

Acts of Conversion: Sister Gertrude Morgan and the Sensation of Black Folk Art, 1960-1982

by

Elaine Y. Yau

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Abstract

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Sister Gertrude Morgan (1900-1980) has been variously celebrated as a unique voice of the southern United States, an “outsider” genius, a “black American” artist, and a quintessentially “American folk” artist of the twentieth century. We might grant these interpretative rubrics a few grains of validity: Morgan was born and raised in rural Alabama, spending her early adulthood in Columbus, Georgia before arriving in New Orleans, Louisiana. Her membership within African American Baptist and Holiness-Pentecostal churches endowed her with a religious vocabulary and expressive repertoire practiced by this worshipping community. Furthermore, her art demonstrates a preoccupation with her status as a “Bride of Christ,” replete with exuberant colors and gestural immediacy intended to induct viewers into otherworldly, biblical realms about which Morgan preached. These categories, however, sustain a rhetoric that hinges upon a boundary between an implied center that names and a hyper-visible periphery that is named. Unifying these terms are slippery questions of social identity and authenticity.

Rather than offer the final word about Morgan’s art, this dissertation argues for the very permeability of the categorical boundaries that have been employed to understand her artistic production. Throughout my account, Morgan’s life as a preacher, gospel performer, and painter is an exemplary case of modernity’s vexed and reciprocal relationship with “the folk.” First, it establishes Morgan as a creatively savvy artist who employed visual culture that was deeply informed by her Holiness-Pentecostal belief—rather than the isolated genius mainstream narratives construed her to be. Second, it argues for the central role of religion in constructing the Otherness endemic of Morgan’s reception as a producer of “heritage,” especially in the context of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festivals in the 1970s. After establishing a social and religious history for her expressive repertoire, I attribute her art’s movement within the post-

WWII market to the multiple meanings audiences drew from Morgan's painterly expressionism, visionary speech, and performances of traditional culture. Third, I narrate Morgan's intersection with two other New Orleans artists—Noel Rockmore and Bruce Brice—to explore how these men's social positions inflected the designation "self-taught" with divergent meanings. My study concludes with a re-consideration of the Corcoran Gallery of Art's *Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980* exhibition that brought "black folk artists" into visibility in the 1980s. Through analyzing artworks and visual culture, sound recordings, oral history, and exhibition archives culled from collections throughout the American South, my dissertation ultimately argues that religious experience in "black folk art" was a form of visual modernity for African diasporic subjects that could dovetail with, but not be absorbed fully by, modernism's insistence on singular authorship, visual formalism, and secular values.

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Introduction

Prayers Painted by Sister Gertrude Morgan

Of all the photographs that artist Noel Rockmore took of Sister Gertrude Morgan in May 1970, one stands out for the frank curiosity it displays towards objects unintended for anyone's view [figure 1]. We are in one of four rooms in Morgan's Lower Ninth Ward home, looking at a stack of five compartments that was functionally her closet. Five, maybe six, pairs of white shoes occupy the lowest two cubicles, while folded clothes—also white—fill the remaining three that we can see behind a white curtain. Given Morgan's neatness that is on display here, she has predictably sequestered a group of errant objects to the side. Yet even this odd assortment adds to the interest of Rockmore's picture; the everydayness of the long wooden handle, a wooden crate storing a glass hurricane lamp, a small stack of papers, and a stool's dark seat cropped at the lower right only intensify the appearance of her wardrobe's diligent upkeep. Part of the fascination that prompted Rockmore to take this photograph surely was derived from the sheer inertness of these clothes and accessories that lie on the shelves.

The vividness of their inactivity had everything to do with Morgan's persona as the Bride of Christ that Rockmore had witnessed elsewhere: walking along French Quarter streets, singing in Larry Borenstein's Associated Artists Gallery, and explaining her art at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival's outdoor concerts [figs. 2-4]. Indeed, the impact of these photographs derive from the consistency with which Morgan fashioned herself *to be seen*, fully aware of how her dark brown skin would have been set off by white garments when worn from head to toe. For those who have known about Sister Gertrude Morgan through an interest in contemporary folk art, African American art, or a history of New Orleans, this kind of dress has become iconic of Morgan's powerful and idiosyncratic spiritual persona. For many, like Eric Newhouse for the *Louisiana Advertiser*, Morgan's visual appearance was transporting when she began speaking about a painting hanging on the wall in her home:

She preaches it with a tamberine [*sic*], enthroned in white robes with white shoes resting on a faded silver footstool, bellowing out the spiritual 'Twelve Gates to the City' in a husky street-singing voice which sends the important words like 'power' and 'hallelujah' and 'amen'—echoing across the rutted streets and through the neighborhood.¹

Out of a "3-by-5 foot chamber between a sagging screen door and a tiny, drab bedroom" Morgan's charisma seemed to remake the space of her performance a threshold to heaven itself.²

¹ Eric Newhouse, "Prayers Painted by Sister Gertrude Morgan," in *Advertiser* (Lafayette, Louisiana), November 5, 1972, 55. Clipping pasted with other paraphernalia from E. Lorenz Borenstein Gallery, vertical file from the Smithsonian American Art and Portrait Gallery Library.

² *Ibid.*

As if to unveil or explain the extraordinariness of the person before him, the remainder of Newhouse's feature consists of direct quotations from Morgan herself. From these verbal clips, which read like a transcription of a documentary film, readers gain a sense of her life in lively, broad strokes.

Though more generous than most reporters who wrote press features about the artist, the resounding image offered by Newhouse is one of mythic proportions. In this text, readers may learn of the main chapters of Morgan's life; these include her youth along the Alabama and Georgia border at Dr. J.B. Miller's Rose Hill Baptist Church, her receipt of a divine calling to preach in New Orleans, her work with two other women at a relief mission, and the fulfillment of her second calling that named her the Bride of Christ. However, punctuating these passages of prose are colorful phrases that serve to magnify the extreme, if not almost outlandish, nature of Morgan's worldview that inveighs against "those strong, sea-monster spirits" and wants to "WHUP the Devil."³ A quality of singular authenticity is staked on these details, one that has persisted with each retelling and recycling of these basic contours of Morgan's life. Having circulated for nearly forty years, these biographical nuggets now travel nearly everywhere that Morgan's art goes, especially in the auction houses, art fairs, and gallery exhibitions that call upon her biography to verify the art's authenticity as "some of the most important outsider art of the 20th century"—a product of unadulterated creativity.⁴

I open with these extended visual and textual considerations of Morgan's biography and reception to introduce the types of cultural performance that structure this dissertation. Foremost, this study seeks to apprehend the cultural categories of expression, value, and meaning that were of central importance to Morgan and her artistic practice. Rockmore's view into Morgan's closet implies the regular maintenance of her own self-fashioning (of all colors, does not white require the most attention to keep clean?). But like so many early mentions of Morgan's performances and art, as exemplified in the *Advertiser*, so few attempt to explain the traditions from which her artistic motivations came. We get little insight into why Morgan wore her apparel to signify her holiness, or how these clothes functioned as necessary markers of an inner, immaterial transformation as the Bride of Christ—the culmination of a series of private, spiritual callings that would have profound implications for her public life.⁵ The ways in which Morgan observed her religious beliefs through oral performance, writing, and visual art are elaborated in detail here for the first time and brought into conversation with fine-grained historical analysis.

Each photograph that captures Morgan in performance implies the presence of an audience. Moving in counterpoint to Morgan's expressive performances, then, is always a field of social reception—a second issue that is central to this study. In the decades from the 1960s to

³ Ibid.

⁴ "Sister Gertrude Morgan," Gilley Gallery, accessed April 17, 2015, <http://www.gilleysgallery.com/Artist-Detail.cfm?ArtistsID=709>.

⁵ For an eloquent elaboration on the relationship between self-awareness and self-agency in African American portraiture, see Richard Powell, *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), 77.

the early 1980s, art exhibitions tended to frame their encounters with Morgan's work through tropes of discovery and primitivist models of interpretation. This study brings local and historical specificity to the reception of Morgan and her art, while also accounting for the cultural matrix out of which such interpretations emerged. Throughout, I concentrate on the dialectical relationship structuring modern and traditional subjects, in which champions and critics of modernity configure vectors of race, gender, class, and age in ways that define the boundaries between themselves and those decontextualized and separated out as traditional others.⁶ Categories of "heritage," "folk art," "black folk art," "visionary," "self-taught," and "outsider" have served as the defining rubrics employed to classify a group of artists like Morgan since the early 1960s.

The proliferation of terms is symptomatic not only of this art's polysemy, but of a boundary between an implied center that assigns these labels to those occupying a hyper-visible periphery. Mediating these boundaries are slippery concepts of social identity and authenticity. During the 1960s and 1970s, the historical period concerning Gertrude Morgan's rise to recognition, the social configuration of this naming process consisted largely of a predominantly well-educated, white, upper- and middle-class art world that mobilized terms like "visionary" and "naïve" to classify artists working at their social and artistic margins. These creative individuals were typically racially or ethnically marked as non-white, economically impoverished, and minimally or unconventionally educated. More significantly, the degree of these artists' social differences further vexed the criteria for determining an object's status as art. Their art resembled those of canonical modern artists (e.g., Picasso), yet their biographies challenged neat categories of artistic training (academic, formal, improvisational, self-taught), collective belonging to a definable community (artistic, racial, religious, or otherwise), continuity with established artistic traditions, and presumed isolation from anomic forces associated with urban life. If the sheer heterogeneity of these categories approaches the absurd—much less the heterogeneity of their combinations—then one gets a sense of their inadequacy in attempting to name social difference. In addition to those mentioned above, other terms have included: naïve, isolated, grassroots, enisled, twentieth-century folk, contemporary folk, modern primitive, popular, vernacular and, the most enduring category, outsider art.⁷ Quoting Roger Cardinal who first coined the phrase "outsider art" in 1972, Lynne Cooke reminds us that none of these terms is "quite incisive enough" to encompass the seeming independence and eccentricity of these artists' work without fetishizing their biographies at the expense of aesthetic

⁶ Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs, *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), 2003.

⁷ In this introduction, I will use "Self-Taught" and "Outsider Art" interchangeably and often in a compounded form to refer to all of these categories of the periphery. As I explain later in this introduction, this choice is made in part for simplicity, but also because these terms have the highest recognition for the historical group of objects I engage with here (as opposed to "folk art," which still has a residual polarizing effect among scholars). In doing so, I do not intend to elide the specificity of their historical and cultural formations, but rather signal their common position as a twentieth-century instantiation of modern primitivism.

inquiry.⁸ In recognition of the categorical inadequacies attending the field of self-taught/outsider art, *Acts of Conversion* presents an account of one such chain of cultural recodings: how Sister Gertrude Morgan's paintings and drawings became known as "black folk art." In opposition to the generalizing tendencies of the field—which also efface the historical conditions of its own formation—my study insists upon the particularities of history and how Morgan's art signified within them.

Amid this categorical slipperiness, I stress the need for historical and visual particularity because the field of self-taught/outsider art repeats the primitivist pattern of modernism's founding episodes. Hal Foster crystallizes the problem in his analysis of the Museum of Modern Art's now-notorious 1984 exhibition, *'Primitivism' in 20th-Century Art*: "In this recognition [of the relationship between tribal and modern art,] difference is discovered only to be fetishistically disavowed, and in the celebration of 'human creativity' the dissolution of specific cultures is carried out."⁹ In this double move enacted by art's center, art at the socio-cultural margins is objectified as other, only to be incorporated by and remade in the image of the West from modernism's position of imperial supremacy. Outsider Art as a phenomenon was established much later than the modern primitivism of Picasso that Foster discusses; the first Outsider Art Fair in New York City held in 1993 serves as an indicator of the field's late twentieth-century robustness (at the time of writing, the highest price at auction for a painting by Sister Gertrude Morgan was \$37,000 in 2010).¹⁰ Nevertheless, in recent years, the contemporary art world's disposition towards artists at its periphery resembles the strategies of primitivism in remarkably similar ways.

Herbert Waide Hemphill Jr. and Julia Weissman's 1974 volume, *Twentieth-Century American Folk Art and Artists* exemplifies one important episode inflected with populism.¹¹ No longer approached as someone linked to an identifiable community, the twentieth-century folk artist was defined by his or her "originality, the bending of tradition to serve a personal vision."¹² Moreover, understanding twentieth-century folk art, in Hemphill and Weissman's view, "requir[es] no knowledge of art history or an explanation of the artist's intentions [and therefore] is a more accessible and comprehensible art."¹³ The exhilaration of discovery pervades their introduction, fueling a sense of promise in the artistic bounty thriving in unexplored areas off

⁸ Quoted in Lynne Cooke, "Orthodoxies Undermined," in Ann Percy, *"Great and Mighty Things": Outsider Art from the Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz Collection* (Philadelphia and New Haven, CT: Philadelphia Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press), 205.

⁹ Hal Foster, "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art," *October* 34 (October 1, 1985), 54.

¹⁰ If the following figures are any indication, the market for the work of certain artists, especially of the earliest generations of self-taught artists of the twentieth century, is now particularly strong. A painting by Bill Traylor, *Man With a Plow*, sold for \$365,000 in 2014 at Sotheby's (Lot 708, *Visual Grace: Important American Folk Art from the Collection of Ralph O. Esmerian*, January 25, 2014). The sale of Morgan's *Great New Jerusalem* was handled by Slotkin Folk Art (May 1, 2010).

¹¹ Hemphill and Weissman's "encyclopedia" expanded the geographical purview of folk art that had been previously limited by Holger Cahill in the 1930s to New England.

¹² Hemphill and Weissman, 11.

¹³ Hemphill and Weissman, 11.

beaten paths or in urban crannies. As a manifesto of the most earnest sort, *Twentieth-Century American Folk Art and Artists* transferred artists' lack of formal training into a native independence pursued by an avant-garde, working "without consideration of accepted theory or rules" and whose art "is a splendid testament to the innate creativity present and recurring spontaneously in every generation—and even within us, the viewers, if we will but restore our intuitive perception."¹⁴

The conscription of artistic outsiders to re-enchant the mainstream is not limited to American nationalism. Another arena in which artists at the margins have been included to reinvigorate the center has been Massimiliano Gioni's *Encyclopedia Palace* at the 2013 Venice Biennale. Gioni's vision has been widely celebrated and noted for its inclusion of "outsider artists," resulting in a vast survey of contemporary art that resembled something like a twentieth-first-century *wunderkammer*.¹⁵ Yet as Briony Fer, among many others, has warned (echoing Foster), "This trend sometimes veers perilously close to a mystificatory as well as mystic re-enchantment of a [dominant] culture in trouble."¹⁶ Gioni's effort to dissolve the boundaries between the outsider and the insider, in other words, risks the uncritical rehearsal of a primitivist gaze, one that reflects more the needs and interests of the center than those of the artists themselves.

Consider an even more recent review from March 26, 2015, when *New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith comments on the exhibition "When the Curtain Never Comes Down: Performance Art and the Alter Ego" at the American Folk Art Museum. Despite the fact that neither "outsider art" nor its cognates appear in the show's title, the shadow of the field's unresolved status persists in its reception: "[Curator Valerie Rousseau's] efforts expand our understanding of how many outsider artists—like many insiders—are cross-disciplinary, working several mediums at once, including performance. Beyond that, the show should deepen our appreciation of eccentricity as not only basic to creativity but to personal liberty and democracy itself."¹⁷ What is striking is how, even after admitting the similarities of so-called outsiders with those on the "inside," Smith's review verges upon allegorizing these artists as unwitting torchbearers of freedom of expression.

¹⁴ Hemphill and Weissman, 20. The historical avant-garde's oppositional strategies depended upon accepted conventions to guide their subversion, an aspect that differs from the implicit unconscious activity of twentieth-century folk artists. Nevertheless, the kind of creative freedom Hemphill and Weissman emphasize resonates with the creative freedom so valued by more familiar early twentieth-century modernists.

¹⁵ Andrew W. Goldstein, "Close Look: 4 Ways of Looking at Massimiliano Gioni's 'Encyclopedic Palace' Show," *Artspace*, June 7, 2013, accessed April 19, 2015, http://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews_features/close_look_massimiliano_gioni_encyclopedic_palace; Sam Thorne, "The Encyclopedia Palace: the 55th Venice Biennale," *Frieze* 157 (September 2013), accessed April 19, 2015, <http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/the-encyclopedic-palace>.

