises gospel invented" (xxx, 275). *The Gospel Sound*'s most scathing vitriol is reserved for the popular music industry itself, the

"petty capitalists," "bloodsuckers," and "rock hustlers" who make up "the show-business juggernaut" that engineered the "commercial take-over of gospel."

Heilbut would likely argue, perhaps justifiably and certainly admirably, that his commitment both to producing knowledge about gospel and to maintaining his position of authority has been an important counterweight to the appropriations and distortions of a music business that exploits the work of musicians, especially the black and the poor, by profiting from a derivative, commodified form of their art that erases the identity of the true innovators. Keeping the reception of black gospel on a short leash also communicates Heilbut's concerns over the question of aesthetic judgment. A real challenge to many casual listeners approaching the music is that the sound of many gospel recordings from the 1940s and 1950s, especially quartet performances, remain within a relatively narrow stylistic bandwidth and can therefore, despite delicious nuances, at a surface level exhibit a basic sonic sameness. Frustration over the tendency of some to enthuse over what he considers an average or even mediocre performance simply because it showcases expected "mannerisms" and fills the right phenomenological prescription—hand clappin', hallelujah shoutin' excitement by singing black bodies—seems to drive Heilbut's determination to steer listeners toward performers and performances that he believes are genuinely worthy of praise.

More suggestive, however, is Heilbut's palpable disappointment when discussing gospel singers who have, in his view, sold their birthright and cashed in on sleeping with the enemy. *The Gospel Sound* grapples continually, though most often only implicitly, with the tension between an appreciation for the hermetic purity of "real" gospel, untainted by "the world," and a desire to see its just compensation and fame in the public sphere as great art. It is highly suggestive that in writing *The Gospel Sound* Heilbut was almost grudgingly forced to reconcile the myriad ways gospel singers themselves perceived and navigated the relationship between their religious convictions and their socioeconomic desires, between their identification with gospel singing and their catholic musical tastes, between the functions of black religion and the form, fashion, and financial realities of commercialized popular music. Ultimately, even acknowledging *The Gospel Sound*'s indisputable importance, I find that in telling the story that the Heilbut of 1971 found most important—one emphasizing cultural insularity and an idealist conception of transcendent art—many concerns and dynamics that I believe are central to a fuller understanding of the post-war black gospel field fall by the wayside. This suggests to me that what twenty-first-century black gospel scholarship needs most is not a newly burnished definitive account but, rather, more stories. Questions regarding boundaries, values, prestige, and the complexity of subject positions that insistently percolate to the surface in *The Gospel Sound* help to pinpoint the fundamental issues that animate the present book.

The Black Gospel Field

This book addresses two interconnected subjects. It is a study focusing primarily on Mahalia Jackson's life and career as a gospel singer up through her first year as a CBS and Columbia Records artist in 1954–1955. The story ends here because, as I show in my final chapters, it represents a seam in Jackson's career, marked by the end of her radio and television shows, her work with her first producers at Columbia, Mitch Miller and George Avakian, a conspicuous broadening of her audience that made her a public figure in a qualitatively different way, and a bout of life-threatening illness that forced a reset of her professional activity. But I also hope to stimulate thinking about black gospel music as a field of cultural production. A core principle of field analysis—a premise that I believe yields a less predetermined picture of post-war gospel—is the necessity of assessing the agents, institutions, practices, points of contestation, and forms of capital within an area of cultural production in relational terms. Considering gospel as a "field" accounts for a fuller scope of Jackson's work as a gospel singer while at the same time assesses her position, however singular, within a realm encompassing the activities of countless others. Thinking of Jackson and the gospel field reciprocally also helps to tackle a frustrating methodological problem. Documentation of black gospel, even on recordings, is spotty—Darden estimates that 75 percent of gospel records made from the 1940s to the 1970s have been lost—and with precious few sources to work with, writing on the music has, by necessity, been heavily anecdotal. Fortunately, the rapid ascent of Jackson's career from 1946 through 1955 generated considerable coverage in print and other public media, enabling us to recover some of the texture of black gospel during a period when her professional career and her successes were deeply interwoven with local and national gospel communities.