¹⁶ Quoted in Thorne.

¹⁷ Roberta Smith, "Review: A Strange and Wonderful View of Outsider Art," *New York Times*, March 26, 2015, accessed March 27, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/27/arts/design/review-a-strange-and-wonderful-view-of-outsider-art.html>.

My critique so far is not made to deny the appeal or aesthetic power of these so-called outsiders. I admit my own enthrallment when I view one of Morgan's exuberant paintings or Bill Traylor's enigmatic drawings. Nor is it a call for instating order within such categorical instability. Rather, my dissertation argues for the very challenge that art like Morgan's (as positioned at the periphery of mainstream contemporary art) poses to the intellectual habits of disciplines of thought, specifically art history. How can we increase self-awareness about the grounds of our interest, the terms of our inclusions, and ultimately, the rationales motivating our methods? How can we think critically and historically about the categories we adopt, as well as the gains and losses entailed in adopting them, as we make sense of artists—or makers, if we wanted to pare down connotations of quality—emerging from increasingly diverse backgrounds, and working in diverse and multiple creative languages?

The stakes of artistic creativity and nationalism rise when championing art by the outsider because such art is always circumscribed by social difference and entangled in the commodification of difference. Such entanglements with race in the United States are especially crucial in considering an artist like Morgan, whose unabashed religiosity and evangelistic performances risk fulfilling the simplistic and racist perception of African Americans as inherently naïve, anti-intellectual, and bent towards orality over literate forms of communication. This condescending attitude is rooted in the extreme violence of enslavement as a form of human objectification, as well as the racial “science” that emerged in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to justify slavery as an institution. The most familiar writings about self-taught and outsider art associated with Morgan have softened and sentimentalized such attitudes, positioning artists as makers of “nostalgic fetish[es]...palliative[s] for uneasy middle-class agnostics”; nevertheless, such gross simplifications of African American artists as “primitives” only extend their vulnerability to economic exploitation.¹⁸

The definition of “black folk art” demonstrates the historical difficulty of avoiding primitivist language when describing the work of non-academically trained African American artists. This category was first elaborated by Jane Livingston, one of the co-organizers of the pioneering and nationally-touring exhibition, *Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980*, which opened at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in 1982. While the show indisputably legitimized and brought visibility to a group of works made by non-academically trained African American artists—never before exhibited at such a scale (with over four hundred objects on the checklist)—its thesis set off heated debates among anthropologists, sociologists, and art critics alike. It claimed that a new category of art had been discovered, which gained currency in the aftermath of the show as “black folk art”: a kind of art that rejected any kind of artisanship or utility in favor of realizing “beauty which inheres to intentional crudeness or indecorum, at

¹⁸ Julia S. Ardery, *The Temptation: Edgar Tolson and the Genesis of Twentieth-Century Folk Art* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 5.

times... assertively den[ying] ‘the beautiful.’”¹⁹ Although Livingston was at pains to debunk “the notion that folk artists somehow experience life-long childhood,” an assumption about their naiveté still permeates some of her descriptions about the artists in her final remarks. For example, in differentiating professional artists from the folk artist “outsider,” she writes, “The compulsion to *know about other art*—to trace past influences and find new ones, to compete in the economic arena, to understand the critical issues surrounding art’s dialectic—this basic constellation of desires seems to be missing from the preoccupation of the folk artist.”²⁰ As this study will show, Livingston’s conclusions are too narrow to attribute to Morgan and they are also partial. Rather than be content with these assessments delivered in negative terms, I have set out to understand the nature of Morgan’s influences and critical issues shaping her artistic practice.

Rather than proposing a one-way history of an artist’s reception, my study assumes that social reciprocity is the basis for Morgan’s production. This dynamic is suggestively captured by Matt Anderson’s photograph of Morgan and Larry Borenstein, her primary dealer, at the 1972 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival and elsewhere [figs. 5-6]. Sitting on a bench in front of Morgan’s exhibition booth, Borenstein appears like the quintessential carnie worker (which he was in a former lifetime): his generous girth—barely contained, it seems, by his belt—summons the appetite for leisure and curiosity that he is in the business of selling. The cigar he balances between his ringed fingers only enhances this impression of smugness and proprietary ease. He is turned towards Morgan, the peculiar performer and artist whose “show” he has successfully launched at what would become one of the largest music festivals in the United States.

If we assumed a gaze from Borenstein’s bench, we could only construe Morgan as a naïve oddity. However, other aspects of Anderson’s photograph suggest otherwise: standing before her booth, she holds a makeshift megaphone to her mouth and directs some kind of admonishment to her dealer. Borenstein’s left hand clutches his chest, as if to defend himself from the force of her speech. Seemingly oblivious to this interaction is a woman, her back turned towards us, who surveys the artwork on view. In this arrangement, Borenstein’s reaction is just that: reactive, contingent upon Morgan’s verbal barrage to which he is subjected. In conceiving of her artistic work as akin to a “call-and-response,” my goal has been to regain a sense of her artistic and cultural agency to complicate the overweening primitivist conception that she was an isolate genius.

Method and Chapter Outline

My dissertation thus examines the trajectory and terms by which Morgan’s star rose within the pantheon of “twentieth-century folk art” and its offshoot, “black folk art.” Each of my chapters strives to portray a woman and artist who was regularly engaged with the denizens of New Orleans’ French Quarter and her local religious community. Spanning the period of 1960,

¹⁹ Jane Livingston, “What It Is,” in Livingston, John Beardsley, and Regenia Perry, *Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980* (Jackson, MS: Published for the Corcoran Gallery of Art by the University Press of Mississippi and Center for the Study of Southern Culture, 1982), 13.

²⁰ Livingston, 20.

the year when Morgan met Borenstein, her dealer, to 1982 when she was canonized in the *Black Folk Art in America* exhibition, my study argues that Morgan's painting practice flourished at the confluence of her evangelistic interests with the commercial and cultural interests of the secular "disciples" who promoted, collected, and exhibited her artworks. Whether her pictures were understood as the production of the Bride of Christ for her Lord, a romantic symbol of "authentic" black spirituality, or a distinctive part of New Orleans' heritage, what remains indisputable is the elasticity of her identity and pictures. They have signified multiple authenticities within intersecting discourses of African American Christianity, modern art, tourism, and national identity.²¹ In more succinct terms, my project interrogates the sites and conditions that allowed Morgan's art to travel along paths of black cultural traffic.²²

But my study is not solely intended as a cultural history; it is an art history concerned with the ways in which such meanings are opened up by artistic form. Each chapter relies on the term "sensation" as defined by Sally Promey: "relations among materialities, embodiment, the senses, and cognition" in which people engage to make sense of lived experience.²³ By extension, this consideration of sensation as a process of sensory attunements and awareness also encompasses how people shape their lives through certain patterns of sensory experience. The materials that Morgan and the other pertinent social actors engage are thus enlisted (through social action) for their potential to "convert" desires, beliefs, and intentions into potent cultural meanings. Morgan's choice of apparel is a case in point. What kinds of sacred meaning adhered to a cotton dress, knit sweater, or lace-trimmed blouse in such a way that, for Morgan, they were understood to transcend their utter mundaneness and elevate their wearer?

Similar processes of sensation, as my study details, revolve around the production and display of Morgan's evangelistic artworks, the planning of large-scale heritage festivals, and the musical and preacherly performances that all attempt to bridge some version of the past to instantiate some version of the future. Central to these contexts is the relationship between the visual and other forms of sensory perception, such as sound and touch, and how that relationship determined Morgan's positionality with her many audiences.²⁴ Alongside her artworks, photography, sound recordings, and printed ephemera, newly discovered archival materials suggest the contours of her reception. This reception both conformed to, and challenged, stereotypes of black performers, artists, and musicians. With an interest in the sensory experience of religion and the cultural construct of "black folk art," this project builds upon and sharpens the focus of William Fagaly's foundational research in *Tools of Her Ministry: The Art of Sister*

²¹ Emily Suzanne Clark, "She's the Four-leaf Clover in the City Katrina Turned Over: The Historical Sister Gertrude Morgan and Her Post-Katrina Specter," (Master's Thesis, University of Missouri-Columbia, 2009).

²² Harry J. Elam and Kennell Jackson, *Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

²³ Promey, 1.

²⁴ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 26-31.

Gertrude Morgan.²⁵ Fagaly's book provided the most complete account of Morgan's biography and contextualized her oeuvre as functional aspects of her religious practice; in this study, I connect her personal history to broader social and aesthetic ones.

To help frame the ways in which personal and social histories are aesthetically mediated, I turn to the idea of "kinesthetic imaginations," a concept I borrow from theater historian Joseph Roach.²⁶ In his use, kinesthetic imagination is a "faculty of memory" rooted in the body and its motions, whereupon individuals perform gestures, habits, and skills of lived experience *anew in the present*, yet always in relationship to a larger matrix of social memories, which are also rooted in written records, spoken narratives, and built environments. A kinesthetic imagination is a motivation and means of doing that is rooted in a truth whose currency operates in the realm of the virtual, the realm of belief. **Chapter 1** elaborates upon the virtuality of sanctification, the key doctrine of Morgan's religious belief that was cultivated within her African American Holiness-Pentecostal community. The ways in which Morgan experienced God, her divine marriage to Christ, and her calling to preach and make her art develop a larger argument about how Morgan's sanctified belief framed her personal memories and self-perception as a black woman.

As opposed to a strictly chronological account of Morgan's production and reception, my study as a whole stresses the social reciprocity through which sensation and kinesthetic imaginations converge and circulate. It thus concentrates upon the text and textures of artistic performances that are intercultural, a particular emphasis for **Chapter 2**. This chapter investigates Morgan's earliest position as representative of New Orleans "heritage." It argues that Morgan's visual practice came secondary to her musical and preacherly performances when it came to gaining cultural visibility. Only through her public exposure at the first five New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festivals (JazzFests) did her artistic practice intensify and her identity as a painter crystallize. With a focus on performance scenarios in which she was both recorded on audio tape and photographed, this chapter examines JazzFest as a crossroads in black cultural traffic.

The reciprocity that I seek focuses on the processes of modernity and the cultures of tradition they construct.²⁷ These processes have proposed enduring binaries that have not only prioritized vision above other senses, but have also sustained a separation between the secular and sacred, human and divine, and historically, racial blackness and whiteness. At some level, each of my chapters attempts to destabilize these false dichotomies to understand how Morgan, as a black woman artist, entered a vibrant, artistic field and negotiated her socio-cultural environment, reshaping racialized tropes along the way within the culturally fluid and water-logged terrain of New Orleans.

The capaciousness of the designation "self-taught" is taken up in **Chapter 3**. Though this chapter acknowledges the individualized process of "mastering of self and of that self's

²⁵ William A. Fagaly, *Tools of Her Ministry: The Art of Sister Gertrude Morgan* (New York, NY: American Folk Art Museum and Rizzoli International Publications, 2004).

²⁶ Roach, 26-27.

²⁷ Bauman and Briggs, 2003; and Promey, 2014.

expressive resources,” what follows demonstrates how the concept could be freighted with claims to authenticity that were deployed in two divergent ways.²⁸ First, I describe the process by which Morgan consciously embraced and developed her painting practice in response to an explicit calling from God to do so. Here, I take “self-teaching” at its most literal: how did Morgan develop her visionary, visual vocabulary? To what visual sources did she refer, and what did she learn from them? I then compare the ways in which two artists identified with Morgan’s auto-didacticism highlight the politics of claiming such an identity. Both Noel Rockmore, a trained figurative white painter, and Bruce Brice, an African American autodidact, reimagined Morgan’s self-taught training within the concerns of their respective practices. This chapter probes the boundaries of their two different deployments of “self-taught.” Rockmore’s interest in Morgan’s self-taught training falls within the primitivizing impulses he inherited: not only the modern primitive championed by New York dealer Sidney Janis and Museum of Modern Art curator Alfred Barr in the 1940s, but also the twentieth-century folk art promoted by Hemphill and Weissman of the 1960s. In contrast, Brice’s interest was shaped by the discourses of black radical politics.²⁹ In drawing out these different deployments of creative training, chapter 3 considers how “self-taught” could function as a marker of deficiency and privilege.

My study is not a strict monograph, in which biography is treated as the preeminent authenticating lens for determining an artwork’s meaning. If anything, the anecdote from the *Advertiser* with which I opened this introduction should caution against the fixation on an outsider artist’s life history. However, to reject biography is equally unacceptable when striving to recuperate a history that has been previously distorted or erased. I seek biographical specificity for the sake of defusing Sister Gertrude Morgan’s mythic persona by contextualizing her practice within the social and cultural communities that shaped her life. Nor is *Acts of Conversion* a catalogue raisonné. Of the nearly three hundred works by Morgan I have encountered, her *oeuvre* was vast and varied. Documentary photographs indicate that artwork displayed for sale (facilitated undoubtedly by Larry Borenstein and Allan Jaffe, who figure prominently in chapter 2) ranged from small three-by-three-inch portraits (almost always paired with a sheet of the artist’s religious writing) to her largest artworks, including Revelation “charters” that could span nearly three feet high and six feet long. I have selected and analyzed a handful of examples of Morgan’s work that suggest key preoccupations, illustrate her expressive skill (whether verbal competency in preaching or artistic facility), or provide insight into her attitudes towards painting and the art world. These include some of her earliest crayon drawings illustrating aspects of the bible, several self-portraits and autobiographical works, and scenes of the New Jerusalem. In keeping with the convention established in Fagaly’s monograph, titles are

²⁸ Roger Cardinal, “The Self in Self-Taught,” in Charles Russell, *Self-Taught: The Culture and Aesthetics of American Vernacular Art* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 78.

²⁹ The representative texts that constitute this genealogy are Sidney Janis’ *They Taught Themselves: American Primitive Painters of the 20th Century* (New York: The Dial Press, 1942) and Herbert Waide Hemphill, Jr. and Julia Weissman’s *Twentieth-Century Folk Art and Artists* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1974), and are critiqued by Julia Arbery in her pioneering work, *The Temptation: Edgar Tolson and the Genesis of Twentieth-Century Folk Art*, 1998.

taken directly from the first line of Morgan's writing that appears on them when available; in all other cases, the titles are descriptive of the main subject.

Several extended studies have laid the groundwork for the critical history of this dissertation. One of them is Julia Ardery's *The Temptation: Edgar Tolson and the Genesis of Twentieth-Century Folk Art*, a sociological study that treats the field as one of "action, interest, and meaning over roughly two decades."³⁰ Broader socio-cultural trends are her main focus; she calls attention to Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, the counterculture in 1960s, and a growing population of MFA graduates who created the interest in living craft artists, for example. Ardery argues that these historical developments created the cultural and symbolic currency Edgar Tolson's wood carvings mediated. The Kentucky artist's social marginality was attached to his art in response to the particular demands of a new niche in the 1960s art market.³¹ Taking stock of how discourses of high art, folk art, and sincerity interweave with liberal politics, Ardery's story ultimately turns upon the tragedy of class privilege and "ramifications of art's demands" that leave socially and economically impoverished artists vulnerable to exploitation.³² Yet her account is not a simple one of subjugation; she importantly addresses the agency of Tolson, the artist, in crafting a persona consonant with the expectations of primitivism held by folk art collectors. My dissertation seeks to enrich Ardery's excellent history by apprehending how race, religion, and gender configured these social operations of twentieth-century folk art.

Additional models for my study include the American Folk Art Museum's catalogue on the early twentieth-century artist Martin Ramirez.³³ This groundbreaking study combined research in social history with inquiries into Ramirez's visual culture as a Mexican immigrant and refugee. More recently, critical histories like Lynne Cooke's essay "Orthodoxies Undermined" in *"Great and Mighty Things": Outsider Art from the Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz Collection* (2013) and Katherine Jentleson's "Cracks in the Consensus" (2014) have laid out important institutional histories that chronicle the entrances of and subsequent positions held by artistic outliers vis-à-vis the contemporary art mainstream.³⁴ This dissertation is committed to following in the footsteps of these historically attentive scholars.

³⁰ Ardery, 2.

³¹ Ardery, especially chapter 3.

³² Ardery, 6.

³³ Brooke Davis Anderson, *Martín Ramírez* (Seattle, WA and New York: Marquand Books in association with American Folk Art Museum, 2007).

³⁴ For a range of helpful institutional histories of self-taught, folk, and outsider art, see Lynne Cooke, "Orthodoxies Undermined" in Ann Percy with Cara Zimmerman, *"Great and Mighty Things": Outsider Art from the Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz Collection* (Philadelphia and New Haven: Philadelphia Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press, 2013): 204-215; Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, *Made With Passion: The Hemphill Folk Art Collection in the National Museum of American Art* (Washington, D.C., and London: National Museum of American Art and Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990); Katherine Jentleson, "Cracks in the Consensus: Outsider Artists and Art World Ruptures," in Thomas Lax, *When the Stars Begin to Fall: Imagination and the American South*, exh. cat. (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2014): 106-114; Eugene W. Metcalf, Jr. "The Politics of the Past in American Folk Art History" in *Folk Art and Art Worlds*, John Michael Vlach and Simon J. Bronner, eds. (Ann Arbor, Mich.:

Given the proliferation of terms that have littered the bibliographies on the work of marginal and self-taught artists, it is worth clarifying how I employ them in the following chapters. Whenever possible, I adopt the term that cultural critics, reviewers, or dealers have employed to describe these works in their historical moment. Given this study's focus on the 1960s and 1970s, "folk," "primitive," and "naïve" are the most frequently used period terms; when referring to the field in general, I will often use "twentieth-century folk art" to distinguish the group of living artists that is my concern here from nineteenth-century non-academically trained artists and itinerant painters. I will use "self-taught/outsider art" as the name with the most recognition to date when referring to the current state of the field. "Outsider art" is an American derivative of *art brut*, a European analogue to outsider art that similarly named objects believed to be unadulterated by mainstream culture.³⁵ "Self-taught" has acquired currency as the most neutral descriptor starting in the politically correct climate of the 1990s; yet as I will argue, it is a term not without its own set of complications. By compounding both terms together, I intend for self-taught/outsider art to encompass the field in its entirety, namely the genealogies mentioned here and the fraught status of the field today.

I use "black folk art" to specify the concept put forth by Jane Livingston in the seminal exhibition of 1982, *Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980* and articulated in the catalogue's lead essay, "What It Is." Her formulation explicitly excludes a more conservative view of "folk art": "It is, admittedly, a newly examined aspect of the American 'self-taught' or 'isolate' or 'naïf/visionary' esthetic—at least it is more this than it is an extension of any American 'craft' or 'folkloric' esthetic."³⁶ By Livingston's confession in this statement, "black folk art" appears to be ill-chosen as an exhibition title if the curatorial goal was to differentiate these artworks from those produced by generations of potters, wood-carvers, and quilters—those objects conventionally known as "folk art" in which handicraft and artisanal knowledge are central to their production.³⁷ The fact that almost all twenty artists in *Black Folk Art in America* worked in

UMI Research Press, 1986): 27–50; Eugene W. Metcalf, "Folk Art, Museums, and Collecting the Modern American Self" in *Contemporary American Folk, Naïve, and Outsider Art: Into the Mainstream?* (Oxford, Ohio: Miami University Art Museum, 1990): 12-22; Beatrix T. Rumford, "Uncommon Art of the Common People: A Review of Trends in the Collecting and Exhibiting of American Folk Art," in *Perspectives on American Folk Art*, Ian M. G. Quimby and Scott T. Swank, eds. (Winterthur, DE and New York, N.Y.: The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum and W. W. Norton & Company, 1980): 13–53; Lynne E. Spriggs, Joanne Cubbs, Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, and Susan Mitchell Crawley, *Let It Shine: Self-Taught Art from the T. Marshall Hahn Collection* (Atlanta, GA and Jackson, MS: High Museum of Art, distributed by the University Press of Mississippi, 2001).

³⁵ Cooke, 204. As Cooke also discusses, the idea of *art brut* was formulated by French artist Jean Dubuffet who championed art of the mentally ill and children for the intensely subjective creative process he discerned in their art. Dubuffet's emphasis on the psychological isolation of the "outsider artist" set the field on a path distinctive from that of the United States.

³⁶ Livingston, "What It Is," 20.

³⁷ To complicate matters further, the catalogue also included an essay by art historian Regenia Perry, "Black American Folk Art." Her argument highlighted several compelling continuities of black folk art with African art and "previous folk art accomplishments of Black Americans." Perry's writing spotlighted the very group of objects against which Livingston distinguishes the artists in the exhibition. Black folk art, then, is both connected to the

media that would have been recognizable to a contemporary art audience as art (i.e., paintings, drawings, assemblage, relief carving, and sculpture) supported Livingston's bid to define a new kind of avant-garde art. Livingston argues that black folk art was altogether different from craft or conventional folk art, a conviction derived from her belief that important art was not sentimental, remained oppositional, and was formally innovative.³⁸ With this in mind, I want to make clear the modernist roots of the black folk art discourse I primarily engage here, though the scholarly work of anthropologists, folklorists, and historians of art significantly inform the broader field of cultural analysis against which black folk art emerged. Intrinsic to this field are the politics of naming themselves. Whether terms like Afro-American, African American, Negro, Black, and, most recently, post-black are invoked, each is freighted with ideologies about the status of people of the African diaspora with society at large. These adjectives are presumed to signify something about racialized subjects' sameness or difference within the American body politic or national progress away from racism and our national ideals of equality and freedom. In this study, "African American" and "black" are used interchangeably in reference these shifting, diverse, and often contemporaneous ideas about racial "origins" and race relations.³⁹

If adjudicating the relationship of an artist individual to her/his community—be it intellectual, artistic, racial, or developmental—defines the fault lines of self-taught/outsider art, other key issues interlace the construct of black folk art: the history of African American art, the investments of other academic disciplines, and the discourse of race in the United States. Lynda Hartigan identifies several of these dilemmas in her 1986 article, "Recent Challenges in the Study of African American Folk Art."⁴⁰ Many of them relate to the elasticity of the term "folk." As I have just mentioned, Livingston's "folk" separated non-academically trained creators from mainstream artists. Here, Livingston's emphasis on gratuitous "aesthetic form mastered in isolation" was in direct opposition to the view advanced by anthropologist John Michael Vlach. His conception of "folk" retained a more conservative view that referred to utilitarian forms that transmitted social values within a clearly bound group.⁴¹ Yet as Hartigan clearly argues, these two points of view—one staking its claims on an artist's aesthetic fluency and the other on his/her cultural fluency—can be reconciled. Aesthetic interpretation and ethnography can

past, yet also a total break from it. Perry, "Black American Folk Art," in *Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980*, 25-37.

³⁸ Livingston, "What It Is," 23. She revisits several of these ideas in the essay, "The Art of the Self-Taught/The Art of Our Time," included in Alice Rae Yelen, *Passionate Visions of the American South: Self-Taught Artists from 1940 to the Present* (New Orleans, LA and Jackson, MS: New Orleans Museum of Art in association with University Press of Mississippi, 1993): 21-28.

³⁹ For examples from both popular and art historical sources on the shifting terminology of race over time, see Lerone Bennett, Jr., "What's in a Name? Negro vs. Afro-American vs. Black," *Ebony* 23 (November 1967): 46-48, 50-52, 54; Rachel L. Swarns, "'African-American' Becomes a Term for Debate," *New York Times* August 29, 2004, accessed August 1, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/08/29/us/african-american-becomes-a-term-for-debate.html>; and Thelma Golden, "Post..." in *Freestyle* (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem) 2001.

⁴⁰ Lynda Hartigan, "Recent Challenges in the Study of African American Folk Art," *International Review of African American Art*, 11:3 (1994): 27-29, 60-63.

⁴¹ Hartigan, 60.

converge when objects such as Elijah Pierce's evangelical woodcarvings are approached as material culture, as they were treated in the Columbus Museum of Art's 1992 exhibition on the artist. Understood in this way, the art object stands at the crossroads of Pierce's role as a lay minister within his African American community in Columbus, Ohio (along with several other group associations), as well as his individual history, such as his northward migration from Mississippi in the 1920s. My approach in *Acts of Conversion* follows Hartigan's recommendations by striving to recover a sense of Gertrude Morgan's interpersonal relationships and communities of identification as essential to understanding the aesthetics of her art.

My decision to emphasize Morgan's cultural fluency at a personal and localized scale mitigates the risk of further segregating non-academically trained African American artists by enfolding them within overdetermined narratives of racial experience. One example that Hartigan names is the African "retentionist" argument, which has gained the most visibility through the work of Robert Farris Thompson. This approach seeks cultural and expressive continuities between Africa and cultures throughout the diaspora. Hartigan states the problem plainly: "Ironically, one of the key factors in advancing that study [of African American folk art] has also begun to impede it, and that is the pursuit of African influences in black American art, *to the exclusion* of other similarly enlightening considerations and approaches."⁴² To this line of reasoning, I would also add that the pursuit of African influences can run counter to the ways in which African American artists regarded their own work. To assert an influence where an artist would reject or not identify with it runs the risk of reinforcing a relationship of intellectual colonialism in the name of efforts to undo it.⁴³ Therefore, the reader will find that I incorporate discussions of "Africanisms" sparingly, even when Morgan lived and worked for half of her life in New Orleans, arguably the most creolized city in the United States. The "retentionist" argument that I tread around carefully has been advanced by the important art historical work of Regenia Perry, Maude Southwell Wahlman, and Alvia Wardlaw, among others, which fits within a larger project of defining transatlantic continuities between Africa and the New World in the creative work of African Americans. Without denying the need to resist white erasure, my analysis avoids making claims for any *fixed* racial aspects in Morgan's work that could otherwise restrict our understanding of how her visual art and practice could actually undermine such racial categories.

Instead, my effort to adhere closely to the cultural terms that were active for Morgan and to respect those values even as I attempt to sketch them out follows Darby English's admonition to move beyond "black representational space"—to let the works of art lead the way of analysis, name the issues of their concern, and present their own ways of being and knowing. In some pictures, Morgan's racial identity is the theme, while in others, it plays a lesser role. This dissertation is my attempt to let one artist's "muffled voice" speak in its own timbre and volume,

⁴² Hartigan, 61.

⁴³ This position acknowledges that art historians do often critically write about art in ways that an artist might reject, or that an artist's perceptions need not limit what his/her artwork signifies. My qualification is made in direct reference to the speculative strains of retentionist scholarship.

allowing for the coexistence of its ambivalences and convictions—to permit nuances lost beneath monolithic constructions of self-taught/outsider art to come to light in all their complexity and texture.⁴⁴

For this reason, while I admire the attentiveness to blues culture and rigorous historical research that Mechal Sobel incorporates in her book, *Painting a Hidden Life: The Art of Bill Traylor*, I eschew the iconographical maps she aims to “decode” meanings of Traylor’s pictures. For an artist like Morgan, the plenitude of her archive (evidenced in her poetry, writings, invocations of gospel songs, and religious texts published elsewhere) and the text she inscribes on her artworks are illuminated as a citational practice. Within various scenarios, Morgan’s performances become displays of a kind of skilled, expressive competence adapted to the situation of social encounter. For another artist like Horace Pippin, for example, other methods of analysis would be pertinent in ways unsuited to Morgan’s worlds of association.⁴⁵

I have limited my study exclusively to Morgan, rather than assemble a series of case studies for two reasons. First, I wanted my contribution to pursue analytical depth within a field overly populated by surveys and catalogues that repeat many of the same, brief narratives of self-taught/outsider art. Focusing on a single artist has allowed me to identify areas of investigation over the course of research. Second, of all the self-taught/outsider artists I could have chosen to study, Morgan has left behind a remarkable archive of letters, writings, and paintings in both public and private collections. These materials are testimonies to her extroverted, indomitable life, and present an extraordinary opportunity to re-examine the contours of her art and the conception of self-taught/outsider art that launched it into visibility.

Studying Morgan’s artwork has proven to be farther reaching than I initially could have imagined; nevertheless the fundamental questions have remained constant: what were the key elements of Morgan’s lived experience, and how did these traits impact her visual practice? In what ways did Morgan’s religious belief engage aspects of modernity such as technologies of reproduction and commodification? What does the reception of her work register about the relationship between religion and contemporary art worlds? This study proposes just a few answers to these questions in the hope it will encourage others to take her work in further directions.

Acts of Conversion: Sister Gertrude Morgan and the Sensation of Black Folk Art, 1960-1983 is on many levels a study about shifting centers and the processes that propel their movement –processes of perceiving and narrating lived experience, religious belief, and art and its institutions that put people in touch with multiple systems of knowledge, economies, and beliefs. In this sense, “conversion” proceeds from a more fundamental desire to possess a vision or hope which has yet to be realized—in as much as it describes one’s attempts to reconcile new things into familiar systems. The attempt to possess a different vision within Western aesthetic

⁴⁴ Didi Barrett, *Muffled Voices: Folk Artists in Contemporary America* (New York, N.Y.: Museum of American Folk Art and the Paine Webber Art Gallery, 1986).

⁴⁵ For example, Lauren Kroiz’s current research is informed by disability and trauma studies, in addition to rigorous historical context of the interwar period.

frameworks is in large part what Morgan accomplished, and with the creative intelligence, commitment, and verve of an artist whom we should be more apt to recognize by that name.

Chapter 1

Possessing the Sanctified Self

Show forth your powers of mind. Prove to the world that

*Though black your skins as shades of night,
Your hearts are pure, your souls are white.*

This is the land of freedom.

– The Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart, Presented to the
First African Baptist Church & Society, 1835

*I want you People to no / God is watching you hearing all you say and seeing all you do. / I'm
putting out these Poem's / God give's them to me / those two great men of mine t[hey] Really have
SET ME FREE.*

– “The Bosses Wife Sister Gertrude Morgan,” *Saturday
Evening 1971*

A Calling Introduced

Sister Gertrude Morgan wanted the facts of her life known; in fact, she composed a formal account of her life's story in *A Poem of My Calling* sometime circa 1963-1970 [figure 7]. Though she was born in 1900 in LaFayette, Alabama, the story she chooses to narrate is a spiritual biography tracing her path towards closer union with God and Christ. The first event occurred “in 1934 on the 30th Day of Dec 30 years ago,” when the “Heavenly Father” said to her, “I'll make thee as a signet for I have chosen thee. Go ye into yonders world an sing with a loud voice for you are a chosen vessel to call men women girls and boys.” The language of the signet appears in Haggai 2:23 of the Old Testament, in which God declares his intent to confer his servant, Zerubbabel, with royal status in a day of coming judgment.⁴⁶ That Morgan understood her revelation in this context is clear: after telling readers that she left “her home” for New Orleans in 1939 and began an eighteen year period of “mission work in the black robe...teaching holiness and righteousness,” Morgan explains how God had “taken me out of the black robe and

Citations from Gertrude Morgan's writing have been transcribed as they appear on her artworks and manuscripts, therefore [*sic*] should be understood whenever grammatical or spelling errors appear. The most comprehensive catalogue of Morgan's work is William A. Fagaly's *Tools of Her Ministry: The Art of Sister Gertrude Morgan* (New York: Rizzoli and the American Folk Art Museum, 2004). Works not extensively discussed are cited herein using Fagaly's catalogue numbers. All biblical citations are taken from the King James Version, the translation used by the artist.

⁴⁶ Haggai 2:23 reads, “In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the LORD, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the LORD of hosts.”

crowned me out in white.” Immediately following, she directs her listeners to prophetic passages in the Christian Old and New Testament bible—Revelation 19 and 22, and Isaiah 54—as texts that legitimize these events as the fulfillment of her divine calling. With bold lettering to match her boldness of speech, Morgan’s poem closes with nods to her new identities as the “wife of my Redeemer” and as “Anna.”

In citing “Anna,” the elder woman prophet of Luke 2:36, Morgan likely located a kinship with Anna’s age (Morgan would have been in her early sixties when she first composed the poem) and the once-married status they shared.⁴⁷ Morgan also allied herself with Anna’s role of prophetess and servant of God, one of the heralds who, in the gospel accounts, announced to the world God’s intervention into earthly life through the birth of Christ, God incarnate. Composed with occasional rhymes, such as “voice” with “boys,” “1938” with “straight gate,” or “through” with “to,” Morgan’s speech intertwines prose with poetry that similarly elevates her speech, while in turn effecting her own transformation from ordinariness to distinction as God’s mouthpiece. In this way, Morgan literalizes her new identity pictorially as well, by including a small self-portrait, in which she is a guitar-strumming Bride of Christ dressed in “fine linen, clean and white,” that is, in clothing appropriate to the “the righteousness of saints” (Revelation 19:8). This colophon, comprised of a dark brown face, two penetrating eyes, and a surround of white, blue, and vibrant pink, all cut a striking visual figure to show beholders the body whose story is told in the verses that follow.