Within the post-war music industry, references to a "spiritual field" or "gospel field" were common, simply indicating the market for commercially recorded and concert-produced black religious music. Jackson identified herself as among the pioneers who steered a transition from "these gospel singers who didn't do nothing but sing in the church" to "this field that we have created." But here I consider gospel as a "field" in a second sense. Some readers will recognize the field analysis that I am describing as drawing on the ideas of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. As anthropologists Paul Silverstein and Jane Goodman have suggested, scholars since the 1970s have found Bourdieu's theories of practice to be "good to think with," and though I am guided more by the methodological spirit than the theoretical letter of Bourdieu's work, several of his foundational ideas have stimulated questions and lines of inquiry that I pursue in the chapters that follow.[53]

A basic principle of Bourdieu's theories of practice and cultural production, one that has hovered spectrally in the background of most gospel literature to date, is the importance of the relations among a diversity of individuated agents, particular

works, specific performance practices, values, sources of prestige, and political and economic dynamics within a field. When these issues have been addressed, the tendency has been to use them to define people, performances, and attitudes in or out of the category "real gospel," to separate the wheat from the tares, as Jackson sang on her first record. Bourdieu's dictum "To think in terms of a field is to think relationally" invites more agents and activities into the picture while also pushing us to consider how the picture changes once a field's boundaries are determined relationally instead of prescriptively. What, for instance, would it mean for our understanding of gospel to think of Jackson's performance in New York on a nationally televised Sunday night variety show as part of the same field of cultural production as a Sunday morning performance by Chicago's Pilgrim Baptist Church choir led by Dorsey? How might each performance matter differently to gospel singers, gospel fans, and black church congregations, and with respect to each other? Employing a field analysis approach oriented toward thinking relationally will, I believe, encourage gospel scholars, as David Schwartz has suggested, "to define the broadest possible range of factors that shape behavior rather than delimit a precise area of activity" or "narrow prematurely the range of their investigation." This openness is something I consciously strive to maintain throughout this book. If at times this inclusivity results in what might be for some a disconcerting decentering of the black church, hopefully it has the benefit of foregrounding a richer spectrum of desires on the part of black gospel's performers, producers, and consumers.[54]

Two features of field analysis will anchor my discussion of Jackson and postwar black gospel: a cultural field as a space of possible positions, and the work of species of capital within the field, particularly field-specific forms of prestige. Field analysis of black gospel music highlights internal differences among constituents who orient themselves by means of what Bourdieu refers to as "position-takings." The possibilities are open-ended and vast—too open-ended, some critics of field analysis argue. Within gospel, positions in the field—singer, accompanist, director, evangelist, popular entertainer, recording artist, competitor, curator, business entrepreneur, impresario, fan, "Queen"—can be static or change over time, be driven by spiritual beliefs or material ambition, and/or facilitate business or pleasure. But accounting for the diversity of positions allows us to consider how the field of black gospel presented itself to each agent less as a cultural template than as an unstable "space of possibilities" shaped by multiple factors. As the four recordings of "These Are They" discussed above suggest, we can include specific performances as representing discrete positions as well. Cooperation and contestation among agents occupying different positions in the field produce the distinctive dynamics that define a particular field while also potentially reshaping it. Indeed, changes over time—in this case, the nature, cause, and effect of transformations in the gospel field in the decade following World War II—is one of the developments that I seek to highlight.

Perhaps the most widely influential concept in Bourdieu's theory of cultural production is capital, which in its most basic sense he defines as "species of power . . . whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field." As a form of power, capital, whether economic, cultural, or symbolic, is diversely differentiated. Bourdieu explains the working of capital in a field through the elaborate but elucidating analogy of a parlor game that employs chips, "a pile of tokens of different colors, each color corresponding to a given species of capital." Unlike poker chips, however, capital is qualitative as well as quantitative. Qualitatively different possessions of capital, even when they might be quantitatively equivalent, determine how one plays the game.

> [P]layers can play to increase or conserve their capital . . . but they can also get in it to transform, partially or completely, the immanent rules of the game. They can, for instance, work to change the relative value of tokens of different colors, the exchange rate between various species of capital, through strategies aimed at discrediting the form of capital upon which the force of their opponents rests . . . and to valorize the species of capital they preferentially possess.[55]

The concept of prestige and its diverse forms is a productive way of assessing how species of capital operate in the black gospel field. I would identify four principal forms of prestige that I believe agents in the gospel field recognize and attribute to singers: devout integrity, charismatic artistry, recognition, and pop-cultural cachet. These function as a means through which gospel singers can accrue respect, admiration, esteem, and other specific profits, including, though not limited to, financial reward.

Devout Integrity

It is hard to imagine a gospel singer who would not claim that they sing first and foremost to the glory of the God he or she serves, whether through testifying about a personal relationship with the divine, seeking to inspire this personal connection in others, or communicating a song's religious message. When singers publicly attest from the floor during a program "I don't sing for form or fashion or for outside show," we see how this ethos functions almost as an ante to enter the game. A form of prestige that I will call "devout integrity" is thus conferred upon a singer who persuasively demonstrates his or her religious conviction and sincerity of purpose when singing gospel and, whether they are singing or not, consistently presents theirself in a manner others recognize as a "good Christian" in their day-to-day life. When Heilbut speaks of R. H. Harris as "the most spiritual man on the road," or identifies the woefully under-recorded Willie Mae Ford Smith as "the