My invocation of Richard Powell’s concept of “cutting a figure” introduces a key methodological anchor that grounds this chapter’s consideration of Morgan’s chosen modes of self-representation and self-portraiture practice.⁴⁸ As an interpretative conceit, “cutting a figure” is Powell’s point of entry into the “incisive cultural work” performed by black subjects in racialized portrayals. In particular, self-fashioning, sartorial choices and rhetoric of the body catalyze, he argues, new modes of embodied existence. Within an embattled socio-political field of representation—of seeing and being seen—these modes fall beneath gazes of censure, desire, and stereotype. Powell’s approach to reading portraits of black subjects “[opens] up the process (and politics) of portraiture, identifying its performative aspects, and revealing the whys and hows of a modern and composite human design.”⁴⁹ Invoking a passage in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, Powell foregrounds the issues of stylistic citation and authorship that drive his study of African American portraiture: “What design and whose” do his subjects mobilize?⁵⁰ For the subjects in Powell’s study, self-possession of gaze and body—achieved, for example, in Donyale Luna’s cool ethereality or Barley L. Hendricks’ sitters-in-suspension—commands the

⁴⁷ Luke 2:36 reads, “And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher: she was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity.” An approximate date of composition can be determined by a handbill containing this same poem, with minor differences, that is printed with the year 1963.

⁴⁸ Richard J. Powell, *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2008).

⁴⁹ Powell, 14.

⁵⁰ *Cutting a Figure*, 18-20.

arena of visibility in ways that seek to interrupt viewers' conventional, racializing portrayals [figs. 8-9].

Gertrude Morgan's self-portraits considered here engage in similar questions of racially- and culturally-inflected subjectivity, yet they resonate differently than the slashing visual "cut" of Powell's construct. Indeed, in addition to picturing, they *resonate* because they lean heavily upon, as *A Poem of My Calling* shows, operations of speaking and writing to capture adequately her likeness. As artworks concerned with mastering self-knowledge through creative means rather than meeting institutional standards of art practice—which Roger Cardinal argues is the benchmark of self-taught art—Morgan's self-portraits are passionate testimonies to Christian scriptural truths composed of religious, existential transformations that penetrate deeply in mind and body. They also crucially depend on "an equally uninhibited relish for publicity" to fulfill the imperative to give evidence to and declare faith in a god.⁵¹ As such, they require persuasion along visual and linguistic registers to satisfy "the need to display (and if necessary to defend) that self within a wider social ambit."⁵²

Specifically, at stake for Morgan in creating these artworks is her apprehension of a spiritual selfhood that reflects, satisfactorily, the image of the Christian Trinity of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (to whom Morgan also referred as "Holy Ghost" or "Spirit of God").⁵³ Along with speaking and writing, the Trinitarian's preeminent presence introduces another element to the task of representing herself to a public audience. On this religious level of piety and moral accountability, the pressing question for Morgan's art is, in Virginia Burrus's phrasing: "Whose word names her flesh?"⁵⁴ Or to quote Michel de Certeau, the question might alternately be put, "Do we exist to speak to the other, or be spoken by him?"⁵⁵

This chapter examines Morgan's beliefs about divine will and how they configured the terms for her self-knowing and self-representation. The central lens is the doctrine of sanctification derived from twentieth-century black Baptist and Holiness practice, which teaches believers that seeking bodily inhabitation by the spirit of God through faithful service was the highest form of religious fulfillment, for it signaled unity with God, spiritual power, and moral purity. In its propositions of love, affirmation, and individual empowerment from such an authority as God, sanctification, I argue, offered a basis of belief that not only dismantled racist, objectifying constructs that a figure like Morgan would have encountered, but also provided a language with which dignity and humanity could be assumed for personal emancipatory ends. Sanctification further overcame prevailing social and theological proscriptions against African

⁵¹ Roger Cardinal, "The Self in Self-Taught Art," in *Self-Taught Art: The Culture and Aesthetics of American Vernacular Art*, ed. Charles Russell (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 78.

⁵² Cardinal, 78.

⁵³ For example, see "Poem, Sister Gertrude Morgan" May 10, 1959 recording at 726 St. Peter Street, reel to reel tape, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University, New Orleans.

⁵⁴ Virginia Burrus, "Word and Flesh: The Bodies and Sexuality of Ascetic Women in Christian Antiquity," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 10:1 (Spring 1994), 51.

⁵⁵ Michel de Certeau, "Mystic Speech," *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 91.

American women entering public life, since the indwelling Holy Spirit was the only legitimizing entity necessary to challenge existing social limitations. Thus, sanctification was one historical means by which Morgan and her fellow female missionaries could reconfigure the “American grammar” of race and gender forged by slavery, and repossess their bodies with all manner of discursive and creative means.⁵⁶

The basic contours of Morgan’s biography have been well-known and often reported from the 1970s onward, coinciding with the period of Morgan’s most concentrated visual production and her gallerist Larry Borenstein’s promotional efforts (which I discuss in greater detail in chapter 2). Local newspaper articles have variously registered her birth in LaFayette, Alabama, her involvement with Rose Hill Baptist Church in Columbus during her young adult years, her missionary work with two elder sanctified women, and her eventual turn to painting around 1956-57.⁵⁷ Primarily human interest stories, these earliest accounts have offered little nuance in exploring the ways in which religious belief, social practice, and material production interact; rather, they have tended to (re)read biographical and anecdotal details—the white dress, her husky voice, the spontaneous “hallelujah,” or unpredictable “attack [on a] poor cardboard box like it was the devil”—to fit Morgan into tropes of naiveté, child-likeness, spontaneity, and religious extremism in a revivification of her social marginality vis-à-vis their mainstream readership.⁵⁸ This preoccupation with Morgan’s otherness diminishes the history of her sanctified knowledge and spiritual intelligence and inhibits renewed understanding into alternate kinds of social being.

Like the sanctified “radical spiritual mothers” that preceded her in the nineteenth century—women including Zilpha Elaw, Jarena Lee, Rebecca Jackson, Amanda Berry Smith, Sojourner Truth, Maria W. Stewart, and Virginia W. Broughton—Morgan’s cultural productivity derived from decades of religious formation alongside like-minded believers, making any investigation into sanctification a social, economic, political, and community-focused one.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17:2 (Summer 1987), 68, 80.

⁵⁷ For example, see Eric Newhouse, “Prayers Painted by Sister Gertrude Morgan,” *Advertiser* (Lafayette, Louisiana) 5 November 1972, 55 in vertical file clipping, “Morgan,” American Art/Portrait Gallery Library, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Rosemary Kent, “Sister Gertrude Morgan” *Interview* September 1973: 40-41. For a more extensive bibliography, see Fagalay, 104-106.

⁵⁸ Sandi Donnelly, “She’s Painting to Speak the Gospel in a New Form” *Times-Picayune* 12 December 1972: section 2, 2, and James Everett, “Gospel Sung, painted by ‘Sister’ Gertrude” (*New Orleans*) *Clarion Herald* 9 April 1970: 1 and 8. A notable exception to this primitivist mode of reporting during the 1970s is F.D. Cossitt, “‘Sister Gertrude,’ Artist, Musician” *Richmond Times-Dispatch* 26 November 1972.

⁵⁹ Rosetta R. Haynes, *Radical Spiritual Motherhood: Autobiography and Empowerment in Nineteenth-century African American Women* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 10-47. While scholarship on the Black Church is fractured and extraordinarily diverse, its historical role as “the cultural womb of the black community” and “custodia[n] of the black community’s basic societal values” makes any claim to the separation between sacred and secular difficult to sustain. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), xii-xiii, 8. Fortunately the numbers of studies on African American self-taught art that engage the sociocultural dimensions of religious practice is

Thus, the first half of this chapter establishes the social worlds of meaning, values, metaphor, and practice within Morgan's African American Baptist (and later Holiness-Pentecostal) background. Autobiographical writings, paintings, and archival records form the basis of this interpretative biography that situates Morgan's pictorial and textual narratives within the historical fabric and progression of her life. One goal is to provide a biographical arc, and as such, I proceed chronologically for readers unfamiliar with Morgan's background. However, my analysis is aligned with the retrospective point of view that Morgan adopts in her self-portrayals. She composes her narrative as a fully sanctified woman looking back on past events. Consequently, the other, overarching goal seeks to apprehend how Morgan's religious conversion to sanctified Christianity fundamentally shaped how she understood and told her life's history.

The chapter's second section continues this exploration through a group of self-portraits that depict and narrate the climactic moment of her sanctification, her bridal crowning. It asks, how did the trope of the "Bride of Christ" guide the development of and redefine Morgan's sense of self?⁶⁰ If Morgan, in her stated devotion to God, is in many ways a mystic, how can we understand her narratives of sanctification to have the power to transform "language into a network of allocutions and present alliances" between the devotee, the divine, and those outside of this privileged relationship?⁶¹ What can we learn about the ways sanctification functioned to empower an African American woman like Morgan? How are these immaterial experiences of the spirit made intelligible and represented materially?⁶² Morgan's reputation in modern and contemporary art worlds has been built upon her identity as the Bride of Christ, and these sections grapple with valences of race and gender that are forged and performed "within the imaginative crucible of [Morgan's] art," and which are too often absented from discussions.⁶³

This chapter ultimately chronicles the events, religious practices, and governing ideas that were formative for her eventual picture-making practice. For the nineteenth-century women mentioned above, spiritual narratives emerge as the genre recording each woman's journey from

growing. These include Gerald L. Davis, "Elijah Pierce, Woodcarver: Doves and Pain in Life Fulfilled," in *The Artist Outsider: Creativity and the Boundaries of Culture*, Michael D. Hall and Eugene W. Metcalf Jr., eds. (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994); Mechal Sobel, *Painting a Hidden Life: The Art of Bill Traylor* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009); and Edward M. Puchner, "Godly Fruit in a Modern Era: The Evangelical Church, the African American Experience, and a Redefinition of American Folk Art" (doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, submitted 2012).

⁶⁰ Powell argues that African American portraitists were ultimately concerned with "the conceptual challenge of self-awareness and self-agency, especially as it impacts (and functions within the portraiture of) peoples of African descent, who have struggled with this challenge under real-life constraints of vilification, dependency, and an all-consuming desire for freedom." *Cutting a Figure*, 77.

⁶¹ de Certeau, 90.

⁶² Art historian Sally Promey has argued, "The material encodes, signifies, shapes, and constrains the construction of Christian subjectivities and the processes of their transformation." Sally Promey, "Hearts and Stones: Material Transformations and the Stuff of Christian Practice in the United States," Yale Classes v2 electronic document (accessed fall 2011), 659-660.

⁶³ Cardinal, 79.

sin to salvation. The burden of proving one's ability to read and write as an African American, much less a woman of color, stood as the foremost obstacle to recognizing authorship and humanity for their black and white audiences.⁶⁴ For Sojourner Truth, cartes-de-visite circulated simultaneously with printed editions of her autobiography; they became the social currency for a woman who resisted the terms of enslavement through a perspicacious deployment of photographic practices and text in arenas of public discourse despite being illiterate.⁶⁵ For Morgan, her reasons for turning to drawing and writing have been less explored, though they were, for the most part, similarly intended for public viewership as tools of her evangelistic ministry. My second chapter deals more fully with public aspects of her performance and visual practice in relationship to a market for objects of heritage; my main concern here is the pre-history of Morgan's better known artistic persona that began to grow starting around 1957. Traditionally, pursuing sanctification within the Holiness movement meant an embrace of the emotionalism of the shout—a rapturous, bodily and affective engagement with song, extemporaneous prayer, and testimony. These verbal genres realize and sustain a disciplined life of holy living and abstention from “the world.”⁶⁶ Making pictures was not a typical extension of sanctified practice, yet Morgan made it hers—a mystic's procedure for producing “endless narrativity” to travel into the divine beyond.⁶⁷ This chapter initiates a discussion on the hows and whys of this journey.

PART 1: Narrative and the (Sanctified) Education of Gertrude Morgan

From a painting and undated manuscript, we learn that Morgan had three years of education in Opelika, Alabama's public school from 1910-1912 when she was ten to twelve years old, enough to give Morgan a foundation of grammar upon which she could build greater literacy [figs. 10-11]. With segregation firmly entrenched in all aspects of life during these years, she attended either the Opelika Colored School that was just opening in 1910, or one of the neighborhood schools for African Americans established in teachers' houses and churches near her home [fig. 12].⁶⁸ Her abbreviated schooling likely derived from her family's movement

⁶⁴ Original versions of their accounts are published, along with others, in *Spiritual Narratives*, The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., general editor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁶⁵ Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, “Negative-Positive Truths,” *Representations* 113:1 (Winter 2011), 16-38.

⁶⁶ During a shout, “what registers...is the passion's strength, which sweeps through the mind like rhythms through the body.” Glen Hinson, *Fire in My Bones: Transcendence and the Holy Spirit in African American Gospel* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 101.

⁶⁷ De Certeau, 81-2.

⁶⁸ Doris Canon, “Opelika's Public Schools,” accessed 6 March 2013, <http://www.opelikapepperellhistory.com/id221.html>. As William Fagaly first brought to light, “Williams” was Gertrude Morgan's family name. Fagaly, 4. If the Gertrude Williams recorded in the 1910 Census is the artist as a young girl, then she would have travelled across the state from Rehoboth in Wilcox County—where she had been living with a step-uncle and aunt—to Opelika in Lee County, reuniting with at least three of her five siblings—

between the small towns of LaFayette, Phenix City, and Girard along the Alabama-Georgia border, combined with scarce schooling options and the need to work and contribute to the family economy. Little historical information remains about African American schools in Opelika.

Nevertheless, if we can consider the curricula at rural schools instituted throughout the state's eastern counties as close to what Morgan was taught, the pragmatic use of language and literacy for agricultural and domestic tasks becomes clear. Established three years after Morgan's final year of formal education in 1915, the rural schools founded in Lee, Russell, and Chambers Counties—the three covering the Chattahoochee River Valley of Morgan's youth [fig. 13]—belonged to a larger network of “negro schools.” These schools were financially supported by the philanthropy of Anna T. Jeanes, an education advocate and Quaker, and Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears & Roebuck Company, as well as guided by Booker T. Washington. With the plantation system dismantled following the Civil War, rural schools were designed to teach industrial and homemaking skills that the plantation once deemed essential to “better individual citizenship and then in returns in dollars and cents to the material advancement of the community.”⁶⁹ Rural schools stressed “the fundamentals of living, teaching the children to be decent and clean, to acquire the elements of an elementary knowledge of books, [and] to learn the dignity of labor and the joy of better home making.”⁷⁰

A membership form for the “Homemaker Clubs for Negro Girls,” a supplemental rural school program, exemplifies the ways in which growing and harvesting vegetables, cooking, and canning were indeed a chief application for reading, writing, and arithmetic. Though scant records capture responses from the teenage pupils, a degree of predictable acquiescence to the industrial and reformist pedagogy emerges from Margie L. Cooper, age 12, who compliantly reports, “I have white washed my house. And out doors and did my duty towards the club [*sic*].” For the white-capped and aproned girls in the Homemaker's Club of Hickory Grove, taut and expressionless faces seem to deflect, as best they can, what Laura Wexler has called the “tender violence” of domestic imperialism exerted upon racial and ethnic others through the force of gendered, educational reform movements [figs. 14-15].⁷¹

Lillie, Jessie, and Lewis—who are listed in the 1910 census at 3 Avenue C, along with two older widows and another relative (the reasons for her family's dispersal are unknown). According to Sanborn maps for Opelika from 1909, if Gertrude indeed reunited with her siblings, she would have been a few blocks from the former Baptist High School, located on S. Fourth Street between Avenues A and B. She could have been one of 4,187 black students enrolled in one of five colored schools, and the dearth of resources available to her would not have been surprising for a rural county school, much less a black rural county school. Statistics found in the Annual Reports of the Alabama Department of Education, 1910-1912, Alabama Department of History and Archives (ADAH).