greatest of the 'anointed singers,' the ones who live by the spirit and sing to save souls," it is the prestige of devout integrity that he is ascribing to these individuals. The rejection of monetary reward often undergirds the economy of this form of prestige. Noting "the acclaim that soul singers get while gospel singers starve," Heilbut gives Dorothy Love Coates the final word: "Sure those singers get more money, but there's some money so dirty you hate to touch it." Indeed, by coincidence or by mistake, Heilbut attributes almost the exact same quote to Willie Mae Ford Smith ("I need money, I need money *bad*, but there's some money so dirty that you hate to touch it").[56] Jackson herself built a reputation of devout integrity through repeated public rejections of offers to sing secular music or perform in nightclubs, accruing prestige through a self-narrative that, paradoxically, she was able to parlay into considerable wealth as a professional gospel singer, exemplifying what Bourdieu called the "double reality" of symbolic capital.

Charismatic Artistry

Even when it is most fundamentally a form of testimony or evangelism, gospel singing is musical performance, and singers accrue the most conspicuously available prestige through dynamic performances on programs and on record. Gospel audiences are inseparably bound up with this second form of capital, which I call "charismatic artistry," since it is the reception of a performance or an artist who can "flat out sing" that confers this prestige. For most, the impact of the singing matters most, and gospel literature revels in stories and legends about the effect of great performances on an audience, from barely perceptible but hair-raising vocal inflections to such theatrical gestures as blind singers leaping from church balconies, all in an effort to "take the house." Part of the seductive pleasure of Heilbut's gospel writing comes from the shared intimacy and immediacy of accounts of charismatic artistry, allowing us, for instance, to savor anecdotes about how the power of Bessie Griffin's singing "literally killed people," as enraptured listeners at programs were, we are told, mortally stricken by the sound of her voice.[57] In practice, charismatic artistry bleeds into devout integrity, or vice versa, as gospel singers speak of "making the spirit come," or singing to audiences amid white-uniformed deaconesses standing by to assist members of the congregation who "get happy" when the spiritual presence of a performance fills them to overflowing.

For many post-war gospel singers, charismatic artistry was often more technical than spectacle. An innovative style, or simply stylishness, could be acquired through close study. Robert Marovich has characterized gospel programs as "lecture halls" that "served as classrooms for emerging singers and musicians," particularly in cases—Church of God in Christ (COGIC) churches, for instance,

where hymnbooks were less often used during worship—in which music literacy was not a requisite skill.[58] Meticulous observation of respected artists was the core curriculum of a gospel classroom. Several outstanding quartet singers I have interviewed, including Otis Clay, Garnett Mimms, and Howard Tate, all of whom enjoyed successful crossover to popular music, expressed their deep admiration for Ira Tucker, lead singer of the Dixie Hummingbirds. Clay earned the nickname "Little Tucker" for modeling his vocal and visual style so closely on the singer. According to Therman Ruth Jr., Tucker drove crowds wild during shows at Harlem's Apollo Theater with his signature move of shedding his suit jacket at climactic moments of his performance. Mimms remembered marveling at how Tucker, "a real master in changing up and making himself sound different," would showcase his vocal dexterity. Tate received his gospel education listening to elite quartet leads at the Metropolitan Opera House in Philadelphia, known locally as the Met: "I would go down there every time they came to town to listen at them, very close, so that I could pick up on their music and what they were doing and how they executed their voice into the style they were singing. . . .I didn't go to music school, but they were my teachers."[59]

In an art form in which affecting the audience was a goal of performance technique, stagecraft was an inescapable component of gospel practice. Reverend Doctor Isaac Whittmon remembered that in "us[ing] programs for schooling" he "watched everything," including "how they would move from one song to the other song." Pastor Stephen Hawkins, who recorded as child gospel star "Little Stevie" Hawkins in the 1960s, remembered Jackson's televisual presence as an inspiring object of fascination.

> Mahalia Jackson when she would be on television every year, we would stay up late to see her sing. She would be singing on TV and you could see the seriousness of it and how she would handle it and the way she would move. . . .So, you know, when you're looking and you're studying different people, you not only study *what* they do but you study what *causes* them to do it.[60]

As Bourdieu's poker game analogy suggests, there are exchange rates between forms of prestige. A singer—Sallie Martin comes most immediately to mind—who is legitimated as possessing unassailable devout integrity can garner a reputation for charismatic artistry because of the persuasiveness of their performance, even if, at face value, their vocal talent, technical skill, or sheer virtuosity falls recognizably short of singers like Tucker or Jackson. "Martin's voice was not the most beautiful pipe in the organ," Marovich writes, but "watching Sallie Martin sing was like watching the stern church mother get happy."[61]