⁶⁹ James T. Sibley, Alabama's Rural School Agent, “The Obligation of the Rural School to the Negro Boy and Girl” in Rural School Agent Correspondence, “Speeches, 1915-1917” folder 1, ADAH.

⁷⁰ Sibley, 2.

⁷¹ Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), especially chapter 3.

The “tender violence” of racial assimilation that motivated domestic reform projects was an ideology enacted through the eye of sentimentalism, Wexler argues. Its affective register obstructs from view the humanity of the African American and Native American subjects who fell beneath its gaze during the era of turn-of-the-century progressive reform programs. While the photographer of this “faithful group of Hickory Grove Homemaker’s Club Girls” is unknown, the rhetorical voice in this instrumentalized photograph similarly participates in the sentimental mode of domestic imperialism: quietude, tonal lucidity (achieved through white cloth against dark skin), pictorial seamlessness, and controlled postures of the young girls bespeak patriarchal aesthetics.⁷²

We are fortunate that Morgan recorded a few details about her labor as a teenager, and a one-page manuscript suggests that she remained within spheres circumscribed for young black women, working for white employers in intimate, domestic settings. She recalls working for George Simms, the county tax assessor, during her teens in Opelika; a Mr. Brownfield, co-owner of the town’s buggy and saddle shop; and as a nurse for a Mr. Ben Talner and the Vann family.⁷³ Appearing sporadically in Columbus city directories during the 1920s and 1930s was her husband Will Morgan (whom she married in 1928), who was listed as a laborer for a local lumber mill. Her mother Frances and sister Lillie are listed as laundresses, cooks, and servants. They were presumably employed by white families residing in neighborhoods near their homes.⁷⁴ Morgan and her working-class family’s livelihoods were fundamentally dependent upon the wealth commanded by white individuals, a division of economic power that emphasizes the class boundaries drawn by Morgan’s race and gender.

Although Wexler’s carefully wrought social history suggests the likeliest and prescribed social path for Morgan during the first twenty years of her life, it offers only one angle on black education and citizenship during the early twentieth century. Through close readings of the artworks and writings Morgan left behind, we gain a port of entry into another history of education. A closer examination suggests that Morgan operated within an intertextual practice that is complex in its references to both the acoustical performances and literacy events pervasive in her African American Baptist and Holiness communities, and to dominant white Protestant culture. Mainline African American denominations assimilated certain white middle-class practices, such as singing traditional hymns, adopting a firm order of service, and the building of parallel institutions and infrastructure. Despite, or even alongside, such accommodations, black

⁷² Wexler, 152. Wexler’s thesis, it should be noted, concentrates on the position of white women photographers who peddled images of domestic imperialism to attain footholds in the male-dominated arena of photojournalism.

⁷³ “This is Sister Gertrude Morgan Gertrude Williams before marriage,” Sacha Borenstein Clay Collection, New Orleans. In her biographical sketch, Morgan also mentions an acquaintance with “Mr. Leonard Trawick a real rich man.” L.M. Trawick, possibly this same man was indeed engaged with local business to a great extent, holding an office with the Bank of Opelika and one-third share in the Trawick Land Company, organized in 1905 and in possession of over 1,250 acres of land in Russell County. See, for example, public statements of Condition of The Bank of Opelika, *Opelika Daily News*, April 16, 1910, January 14, 1911, and November 17, 1911. Lee County Probate Records, LGM 292 R24, ADAH.

⁷⁴ Columbus City Directory (Birmingham, AL: R.L. Polk and Co.), years 1918-1940.

churches retained aspects of African communal life and culture; so too, did Morgan in her visual practice.

Morgan's quotation of children's verse in writings like "Blossom Bells" and the popular hymn "All things bright and beautiful" indicates exposure to and adoption of a repertoire of rhymes and songs that have origins in white Protestant culture.⁷⁵ Along with the rhyming structures of her poems and employment of acrostics in her alphabet poems, Morgan's aesthetic deployments of language all have a basis in social environments of teaching and learning.⁷⁶ Perhaps there were a few informal instructors—an educated elder or formally-schooled white employer; but if there was a significant teacher in Morgan's life, his or her name does not appear in the artist's body of work. If asked, Morgan might have employed spiritual language to account for her incremental acquisition of reading and writing skills: God had taught her.⁷⁷ From this perspective, the aims of her literacy were not what those at Opelika Public School might have intended. Anthropologist Grey Gundaker has argued that, within African American vernacular performance, conventional literate skill could be reconfigured by and subordinated to spiritual visions concerning communication with the divine, and with the movement and intent of God.⁷⁸ In Morgan's case, we see this dynamic of co-existing knowledge worlds littered throughout her

⁷⁵ "Easter Song sing childrens," Sacha Borenstein Clay Collection. The latter hymn appears in a Morgan painting in the collection of Christopher and Jane Botsford, and was written by Cecil Alexander in 1848. A popular Episcopal hymn, it can be found published as early as 1850 in *Hymns for Little Children* (Philadelphia: H. Hooker, 1850), 27, accessed 18 August 2013, <http://archive.org/details/hymnsforlittlech00alex>. That the British comedy group Monty Python has composed a parody of it, entitled "All Things Dull and Ugly," speaks to the song's familiarity in white Anglo-Protestant circles.

⁷⁶ For a discussion of nursery rhymes and children's primers in the United States in producing visual and biblical literacy, see David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 102-105.

⁷⁷ Among African Americans with little or no access to Freedman's schools, rural schools, or Industrial education during Reconstruction and Jim Crow, the supernatural gifting of literacy was a common explanation among religious believers. Julia A. Foote, born 1823 in Schenectady, New York and converted at the age of fifteen, reports being taught the alphabet at age eight by her father. This teaching was sufficient for independent study of the Bible "at every spare moment that I might be able to read it with better understanding." Ultimately, though, Foote credits her literacy to a divine source: "the dear Holy Spirit helped me by quickening my mental faculties." Elder Utah Smith, a Louisiana-born Sanctified preacher best known for his electric-guitar evangelism in the 1940s, claimed that "God educated him" in the bible though his writing and reading abilities were limited. Julia A. Foote, *A Brand Plucked from the Fire* reprinted in *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. William L. Andrews (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 182-181 and Lynn Abbott, *I Got Two Wings: Incidents and Anecdotes of the Two-Winged Preacher and Electric Guitar Evangelist Elder Utah Smith* (Montgomery, AL: CaseQuarter, 2008), 5. In a tray painting, Morgan depicts "Mrs. Whitney Vann" as one of her white employers in Opelika. I have located a Professor W.T. Vann, an educator who led a discussion during a teachers' Institute meeting in Opelika on March 4-5, 1910, which is a suggestive (but still inconclusive) personal link that could account in some part for Morgan's level of literacy. Rural School Agent Correspondence, 1909-1910, folder 1, A-B, ADAH. Genealogical research did not yield any further information on this figure in Morgan's life.

⁷⁸ Grey Gundaker, *Signs of Diaspora, Diaspora of Signs: Literacies, Creolization, and Vernacular Practice in African America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 119-121.

written narratives that seek to both report on and persuade her readers about the truth of the spirit world as she knew it to exist.

Conversion

Morgan's earliest recorded encounter with God comes from a short text that reads:

When I was a girl around 14 years old I wanted to Become a christian in going to my work one morning I was hearing some girls talking about how they got religion. The lord put it in my mind to ask him lord teach me how to pray and what to pray for, for Jesus sakes so many sweet words came into my heart until I found my way[,] after three days of being in prayer an angel begin to sing to me lord I know I've ben changed repeat 3 times the angels in heaven done changed my name. and I became so happy as happy as I could be[,] happy over what the lord had done for little me.⁷⁹

The role of conversation in this conversion account is central, and it occurs on two levels. The first instance occurs when the other girls are “talking” about their conversions, provoking Morgan to pray. Morgan's attention to the silence or absence of God in her pre-converted state underscores the “communal effect of sound” at play in this detail. Within this moment of shared experience, Morgan's exclusion from the shared beliefs of the girls is induced and felt, and catalyzes her own spiritual search.⁸⁰ The second “conversation” occurs in Morgan's subsequent prayer with “the Lord,” as she narrates it here. The way in which Morgan frames the progression of her spiritual path as completely orchestrated by God—how he “put [prayer] in my mind” and responded with “so many sweet words”—conveys the rapturous emotions entwined with the message she received and to which she responded.

She does not—or perhaps cannot—tell us what transpired when she “found [her] way,” but significant is the fact that Morgan reports about her feelings during the experience, rather than sharing its content with an audience outside of this personal, interior space of divine conversation. We do not enter into her converted state, but are made witness to her own moment of rapture in the musical invocation of the gospel song, “Lord I Know I've Been Changed”⁸¹ “I know I got religion,” one of the verses of this spiritual goes, “Lord knows I'm not ashamed / Oh a holy ghost is my witness, and the angels gonna sign my name.” As this anecdote indicates, uncontainable happiness is the primary affirmation of her secured, eternal salvation (expressed as “getting religion”). The affect is powerful and resonant enough to interrupt the sequence of events in her story.

⁷⁹ “Some History of Life,” undated and unsigned manuscript, Sacha Borenstein Clay Collection, #13A.

⁸⁰ David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 162.

⁸¹ “Some History of Life,” Sacha Borenstein Clay Collection, New Orleans. Glenn Hinson discusses the absence of ecstatic description in *Fire in My Bones*, 15-20.

In terms of evangelical Christianity, conversion marks a person's entrance into the "marvellous" light of God's love, and initiation along the path of Christian salvation.⁸² First, the believer admits his or her sinful nature, repents of such transgressions before God, and becomes morally justified to be spiritually reborn—a fundamental transformation of the believer's subjectivity that restored humanity's fallen state originating in the Garden of Eden. According to eighteenth-century Wesleyan Methodism in particular, which is the basis for the Holiness movements of nineteenth-century revivals and Holiness-Pentecostal movements of the early twentieth century, conversion describes the first work of God's grace.⁸³

Sanctification emphasized the second work of grace that allowed a Christian, following conversion, to pursue a mortal life free from sin and its control.⁸⁴ That is, the ritual purity inside the sanctuary requires practices of purity "in the world" made manifest in "clean living," the outward demonstration that saints possess "the Spirit that possesses them in worship."⁸⁵ Such demonstration included abstention from drinking alcohol and smoking, avoiding immodest dress, and dancing only within the confines of Christian worship. These practices were meant to foster the gradual development of one's spiritual life towards perfected ability to love and obey God on account of a perfect union of wills. By extension, sanctification involves an increased awareness of the presence of sin that has not yet been wholly subordinated to God. "Entire" or "full" sanctification described the climax of one's journey when the believer is "baptized, or filled, with the Holy Spirit." This moment "brings added power to conquer sin, to love others, and to witness for Christ." Attaining sanctification does not end one's spiritual development, but rather empowers the believer to remove her life even further from the realm of the profane by choosing to be set apart for God's sacred, holy use.⁸⁶

Sanctified Singularity

As a life-changing work of the Spirit, sanctification reframed the whole of one's life direction in terms of divine destiny. Morgan's painting of Opelika Public School and a letter written to Regenia Perry, an art historian who became one of Morgan's confidantes and regular correspondents, exemplify this retrospective narrative tendency [fig. 11]. In the painting, "gert" appears as the figure in profile beside the right-most schoolhouse posts, a position that affirms the social isolation she once described verbally: "I was a peculiar little person in childhood days

⁸² Sister Gertrude Morgan, "some history of life," undated manuscript #0013A, Sacha Borenstein Clay Collection, New Orleans.

⁸³ Haynes, 90. See 89-92 for a fuller doctrinal description of conversion and sanctification.

⁸⁴ "Our Wesleyan Theological Heritage,"

[http://www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4KnN1LtH/b.2310047/k.4669/Our Wesleyan Theological Heritage.htm](http://www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4KnN1LtH/b.2310047/k.4669/Our_Wesleyan_Theological_Heritage.htm), accessed 25 March 2013, and John Wesley's Sermon 40, "Christian Perfection," <http://www.umcmmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-40-Christian-Perfection>, accessed 25 March 2013.

⁸⁵ Cheryl Sanders, *Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 64.

⁸⁶ Melvin E. Dieter, "The Wesleyan Perspective" in *Five Views on Sanctification*, Melvin E. Dieter, et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 18-19, quoted in Haynes, 91.

the different people noticed my ways and action.”⁸⁷ But what follows transforms Morgan’s self-evaluation into a sign of divine intention: “I was a peculiar little person in childhood days...so I am the seventh child born on the seventh day of the week Saturday night pay night on the seventh day of April” (emphasis mine). The connecting adverb construes her idiosyncrasy as a natural consequence of her birthday’s timing or how each—her character and the circumstances of her birth—are occurrences of the same kind, varying only in degrees of exceptionalism. Thus Morgan understood her life as a series of events animated by and born of the same divine motive. The triple presence of the ordinal number seven, the biblical number of spiritual perfection, also serves as a sign that validates Morgan’s belief in sanctification’s pervasive power to fulfill divine intention.⁸⁸

Her description of her birth night as “pay night” adds yet another element of uniqueness to her nativity story. An idiom referring to weekly recreation funded by one’s regular paycheck, “pay night” connoted drunkenness and wanton behavior. To be as “lonely as a preacher on pay night” accentuates the isolation for the religious that its profane associations elicits.⁸⁹ If taken to represent its common usage, Morgan appears to reject a secularized attitude that pities the pious and their abstention from so-called worldly activities. Instead, she imbues her birth date with a sense of holy solitude positioned at the cusp of earthly life and cosmic vision.⁹⁰

Rose Hill Memorial Baptist Church: Knowing Sanctification in Community

In addition to individual consecration, sanctification also requires participation within a church community for the Holy Spirit to be discerned and exercised. Some denominations have stressed physical manifestations as proof of the sanctified life that have often included, for example, divine healing or the ability to speak in tongues. Historically, church doctrines have judged these highly visible expressions as legitimate proof of a sanctified, spiritually-empowered life, spurring the “schismatic creativity” of evangelical Protestantism throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—most notably in the proliferation Holiness-Pentecostal sects to which Morgan’s story belongs.⁹¹ But other, more subtle signs performed within the public context of African American Holiness worship services can signal a personal, sanctified authenticity or certainty of the Holy Spirit’s presence. Fervent singing or “shouts,” impassioned responses to prayer, clapping or raising one’s hands, “holy dancing,” or any expression that elevates the emotional and spiritual focus of worshippers are just a few actions that can be

⁸⁷ Letter from Morgan to Perry, 4 Dec 1972. Gitter-Yelen Collection.

⁸⁸ The International Bible Encyclopedia, accessed 16 April 2013, <http://bible.org/question/what-significance-numbers-scripture>.

⁸⁹ Ramon F. Adams, *Cowboy Lingo*, (NY: Houghton Mifflin, revised 1964 [1936], issued 2000), 232.

⁹⁰ On the sensation of being subject to a “voice larger than ourselves,” see Francesco Clemente, “A Quickening of the Spirit” in Percy, 199-203.

⁹¹ For a study on the reformist dimension of sanctification in relationship to an African American history of social disempowerment, see Cheryl Sanders’ *Saints in Exile*. Doctrinal distinctions are comprehensively covered in Sherry DuPree, *Biographical Dictionary of African-American Holiness-Pentecostals, 1880-1990*, Washington, D.C.: Middle Atlantic Regional Press, 1989.

understood to be Holy Spirit-led. Yet they are only signs; the risks of false experiences or pure emotionalism are ever-present. Qualified judgments concerning godly fruits of a moral life are the only way authentic moves of the spirit can be discerned.⁹² But as a consequence, the bonds of a worshipping community become even more central for the increase in one's sanctified knowledge; for within the community's shared practices of worship and devotion, spiritual insight is given, and discerning knowledge is sharpened and exercised with care by and for each believer.