Recognition

Devout integrity and charismatic artistry are the available forms of prestige most often focused upon by writers on black gospel music. Other types of prestige further open up our thinking about gospel as a field of cultural production. A third species of gospel prestige is "recognition," the strong form of which is fame, the weaker form being differing types of acknowledgment. In the case of black gospel, recognition first emerged through a local, in-group dynamic well before the music went national. For gospel historians, the narrative of how the movement led by Dorsey, Theodore Frye, Magnolia Lewis Butts, and other members of the "gospel nexus" in Chicago achieved its decisive breakthrough in the 1930s is a story of how the musical worship valued by Southern migrants, by virtue of the stunning breadth of its appeal across congregations, was recognized as legitimate—or at least indispensible for building church membership—among Chicago's established old-line "landmark" churches.[62] Broader recognition subsequently came in many varieties: press coverage; the aura of mediated performances on recordings, on radio, and on television; the quantity and quality of performance opportunities; high-profile tours; billing on gospel programs (as in vaudeville, where one appeared on a program lineup communicated status); or symbolic "victory" in a gospel song battle.

Newspaper reports constantly referenced the prestige of recognition not only in the escalating coverage of Jackson—the "nationally known gospel singer" who is "without a doubt, the most outstanding spiritual singer of the present era" and "is being groomed for a network radio show"—but of other gospel singers as well. If in certain contexts singing to the glory of God was the most salient positioning, in others, celebrity, fame, and reputation, whether local or national, could represent the most immediate attraction for some singers, fans, and commentators, even if admitting as much was impolitic. In fact, from a certain perspective, particularly that of the black press, recognition beyond black communities, among "those who do not understand gospel music," was one of the most important implications of the growing popularity of black gospel singing. Recognition could also help garner a related and more collectively felt form of prestige: racial honor, or a sense of pride at a high level of attainment by black artists. It is clear that to many African Americans, Jackson's appearance on *Toast of the Town* indicated a level of individual recognition that was a powerful source of collective prestige in the form of racial honor.

Pop-Cultural Cachet

As Heilbut discusses, for the overwhelming majority, gospel singing was not a highly remunerative vocation. But when attained, success in material and economic terms was most often linked to the interface of gospel with popular culture.

What I call "pop-cultural cachet," a fourth type of prestige, is less strictly a matter of achieving financial reward than it is a highly specific sense of value suggested by such factors as record and sheet music sales, audience draw, or earnings. These apply to individual singers and groups but also to the gospel field itself. Singers were often identified by the fact that they had a hit record (by gospel standards). The astonishing success of "Move On Up a Little Higher," which sold in great volumes, catapulted Jackson to international recognition, but it also transformed the field by coaxing many more gospel singers to relax their ambivalence toward recording. As Jackson said, "Move On Up" taught gospel singers and the music industry that "you could take religious songs and sing them just like you sing in the church, put them on records, and people would buy 'em."[63]

Attendance and box office figures for gospel extravaganzas—more concretely comprehensible evidence of pop-cultural cachet than a "hit" record—were documented in music trade publications and re-reported enthusiastically in black newspapers. Earnings and attendance numbers were noteworthy to a black press than ran numerous articles trumpeting with considerable relish: "Yessir . . . GOSPEL SINGING is BIG business." African American newspapers enthusiastically promoted the 1952 Gospel Train and reported production costs in the neighborhood of $100,000, with Jackson alone said to have been paid "a juicy $3,000 weekly guarantee" as star of the show.[64] The reality of financial reward, or lack thereof, for the singers themselves is less my concern than the fact that the citing of packed stadiums and auditoriums and eye-popping box office receipts indicates that the prestige of pop-cultural cachet mattered in field-specific ways to gospel singers and their fans.

JACKSON'S SIGNIFICANCE AS an artist and as a public figure merits a study with her as its focus. As she came to prominence in the 1940s and 1950s, her voice was repeatedly compared to the late vaudeville blues singer Bessie Smith by commentators who seized upon her recollection that she closely studied Smith's records when she was growing up in New Orleans. These were most often jazz critics, for whom the representation of Jackson as a latter-day Bessie Smith made the gospel singer legible as a living embodiment of origin myths identifying the blues and black church music as an aesthetic dyad that was the heart, soul, and fountainhead of genuine jazz. But she was also embraced by the entertainment industries as a symbol of religious sincerity and racial rapprochement in the midst of a Cold War in which "godless communism" was the adversary and Jim Crow was an "Achilles heel."[65] Most often, Jackson was expected to represent black gospel music at its best and most genuine, though there was an implicit expectation that she would in fact represent on many levels: African American cultural history, the United States' Judeo-Christian heritage, black respectability politics, the American Dream. Jackson's negotiation of these multiple axes of representation is one of