In his ethnography of African American gospel performance, Glenn Hinson observes, "The Spirit will never touch one of His children in precisely the same manner," because of the spontaneity and unpredictability of the Holy Spirit's movement, that is, His *flow*.⁹³ Flowing with the Spirit indicates a conjoining of wills between Spirit and the believer. Its opposite is confusion, which suggests disorder and a displacement of the believer's spirit. Morgan depicts one such instance in which her community reckons with the flow of the Holy Spirit in *The Rose Hill Memorial Baptist Church* [fig. 16]. This artwork demonstrates how orality—hearing, telling, and framing speech—is a key way to discern the Holy Spirit's movement inside oneself and towards a growing sense of self-authorization, as we shall see. Just as significantly, we gain a sense of how God's intervention into Morgan's everyday life affirmed her belief that he was leading her further along an ordained, sanctified path.

Few historical records remain that detail the event Morgan recounts in this painting, and oral histories from the actors involved are, by now, irrevocably lost. Yet we can roughly date the event in *Rose Hill* to the months leading up to September 6, 1936, the date Elder Biggins' congregation in Columbus, Georgia, Nazareth Baptist Church, held its opening program after it had divided and split away from J.B. Miller's congregation at Rose Hill Memorial Baptist Church. The event would have fallen just one and a half years after the revelation of Morgan's calling on December 30, 1934. It thus marks at least one of the earliest, if not the first, moments in pursuit of her calling to "sing with a loud voice [as] a chosen vessel to call men women girls and boys."⁹⁴ Rose Hill was the church where Morgan "spent the longest life [and where] I served God" starting around 1917, prior to her arrival in New Orleans in 1939. "God moved me and had me to sanctify my life for him. He filled me with the holy ghost that of him I will lean upon."⁹⁵ Painting this work retrospectively sometime in the late 1960s or early 1970s, Morgan depicts the events as a sanctified woman with decades of experience listening and speaking to and of God.

As the artist-narrator, Morgan positions herself centered between two rows of church pews. Above the group of eight men, distinguished by their dark robes and mustaches, and four women clustered at right, her distinctive cursive writing fills nearly all of the remaining negative space. Her text narrates a first-person recollection of "confusion" at Rose Hill Baptist Church

⁹² Hinson, 253-262.

⁹³ Hinson, 255.

⁹⁴ *A Poem of My Calling*.

⁹⁵ *Rose Hill Memorial Baptist Church*, 11 x 14 in. at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, the University of New Orleans (Fagaly, figure 4); "This is Sister Gertrude Morgan," Sacha B Clay Collection.

following the death of its founder J.B. Miller in 1930.⁹⁶ Into this potential chaos, Morgan tells us that “a splitting Begin to work in their mind,” at which point “God gave me a Revelation / at the time to / give to Deacon Pape / he wanted it in the church now ...the Powerful words from God through me went to / Rolling out Deacon Pape[.]” The remainder of Morgan’s account conveys how her prophetic message set Elder Biggins further at odds with Deacon Pape, which eventually prompted Biggins to leave Rose Hill. As for Morgan, God had ostensibly led her, after she asked Him in prayer for guidance, to “follow and obey him [*sic*]” and join a “little sweet spiritual singing church.” The identity of this new church is unclear from the artist’s narrative, as is the “him” with whom Morgan eventually aligns herself (who could be Pape, Biggins, or the voice of God). These ambiguities aside, what is important here is the expression of Morgan’s obedience to male authority. The painting *Rose Hill* suggests some of the complexities of negotiating gender norms and restrictions. Because Morgan had committed her life to obeying God—the core of living a sanctified life—she was compelled to deliver the divine revelation and prophecy in the public arena of worship, for “he wanted it in the church.” However, as historian Laurie Maffly-Kipp has argued, such an occurrence would have challenged the church’s gendered hierarchy.⁹⁷ The terrain of African American women’s speech in the early twentieth century did not include the church’s formal, ritualized setting, but was confined to informal spaces of female sociability: normal schools (teachers’ colleges), Sunday schools, women’s clubs, and church auxiliaries. In the latter contexts, a print culture fostered by denominational publications like *Hope* or the *National Baptist Magazine* was the primary textual space in which women could freely express their voices in poems, articles, and stories, and thereby potentially circumvent the male-dominated arenas of the pulpit and sanctuary.⁹⁸ By claiming the space of the church as a platform for speaking “Powerful words from God,” Morgan had entered contested religious and social ground. Yet by citing God as her spiritual authority and not claiming ownership of her words, she could speak without directly confronting the leadership of men like Deacon Pape or Elder Biggins.⁹⁹

This containment of Morgan’s feminine voice in a church setting can be detected textually. As a personal story recounted sometime after 1957—the year Morgan began painting

⁹⁶ Arthur Bunyan Caldwell, *History of the American Negro and His Institutions* (Atlanta, GA: A. B. Caldwell Publishing Company, 1917), 72-5.

⁹⁷ See chapter 6, “The Grand Traditions of Our Race,” in Laurie Maffly-Kipp, *Setting Down the Sacred Past: African-American Race Histories* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 234-257.

⁹⁸ Maffly-Kipp, 250. As an example of one such publication, see *The Worker: A Missionary and Educational Quarterly* published for the Woman’s Convention Auxiliary to the National Baptist Convention and founded by Nannie H. Burroughs, founder of the National Training School for Women and Girls based in Washington, D.C. in 1909. This periodical contained editorials and commentary and weekly bible lesson guides for missionary societies. My examples are housed in the American Baptist Historical Society, Atlanta, GA.

⁹⁹ The range of circumscriptions for female service and prohibitions against women preaching within Holiness churches is as varied as there are numbers of sects and denominations. See “If It Wasn’t For the Women: Women’s Leadership in African American Pentecostalism” in Estrela Alexander’s *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of Pentecostalism* (Downer’s Grove, IL: Intervarsity Academic Press, 2011) and Anthea Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making of a Sanctified World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 2007.

in earnest—her written account in this artwork is couched as a personal testimony of a sanctified woman and not a formal church history. It turns upon a series of God-ordained events funneled through Morgan’s own eyes and ears, citing God’s reported speech in phrases like “when I got through telling [Pape] what all God said I ask him what I’m gone tell God” and Morgan’s insistence that she “done done what on[e] told me to do.” In her text, Morgan is a messenger of God’s words; her use of reported speech crafts a narrative that avoids placing herself solely as the source of her prophetic message, but rather positions her as a mediator between two male figures, the deacon and God. Characteristic of sacred accounts written by African American women, Morgan’s written speech gives an authoritative account of her church community without explicitly announcing it as such or claiming formal authorship; rather, she delivers it in a “low voice” of a woman appropriate to the gender hierarchies strictly enforced in African American Baptist churches. Furthermore, she frames her recollection as a “poem by missionary morgan,” adopting a typically feminine literary genre and distinguishing herself as a missionary, rather than a preacher.¹⁰⁰

If Morgan’s use of reported speech in her text diminishes the centrality of her role among her narrative’s characters—God, Elder Biggins, Sister Biggins, and Deacon Pape—it nevertheless positions Morgan in an intimate relationship with the reader-beholder. That is to say, while her textual narrative *represents* her submission to male church authorities, Morgan’s *act* of telling through paint and writing undermines the event’s self-monitoring (Morgan delivering prophecy to a male deacon) and presents a boldly rendered, self-affirming image of the artist herself. This malleable, subjective narration and remembrance originate from a woman freer to report her experience in the moment of picture-making than the circumstances of the event itself allowed.¹⁰¹

Morgan was not just deploying text, but she was also making choices about how visually to represent her position as an authoritative speaker. A few compositional choices suggest the deliberations Morgan undertook visually to portray the increased freedom of voice and fuller range of emotion she felt nearly three decades after the event. The spatial perspective that barely coalesces between her foreground figure and the elevated ring of four elders visualizes this temporal distance. Given the way her text bends around the figures, Morgan most likely painted them first, arranging them in a tripartite format. The layout of her script likewise indicates that she intended to maintain these spatial divisions, roughly aligning sections of her narrative within these thirds. Additionally, she employs swaths of color that, quite literally, infuse her written

¹⁰⁰ Women in Baptist churches were more often missionaries than men, “working in secondary roles alongside, and in the shadow of, men who became prominent leaders....[women] served on mission fields for lower pay and fewer benefits than men would accept.” Alexander, 300.

¹⁰¹ Reportability is one of four dimensions of the situation of storytelling and performance, which are outlined by Dell Hymes in “Breakthrough into Performance” (1975), reprinted in *In Vain I Tried to Tell You: Essays in Native American Ethnopoetics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 83. For a discussion on social positioning, reportability, claims to talk, ownership of experience made through storytelling, and the manipulation of reported speech in personal experience narratives, see Amy Shuman, introduction and chapter one of *Other People’s Stories: Entitlement Claims and the Critique of Empathy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

language as if to convey the decisive, bright timbre of her narrative voice. She pads the spaces between her lines of words with dabs of canary yellow, enlivening the paper's surface as our eyes run across alternating patches of word and paint. This flickering sensation, as our eyes optically waver between reading and seeing, are mimicked by the red paint that dots the upper part of Morgan's textual field. These visual embellishments destabilize the familiar, pictorial form defined by a foreground-horizon-background. Like buoys in a pool of written words, they assert the transcendental power of the Spirit that aerates everyday speech and events, displacing a sense of "everydayness" to set the believer's life on a different, sacred course.

Rose Hill also demonstrates the centrality of song as a vehicle for interpreting and recalling moments of revelation; song functions as an authenticating sign of the Spirit. Morgan's primary musical reference is the spiritual "Ain't A That Good News," whose lyrics are italicized in this transcription of the middle section of Morgan's text, starting at the end of the first line below the title:

I dont / Remem - / Ber the words God gave me But I do remember the / sweet
spiritual he gave me Before the Prophecy / taken place. Oh Christians *ant that*
good news. / I'm gone lay down my Burden. And take up my cross I'm gone carry
on for Jesus good news / and the Powerful words from God through me went to
Rolling out Deacon Pape God said [*sic*].

In Morgan's citation here, the power of song is threefold. First, in the context of the event, the song functioned as spiritual encouragement that emboldened Morgan to deliver God's words ("the Prophecy"). If one imagines a timid Morgan in the company of elders and deacons, the words to the song become a renewal of spiritual devotion to "*carry on for Jesus good news.*" We are made aware of her obedience by the theme of obedient action that recurs three times in Morgan's text, each at the close of three smaller episodes: Deacon Pape's comment that "you done what he told you to do," the same message repeated by the deacon's wife after her dream, and Morgan's emphatic closing, "I had to follow and obey him." In these ways, Morgan communicates how she "lay down [her] burden" and accepted God's task of public speaking.¹⁰²

Second, the song memorializes Morgan's obedience. Strikingly, Morgan cannot recall the actual words of the prophecy.¹⁰³ The song consequently becomes an affective point of entry into

¹⁰² Hinson, 110-111, 182-3

¹⁰³ The power of embodied engagement with song—such as hand-clapping to the rhythms, swaying, foot-tapping or stomping—to impact memory impressed even a white, cultured northerner such as the landscape architect, Frederick Olmsted: "I was once surprised to find my own muscles all stretched, as if ready for a struggle—my face glowing, and my feet stamping—having been infected unconsciously....I could not, when my mind reverted to itself, find any connection or meaning in the phrases of the speaker that remained in my memory; and I have no doubt it was [more] his 'action' than his sentiments, that had given rise to the excitement of the congregation." Frederick Law Olmstead, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States: Based Upon Three Former Volumes of Journeys and Investigations by the Same Author*, vol. 1 (New York: Mason Brothers, 1862), 310; quoted in Albert J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African-American Religious History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 148.

remembering the event as much as it re-invokes the song's expression of devotion that rings true at the moment of the painting's rendering. It permits Morgan to revivify, remember, and reaffirm her commitment as she "climb[s] high mountains trying to get home," a phrase from another spiritual cited in this painting. As is common in African American gospel songs, the "I" is collective; it permits any potential singer to adopt its declarations, invites beholder-hearers to enter the singer's sanctified world by acknowledging "individual and communal canons of significance" when the words are sung. In its inclusiveness of address, the song thus bears out its third, testimonial power that can "infus[e] the narrative with a kind of ideational reality...[that] allows the hearer empathically to share experiences as they unfold in talk."¹⁰⁴ The song, then, cast into Morgan's picture-story, functions as a benign sort of evangelical bait.

The degree to which *Rose Hill* is successful in making these rhetorical and aesthetic intentions clear is questionable. Though Morgan's figural placement and frontality establish her as the protagonist in this group picture, they cannot fully convey the temporal shifts in story, event, and the performance of her recollection that her writing mediates. Likewise, the affective and memorial functions of her songs would fail for a viewer without prior familiarity with their melodies. While visually riveting, the painting relies heavily on the beholder's ability to apprehend the visual-verbal components that Morgan entwines together. From the perspective of the artist, these flows between song, narrative, and performative commentary in *Rose Hill* display how Morgan approached her sanctification as a dialectical process of receiving revelations, sharing them as an act of obedience to God's commands (in this case, within the social space of the church), and committing to live faithfully, evangelize, and hear from God again.¹⁰⁵ It exemplifies the organizing structure that sanctification brings to all aspects of Morgan's lived experience, communicative expressions, and memory.

A Speaking Vessel and the Talking Book

¹⁰⁴ Hinson, 329. Hinson continues that such testimony "offer[s] exegesis of experience that is simultaneously subjective and shared" by defining what is in fact "remarkable." The collective "I" is a common strategy of African American sermons, through which effective preachers identify with their diverse audiences in order to create a sense of community and bring them to a place of spiritual depth. For examples and analysis, see Beverly J. Moss, *A Community Text Arises: A Literate Text and A Literacy Tradition in African-American Churches* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2003), 73-80.

¹⁰⁵ The risk that Morgan's testimonies and recollections pose is the potential for unintelligibility to others, an aspect that Susan Stewart elaborates upon when she writes, "The involuntary dimension of intuition and the carrying over of impressions into memory is something private to us; something that in fact forms us through an arbitrary but over-determined contingency." Citing Proust, she continues: "Beyond the threshold of fear, and on the edge of a threshold of pain, the mind's anticipatory joy accelerates—closure comes with the recognition of intuition, not in comprehension." In "Remembering the Senses," published in David Howes, ed., *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 66.

For Morgan, God’s spiritual work almost certainly accelerated during the nearly two decades she attended Rose Hill Memorial Baptist Church from around 1917 to 1938.¹⁰⁶ This period marked the National Baptist Convention’s pursuit of middle-class respectability for its members, which included, centrally, the acquisition of reading and writing to “transform certain behavioral patterns of...the ‘folk’—the expressive culture of many poor, uneducated, and ‘unassimilated’ black men and women dispersed throughout the rural South or newly huddled in urban centers.”¹⁰⁷ Morgan’s association with the approximately four hundred members at Rose Hill and participation in the life of the church—especially its growing infrastructure of clubs, women’s auxiliaries, Sunday Schools, and mission boards—likely provided contexts for cultivating conventional literacy that manifested in the writing on her later artworks. Items such as picture lesson cards, illustrated Bibles, and prints would have likely been in use by this Baptist community as well, cultivating a religious visual culture in which pictures as well as texts would be employed as a means of communicating religious truths. This cultural background at Rose Hill emerges in some of Morgan’s earliest drawings that I will discuss shortly.

Morgan’s associations with Holiness-Pentecostal communities in New Orleans starting around 1939 continued to be formative in bringing her into “greater light, and more of God’s mystery to see” along the path of her sanctification.¹⁰⁸ This community consisted of a church belonging to a small denomination named Triumph the Church and Kingdom of God in Christ (Triumph the Church), a regional network of additional affiliates, Reverend Louis Hampton, and Morgan’s partners in mission.

Sister Palmore Had a Dream of Me clarifies the way in which biblical text forms the basis for discerning divine intent in prophetic speech [fig. 17]. Like *Rose Hill*, it is painted from the perspective of the white-robed Bride who recalls her missionary period in black-ropes [see fig. 33 for other Triumph women dressed similarly]. During this early period of her calling, Morgan “had been on the hedges and highway,” working to fulfill Christ’s command in Luke 14:23 to invite the unbelieving heathen into God’s house. The full inscription is as follows, with words underscored to mark her somewhat irregular, rhyming structure:

Sister Palmore had a dream of me in around 1947 she saw / me shooting at some
birds way up in the air that Represents those high / Heavens whom God is calling
down whose mind is way up there. / See Isaiah one and two read it ask your self a
question what must I do. / Do like Nicodemus St. John 3:3 humble yourself come
on down Pray Lord / have mercy on poor me pity yourself fall on your face and

¹⁰⁶ “History of Rose Hill Memorial Baptist Church,” *Sixty-Third Anniversary Program*, Columbus, GA: 1953. This discussion of black Baptist visual culture builds upon Helen Shannon’s essay, “But Go Thou Thy Way: Sister Gertrude Morgan and the Visual in African American Culture” in Fagaly, 85-93.

¹⁰⁷ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 15, quoted in Shannon, 86.

¹⁰⁸ “Poem by Jehovah’s Wife Have you read the scripture of Isa 54?” undated manuscript #004A, Sacha Borenstein Clay Collection, New Orleans. The names of other individuals appear in Morgan’s various artworks, but scarce information has been located about them.

cry you better wake up you want to be able to stand that Brimstone and fire. Let the church say amen.

Sister Palmore lived up here near this protection levy when she / had that dream of me at that time I had been on the hedges and highway / around [8?] years and God was showing that old Christian woman / what my life would be to call the high hills down levee with the valley / wake them up so many are blind and cant see

Sister Gertrude Morgan
Everlasting Gospel teacher Rev. 14
Read run to the master Rev 3:20

The jumps in tone and address within Morgan’s account are jarring, shuffling us between a narrative recollection of times, places, and people; her interpretation of events; and confrontational exhortations. Yet grounding these rhetorical shifts is a belief in the efficacy of Old and New Testament scripture to resonate across time and space. This belief in “the living word” prompts her to interpret the image of shooting down birds with the flattening of the physical environment that Isaiah 2 equates with the humility of man provoked by the descending judgment of God .

This same belief launches Morgan into a performance of her calling to teach and preach with urgency—rather than report about it exclusively in a dispassionate, expository fashion (which she does to close). The preacherly interjection of second-person imperatives (e.g., “Do like Nicodemus St. John 3:3 humble yourself come on down Pray Lord . . .pity yourself fall on your face and cry”) is the first obvious indicator that Morgan assumed her role as the instrument of God’s holy, living Word.¹⁰⁹ Her deployment of rhymes, which foreground the oral nature of her writing, demonstrate the kind of verbal artistry that invested her message. Though simple, these sound phrasings affectively charge key words in pairs, such as “two” and “what must I do,” or “cry” and “fire,” to draw links between the sort of action and response she desires to elicit in her reader-hearer. In this duality of telling and performing her call to evangelize, the painting *Sister Palmore* outlines the prophetic circuit that emerges in dreams, overlays lived reality through interpretations of sacred text, and invites the believer into its divinely-ordained events. These three aspects of prophecy converge in this tight narrative, which reflects a confidence that is founded upon the testimony of Morgan’s personal experience in this event.¹¹⁰ Visually,

¹⁰⁹ John 3:3 reads, “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

¹¹⁰ Based on Morgan’s sound recordings and writings, she never developed sermons proper, but rather her own poetic rhythms through music and call-and-response structure. For more on sermons in the African American church, see Moss and Gerald L. Davis, *I Got the Word in me and I can sing it, you know: A Study of the Performed African-American Sermon*, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

Morgan's painted figure—with lifted hand and cradled bible—approaches the beholder with that same confidence as she departs from Sister Palmore, whose cottage sits atop the levee of the Mississippi River.

A statement concerning her ideas about biblical and divine language appears in a small work, executed on cardboard, that borrows its text from W.A. Spicer's book, *Our Day In Light of Prophecy* of 1917. Her writing coincides with the printed text that begins under Spicer's heading, "The Book that Speaks to Our Day" [figs. 18-20]:

Man may write a true book. But only God, the source of life, can write a living book. The word of God...liveth and abideth forever 1 Peter 1:23. The bible is the living word of God[;] we look at the volume; [verso] we hold it in our hands. It is like other books in form and Printers art. But the voice of God speaks from these pages, and the word spoken is alive. It is able to do in the heart that Receives it what can be done only by Divine Power.

Morgan copied frequently from this Seventh-Day Adventist text, a practice I explore in the next chapter; for the moment, I would like to emphasize the visual codes Morgan adopted to illustrate the unique orality of the bible as argued by Spicer—that is, the ways in which she denotes the iconicity of divine speech. Spicer's cover visualizes the illuminative power of the bible through golden rays that beam from the open book. Morgan borrows this open-book form, enlivening it with dashes of red crayon, green ink, and pencil that invoke the red-lettered printing conventions for Christ's speech in modern publications of New Testament gospels. Her sensitivity to representing this convention appears in other examples of her work [figs. 20-23].

In Morgan's pencil and crayon adaptation, the beginning of John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave," occupies the left page only, cut off for lack of space, but the statement's premise reinforces the central message of Spicer's picture and text: the words spoken by the voice of God, mediated through written and spoken scripture, have the power to change the reader-hearer. Indeed, the open-book form undergirds *A Poem of My Calling* [fig. 1], citing the originary and authoritative word formally through its folded structure. Morgan was also sensitive to printed bibles' red-lettered vitality, a visual cue she adapts, as we shall see, to stunning effect.

In the likelihood that Morgan copied her text directly from a page in Spicer's book, she would have also seen the illustration of Christ, the *Logos*, walking through an illumined doorway that echoes the opening of the holy book [fig. 19]. The consumption of Christ's words (as "the Word") by reading or hearing has long been understood to be crucial means to faith and Christian belief; the concept of accepting God's Word as accepting Christ the divine appears again in Revelation 3:20, the passage on which the illustration is based. Morgan unquestionably held both reception of the word as an act of faith ("eat the Word [that came from Heaven]" she sings elsewhere).¹¹¹ Yet one further senses that Morgan detected a visual resonance between

¹¹¹ Sister Gertrude Morgan, "I am the Living Bread" from *Let's Make a Record* recorded ca. 1971, True Believer Records and Preservation Hall, 78 rpm and re-released by Rope-a-Dope, 2005, compact disc.

biblical words and the incarnate Christ as thresholds to faith, rendering bibles (as containers for holy words) and doorways with the same white C- or U-shaped form overlain with a colored rectangle that doubles as a bible cover and door [figs. 24-27]. Between both printed and spoken scriptures and in the physical form of the book, sanctified belief endowed the material, oral, and textual world with creative, spiritual power. Whether by mere circumstance or divine design (as God's intent presented through Morgan's narratives suggest), her expressive repertoire of sanctified belief was exercised through the 1940s and 1950s primarily in the realm of the oral. At the same time, it overlaid the urban spaces into which her sanctified community spread and established their networks.

PART 2: The Geography of Sanctification

Go ye into yonders world and sing with a loud voice.
—*A Poem of My Calling*

Movement and migration were integral to pursuing the sanctified journey, in addition to the disciplines of prayer, bible study, and speaking prophecy. Morgan was first called to evangelize on December 30, 1934, but she tells us that she did not leave Columbus and Rose Hill Memorial Baptist Church until July 1938, staying for a short period in Mobile, Alabama before arriving in New Orleans on February 26, 1939 to begin her mission work in the “den o’ sin.”¹¹² It is challenging to make any claims about Morgan's activities during the following eighteen years in which she taught “holiness and righteousness” because there is virtually no correspondence or any kind of enduring, personal artifact linked to her activities from 1939 until her crowning in 1957 as a bride. Only her artworks make clear that her wearing of black robes, the ostensible garments of a missionary and evangelist, is associated with this period.¹¹³

However, archival records can be mined for insights into the geography and spatial practice of sanctification. Notarial archives, tax books, surveyor's maps, and statistical figures registered under New Orleans' municipal records stand as indexes of a set of implicit claims, communal networks, and investments. Reading these archives through the lens of sanctification can illuminate points at which a sanctified imaginary and invisible, but dynamic, presence of the Spirit exerted its imperatives upon a material world. In particular, I reconstitute the history of Morgan's financial transactions to underscore the agency she exercised along with her missionary partners. Even as their sanctification was intended to set them apart from mainstream cultural practices, it did not preclude their participation in already organized institutions of so-called secular black society and its commerce. Taking advantage of the economic and social

¹¹² An undated work depicts Morgan, portrayed in black robes and with two other African American figures, contains the artist's writing indicating that “the beginning of my work” included a stop in “Mobile Ala.” Photograph in collection of William A. Fagaly. Current whereabouts of the painting are unknown.

¹¹³ Discussions with Josephine Samuels and Maureen Moody of *Triumph the Church and Kingdom of God in Christ*, New Orleans and Jackson, MS, 2013.

mobility afforded to them within the constraints of racial segregation, they proceeded to work for and pursue their heavenly crowns on earthly terrain.

The earliest official record of Morgan's whereabouts in New Orleans appears in the 1940 census, when Jacques P. de la Vergne stopped in front of 816 ½ South Rampart Street. The address received its own page in the population schedule book, for its residents were no fewer than seventeen children under the age of seventeen, two lodgers, and three women to run the "household": Margaret Parker as the head at age forty-seven, with Cora Williams, aged fifty, and Gertrude Morgan—then forty years old—were listed as Parker's assistants.¹¹⁴ Classified as "missionaries," they "car[ed] for orphans" as their "Industry" at the "Margaret and Cora Orphan Home."¹¹⁵ Located between Canal and Clio Streets, along a stretch of eleven city blocks dubbed as the "leading Negro Street," their orphan home was an unlikely establishment amid the beer gardens, pawn shops, open-air markets, department stores, peddlers, and other "hot spots." South Rampart Street in the early half of the twentieth century was a place where "police informers, pimps, and ladies of leisure" must have made certain that "people's fortunes var[ied] with each passing breeze" [fig. 28].¹¹⁶ An array of socio-economic contingencies and colliding paths, South Rampart Street was also just outside of the so-called Black Storyville that crept along the edges of the French Quarter and Basin Street jazz clubs. And yet, along the 800-block populated by mostly African Americans and two European immigrant families, surrounded by the kind of drinking, gambling, and jitterbugging their Holiness doctrine condemned, three Sanctified women oversaw the care of motherless and fatherless children.

New Orleans city directories provide a cursory record of the three women's whereabouts after they moved from that location. From its pages, we have some indication that the three missionaries remained downtown for an additional two years at most, relocating to 1123 Ninth Street by 1942. It is unclear if this new address in the Irish Channel district, just off the Magazine Street commercial thoroughfare, served as a new location for the same children. Subsequent residences from 1946 to 1956 are inconclusive at best, indicating that they inhabited at least 5 different addresses and perhaps more, for they often fail to appear in city directories.¹¹⁷ Neither the addresses listed for the three women during these years match one another, nor do occupation listings indicate that individuals with the same names were missionaries. Yet a series of transactions registered within New Orleans' Notarial Archives suggest that, if they indeed were

¹¹⁴ Biographical information about Margaret Parker and Cora Williams is scarce, though vital records indicate they were both natives of Louisiana. Margaret Parker married Andrew Goodman on October 2, 1915 in New Orleans. Cora Williams was born March 3, 1887 in Schriever, Louisiana, Terrebonne Parish. The southernmost parish in the state, it was home to fertile soils, seafood-rich bayous, and Houma Native Americans, Acadians, Euro-American settlers, and African Americans. Morgan registers Cora's lighter complexion in *You Got Your Bible*. By October 24, 1927, the date she married John Baptiste, she was in New Orleans. She passed on November 13, 1955. Marriage and Death Certificates, Louisiana Vital Records Registry.

¹¹⁵ 1940 Federal Census, S.D. 2 E.D. 36-2[3], sheet 85A.

¹¹⁶ Marcus Christian, "South Rampart Street," chapter 44 of the unpublished manuscript, "A Black History of Louisiana." Marcus Christian Collection, Series XIII, Box 10. Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans. Marcus Christian was director of the all-black affiliate of the Works' Progress Administration's Louisiana Writers Project at Dillard University beginning in 1936.

¹¹⁷ New Orleans City Directories.

peripatetic, it was because plans to find a larger space (probably away from vices of the city's downtown and "back of town" areas) were slowly forming over the course of a decade as they looked for opportunities to establish their mission more securely.

"Now when the Lord calls 'You ready?' you got to move"

533 Flake Avenue would eventually become the most stable location for their children's home, and indeed, it was the one address Morgan depicted frequently as "Margaret and Cora's home," surrounded by children and music [figs. 29-31]. One painting of an interior indicates it was also a satellite mission of the African American Pentecostal denomination, Triumph the Church and Kingdom of God in Christ. In this assembly of pastors, elders, and Bible teacher-missionaries (identified by their formal robes, belts, and collars), Morgan depicts an inviting service in one of its rooms, the main worship space in the house that is simply outfitted with the essentials for connecting with their God: an altar, piano and drum set, chairs, a single light bulb, and even a coat rack to ensure one was unencumbered for the shouts of the service to come [figs. 32-33]. With a sidelong gaze and wide eyes, Morgan, likely the central figure at the drum, cues us to join in singing the melody whose lyrics appear below the upper row of women: "I've got a home in that Rock, don't you see."

Within a Pentecostal imaginary, "that Rock" can be both Jesus Christ and His body as figured in church membership. Thus, finding a spiritual home in Christ implied the building of physical homes for the worship of Christ, and these were the objectives of the missionaries' sanctified labors during the 1940s and 1950s.¹¹⁸ The archival record suggests that the path to establishing the orphanage was not necessarily a straightforward one, and yet the missionaries took advantage of economic openings available to them. Following the vagaries of the market and grappling with their own need for funds, they likely ascribed the unpredictability of their ventures to the unpredictable lead of the Holy Spirit to make apparent opportunities for action. Taking a cue from a sanctified song, "you got to move" when the Lord calls, regardless if you may be high or low; you have to obey the call no matter what the circumstance.¹¹⁹

Perhaps still living at their South Rampart Street location, the missionaries began "to move" in earnest on May 6, 1941. With \$30 in hand, Margaret Parker and Cora Williams made

¹¹⁸ The church's formal constitution papers state that its first purpose is "For the worship of Almighty God, for the establishment of a Church of God." Dated July 27, 1970 and included with Notary Act (NA) 14982, December 9, 1970 in which the main church building's mortgage is registered. This main building's address was 3431 S. Franklin Street (now Loyola Street) in the Central City neighborhood. New Orleans Notarial Archives.

¹¹⁹ In his ethnography of African American Sanctified worship, Glenn Hinson explains that the movement of the Holy Spirit is 1) collaborative with human will and 2) can have many manifestations, from private and fleeting moments of ecstasy to public displays of dramatic expression. These evidences notwithstanding, though, knowing when the Spirit moves hinges upon what is felt rather than seen. "The Spirit [says the Bible]," quoting one of his informants, "is like the wind. You don't know where it come from or where it going, but you know when it's *there!* You know when it's there." Such experiential knowledge, Hinson acknowledges, adds to the ambiguity of discerning the Spirit's presence and movement; however, such sensitivity can be trained and grown. See Hinson, 38-9, 172-3, 292-293, 322-323.

their way to the office of John F. Stafford, a public notary, to give John Bartholomew the first payment on two lots comprising 533 Flake Avenue, located in the recently platted Gabriel subdivision that is roughly ten miles east of the missionaries' downtown location, over the Industrial Canal [fig. 34]. The remaining \$220 would be paid at \$4 per month. This particular subdivision parceled the former plantation property owned by Michael Gabriel, who sold his land to developers. This turnover of property was most likely a consequence of New Orleans' broader drainage projects designed to make outer swamplands habitable, and thereby alleviate residential settlement within denser parts of the city while competing with neighboring parishes for a residential tax base.¹²⁰ The lots along Flake Avenue were targeted specifically for the African American market, and in these properties, the missionaries must have seen a quieter site for their children's home at the eastern edge of the city. If Morgan was with them, she did not sign as a witness.

A series of land purchases indicates that 533 Flake Avenue was one of several other stakes set down within the city's real estate market. In an act of ambition, strategic investment, opportunism, or all three, nine months later the women appeared in Stafford's office again to buy a lot down the street. On January 26, 1942, Parker, Williams, and Morgan legally purchased 437 Flake Avenue for \$330, again from Joseph Bartholomew. Requiring \$33 upfront, this purchase further committed them to another \$5 per month for the next four years on top of their \$4 monthly payments for 533 Flake Avenue.¹²¹

What is most striking amid the formal, legal language is their economic independence as women. Each was "married but once and then to [a husband]...from whom she has been living separate and apart" for at least five years.¹²² Even an instance in which Parker's divorced husband, Andrew Goodman, appears before the notary and "intervenes herein for the purpose of assisting and aiding his said divorced wife," still, the record by the notary George S. Graham reinforces the sole investment, "continual custody and control" retained by Parker in this sale. Her husband, though present, is documented legally and historically as but a shadow of her missionary-minded business dealings.¹²³

¹²⁰ John F. Stafford, NA 3110, May 6, 1941. E-mail correspondence with John Magill, Historic New Orleans Collection, 17 June 2013.

¹²¹ A reference librarian remarked that the newly drained swamplands along Chef Menteur Highway—though beginning to be settled by the 1940s and 50s—were essentially where "dragons lived." "Lots of Lots for Colored," *Times-Picayune*, 15 September 1950, 50; John F. Stafford, NA3465, January 26, 1942. These were lots 19-20/Sq4 of Gabriel Subdivision.

¹²² John F. Stafford, NA3465, January 26, 1942.

¹²³ George S. Graham, NA69-71, September 5, 1947. Since 1940, Andrew Goodman had remarried a woman named Victoria, and they were living at 811 Newton Street in Algiers, a section of New Orleans' West Bank. The two remained married until Andrew's death on September 22, 1951. 1940 Federal Census, E.D. 56-422, Sheet 61A and Louisiana Death Certificate no. 5695, Louisiana Vital Records Registry, Department of Health and Hospitals, Louisiana.

Gertrude Morgan's husband, Will Morgan, whom she married in 1928 while in Columbus, likewise remains in the background.¹²⁴ As she narrates in her writings, by 1942, Will was displaced by God through a revelation in scripture. (This union with God the Father was the first "marriage" that preceded the better known 1957 union with Jesus Christ the Lamb of God, her "crowning.")¹²⁵ Only Cora remained legally married to John Baptiste, though they had been living apart since 1934.¹²⁶ Like the sanctified women before them, these three women followed their calling and pursued their holy missions with the fullest devotion: they severed their earthly marital bonds. Leaving behind their husbands signaled their commitment to full-time missionary work, and Margaret Parker, Cora Williams, and Gertrude Morgan joined together in this enterprise. As one notary commented upon the situation, the funds used for the purchase "were acquired by them through their own business efforts."¹²⁷

Such business efforts continued in the ensuing years. Nearly three years after purchasing 533 Flake Avenue (the lot closer to Lake Ponchartrain versus the Mississippi River), the missionaries sold it to Reverend Louis Hampton on March 18, 1944 for \$1,700 cash.¹²⁸ With this influx of liquidity, they were poised to acquire other properties for their holy work while continuing to pay the mortgage on 437 Flake. On October 13, 1945, Margaret Parker indeed acted upon a new opening in the African American real estate market, purchasing—with Cora Williams as a witness—six lots in the relatively new Haydel Heights Subdivision along Ray Avenue for \$247.50 upfront, with the remaining \$1,402.50 balance to be paid at \$24 per month.¹²⁹ Their eventual sale just two years later on September 5, 1947 netted for Parker and presumably the mission a total of \$600 in cash and would supply her with a monthly financial inflow of \$36 per month from each of her three buyers (each of whom purchased pairs of lots with mortgages set up for \$12 due per month each for 37.5 months, just over three years). There appears to have been some urgency, or perhaps convenience and forethought, in this block of sales. Just three days later, Parker re-purchased 533 Flake Avenue back from Reverend Louis

¹²⁴ Only in his death does Will Morgan "appear" in passing mention in the notary papers. He is named to establish succession of 437 Flake Avenue, the one property Morgan owned. Gerson Tolmas, NA311[1], June 10, 1953.

¹²⁵ Letter to Regenia Perry, 4 December 1972, Gitter-Yelen Collection. Morgan also mentions her 1942 marriage to God the Father in an unaddressed and undated manuscript #0004A in the Sacha Borenstein Clay Collection. Her marriages to "The Lord of Host" and "The Lamb" and their visual markers are clearly illustrated and labeled "beginning" and "ending" in a work entitled "Scriptures," currently in the Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz Collection (BST-32).

¹²⁶ Gerson Z. Tolmas, NA 311[1], June 10, 1953.

¹²⁷ Historically, the zeal of sanctified women to serve in church or in other formal religious capacities caused disapproval and domestic tension with their male spouses. Such was the case of Zilpha Elaw and Julia A. Foote. See Haynes, especially chapter 1. John. F. Stafford, NA3465, January 26, 1942.

¹²⁸ Herman Midlo, NA74 ½, March 18, 1944.

¹²⁹ "Announcing the Opening of the New Subdivision Haydel Heights for Colored," *Times-Picayune*, 20 June 1943, section 4 page 8. Raymond H. Kierr, NA113, October 13, 1945. Based on the tax assessor's books for that year, it is highly unlikely that any structures existed on these properties. Books for 1945-6 indicate no improvements were made on these lots, and that the total value consisted of the land value, \$200 each. Tax Assessor's Records, 3rd Municipal District 9W, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library.

Hampton on September 8, 1947, presumably using the cash from the Haydel sales to reestablish the “Home of Colored Children.” Pastor Hampton likely moved across the street to 530 Flake.¹³⁰

Expansion and the need for improvements to 533 Flake Avenue likely sent the women to other churches to raise funds during the ensuing years. Morgan records her travels to small Louisiana towns like Berwick and Morgan City, and as far as Center, Texas, about seventeen miles from the western Louisiana border, perhaps another church affiliated with the Triumph the Church denomination.¹³¹ A combination of their travels and need to raise funds likely precipitated the tax sales on 497 Flake Ave in 1947 and 1949 upon their failure to pay their New Orleans property taxes. There is a four-year silence until 1953, the year they sold 437 Flake Avenue to garner \$800 cash, leaving the orphanage the sole property under their ownership and care.¹³²

This twelve-year period of property transactions between 1941 and 1953 seems uncharacteristically commercial for three women preeminently concerned with living a Holy Spirit-filled life “set apart” from the world. Yet their dealings with property exchanges reveal the degree to which sacred actions could be bound up—even necessarily so—in material and financial matters. Parker, Williams, and Morgan’s missions work involved dedicating their lives to God for the possession of their spiritual perfection.

A Cultural Geography of “Margariette and Cora’s Home” at 533 Flake Avenue

No building or floor plans exist for 533 Flake Avenue during its life as an orphanage, but oral history and classified advertisements indicate that the two-story house had anywhere from eight to seventeen or eighteen rooms—certainly one of the largest houses on the street.¹³³ As William Fagaly has described it, the Flake Avenue orphanage was refuge for nearly twenty children of working mothers, orphans, and runaways for whom missionaries cared, fed, and taught bible lessons. Parker, Williams, and Morgan would cook meals and host feast days for neighbors, and likely accompanied such celebrations with lively “shout” music performed by the women on the piano and drums.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Herman Midlo, NA13, Sept 8, 1947. “Home of Colored Children” and “S/R” (?) appears in the tax assessor’s annotations dated 3 April 1948; 1947-48 Tax Assessor’s Books, Book 9. Their religious networks appear to have extended beyond Flake Avenue. Reverend Irvin Stafford was one of the buyers of the Haydel lots sited on Ray Avenue, and he would later become the pastor of Ray Avenue Baptist Church just a few lots down. 1956 City Directory.

¹³¹ The church would have been only about three years old at the time of their annual meeting in 1948 that Morgan depicts in the painting reproduced as Fagaly, cat. 6. Triumph the Church and Kingdom of God in Christ Church was established in March of 1945. Charles Tatum, *Shelby County: In the East Texas Hills* (Austin, TX: Eakin Publications, 1984), 437.

¹³² Gerson Tolmas, NA311[1? - illegible], June 10, 1953. Sale to Jessie H. Simmons.

¹³³ Advertised as 18- and 17-room home providing “good revenue,” and having electric, water, and gas service in the *Times-Picayune* classifieds, 10 May 1956, 56 and 5 October 1956, 50; later listed as a “2 Story Sgle 8R” in 1960-1 Real Estate Tax Assessment Records, 9W Book 13, NOPL. Fagaly, 8.

¹³⁴ Fagaly, 8-9.

Evidence suggests that Morgan possessed the most schooling: her two other missionary “mothers” both seemed to have less or no formal education. Morgan’s signature on the purchase agreement of a Gabriel subdivision property reveals a practiced, steadier hand than Parker’s tentative autograph. Cora Williams’ “mark” just below Morgan’s name poignantly registers the illiteracy of the elder woman [fig. 35].¹³⁵ The distinct advantage of Morgan’s literacy may have brought a vital skill to the operations of the children’s home the three women ran together, namely teaching those in their care the basic stories of the bible.

This outpost of Triumph the Church was not the only African American church building on the five-block stretch of Flake Avenue. Lining this often muddy and shell-encrusted lane, several houses of worship and residences for their leaders could be found by 1956. There was St. Paul Spiritual Tabernacle with Reverend John D. Hart living in the rear on the 300-block; a Church of God In Christ; a Holy City Baptist Church with its leader Leonard Diggins and relation Booker T. Diggins residing down the street; and evangelist Bessie Johnson occupying a house church at a blue double-shotgun-style house at the far end of the 500-block. Johnson was known to hold Spiritualist services on one side while residing in the other. Neighbor Shelton LaFrance and his wife were also known to do mission work [fig. 36].¹³⁶

Perhaps the relative affordability of building (and thus establishing) churches on this edge of town attracted evangelical groups and black residents alike; indeed, immediately following World War II in 1946, settlement and building in the Gabriel Subdivision equaled if not exceeded the rate of building in nearby subdivisions that were predominantly white.¹³⁷ Though “Margaret and Cora’s home” and the other church buildings on Flake Avenue were not technically storefront churches in that they did not occupy formerly empty commercial spaces in urban centers, they effectively functioned as such, offering economic support, psychic and communal affirmation, and expressive freedom within a small, intimate community that formal, more assimilated mainline churches did not accommodate.¹³⁸

It is important to resist romanticizing life along Flake Avenue and understand the history of its development as a segregated urban neighborhood. More specifically, this section of the Lower Ninth Ward was shaped by municipal efforts to control of water successfully—from the banks of the Mississippi River to the region’s rainfall and storms that filled and flooded the city’s low-lying site. The neighborhood could only have been settled as Reform- and Progressive-era efforts to build canals and pumping stations opened new areas of the city for black residents.

¹³⁵ “Sale of Property.” John F. Stafford, Notary Public, January 26, 1942. N.A. 3465.

¹³⁶ Interviews with Edwin Nelson (28 May 2013) and Brenda Ewell (22 June 2013), both Flake Avenue residents. 1956 City Directory. N.B. By 1971, street numbering along Flake Avenue changed over from three to four digits. 533 Flake Avenue is currently numbered 4901.

¹³⁷ The Tax Assessor’s Books from 1946-1947 show that 70 percent of the Gabriel Tract properties had improvements made on them valued over \$100, compared with these white subdivisions: Jackson Place had approximately 86 percent of its properties developed, Plum Orchard had 62 percent, and Rosedale had 29 percent. New Orleans City Archives, New Orleans Public Library.

¹³⁸ Robert L. Boyd, “The Storefront Church Ministry in African American Communities of the Urban North During the Great Migration: The Making of an Ethnic Niche,” *Social Science Journal* 35:3 (1998), 319-332.

Beginning with the legislative creation of the Drainage Commission of New Orleans in 1895 (later the Sewage and Water Board), concerted efforts to decrease the water table and drain New Orleans concentrated on serving already-settled (and often higher-ground) areas. They reached the city's swampy outskirts, namely the areas of eastern New Orleans and the Lower Ninth Ward, only in the 1940s. The creation of segregated neighborhoods alongside the democratizing aims of public works forms the backdrop for this period of Morgan's life on Flake Avenue; the uneven effects of racially biased policies segregated and, by turns, nurtured the expressive cultures emerging from her racially homogenous, yet possibly religiously heterogeneous communities.¹³⁹

The precise date and causes for the orphanage's closure are uncertain, though the death of Cora Williams was a probable factor. Contrary to earlier accounts, Williams, the "second matron" of their triad, passed away on November 13, 1955 of congestive heart failure at the age of 54.¹⁴⁰ Her death likely ushered in a period of transition for the mission, eventually prompting its sale on April 30, 1957 for \$4,200.¹⁴¹ The extent to which Mother Parker and Sister Morgan remained together thereafter is unclear, though they are both listed as residing at 2538 Alabo Street from 1958 to 1962, perhaps continuing to serve as missionaries in a smaller, eight-bedroom house in the Lower Ninth Ward (photographs capture them both singing with Preservation Hall musicians at 726 St. Peter Street, though never together).¹⁴² By 1964, Morgan was living at 1721 Alabo Street and then moved in 1965 into her final dwelling, the shotgun home she shared with Jennie Johnson at 5444 North Dorgenois Street.¹⁴³ At this time, Parker and Morgan seemed to have pursued more independent, sanctified ventures that would have fit comfortably within New Orleans' milieu of musical and spiritual personae [figs. 37-39]. Parker died in 1968.¹⁴⁴ Meanwhile, Morgan had begun drawing and painting more regularly from

¹³⁹ Craig E. Colten, "Basin Street Blues: Drainage and Environmental Equity in New Orleans, 1890-1930," *Journal of Historical Geography* 28:2 (2002), 237-257 and Ari Kelman, *A River and Its City: The Nature of Landscape in New Orleans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003): 154-5.

¹⁴⁰ Certificate of Death, 1955, no. 6759, Louisiana Vital Records Registry. Fagaly had listed Cora Williams' death year as 1944.

¹⁴¹ August H. Ritter, NA1230, April 30, 1957. Parker sold the property to William and Leona Randall. A surveyor's map accompanying this sale shows a 1-story frame house with another 1-story frame building at the rear. This information contributes a conflicting account of the house as 2-stories high, but at this point seems inconsequential.

¹⁴² 1958-1962 New Orleans City Directories. 2538 Alabo Street is listed as a "colored" property, an apartment brokered by "Lefevre," the same person overseeing the sale of 533 Flake Avenue. *Times-Picayune* 10 May 1956 page 56. For photographs of Margaret Parker and Sister Gertrude Morgan at Preservation Hall in the early 1960s, see Louisiana State Museum Collection, accession 1978.118(B).00959 and "Gertrude Morgan" vertical file, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University.

¹⁴³ New Orleans City Directories, 1962-1975. No city directory has been located for 1963, but a printed handbill indicates that Morgan resided on Alabo Street in 1963 at #1725, rather than #1721. This discrepancy could either be true to fact, a misprint, or a distinction of no consequence to Morgan's mind; the point of her separation from Parker still remains.

¹⁴⁴ Fagaly, 9. If this year for Parker's death is correct, her death certificate will not be publicly available until the year 2018, or fifty years after the date of death, as is the policy of Louisiana Vital Records Registry.

around 1956-57, coinciding with this watershed event of her life.¹⁴⁵ Although separated from her partners, Morgan was not wholly alone. “Jesus Christ the lamb of God is guiding me each day,” she wrote on a drawing that commemorated the tenth anniversary of her work with young people.”¹⁴⁶ Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, her Lord would guide her into a new line of work: creating visual art.

PART 3: Sensing the Sanctified Self

*Now God married me in 1942 to my remembers and shewed me 54 Isa[iah] the
lord of hosts is his name. now he didn't put my eyes on the other reading [in
Revelation] until he got ready to make it known unto me O girl it's a mystery
god is a mystery man.*

—Letter to Regenia Perry, 4 December 1972

In 1957, the same year that Margaret Parker sold 533 Flake Avenue, Morgan received the revelation that she was the Bride of Christ through reading and “hearing” from the “Talking Book.” The moment was pivotal. Along a believer’s path towards entire sanctification—“Christian perfection” as John Wesley spoke of it—Morgan’s union with her Savior could not be surpassed, nor can its implications be underestimated. Her bridal crowning was the “[ap]pointed time that our Big dada had planned for [Christ] to take possession of little me that him and I would start our work in the kingdom...that he went back to his father to prepare according to St. John 14.”¹⁴⁷ The spiritual milestone to which she refers was effectively the launch of her solo mission to bring the news of the coming Kingdom of Heaven rhapsodized about in Revelation: the “everlasting gospel.”¹⁴⁸ It was also a mission into which pictures could be enfolded and mobilized to fulfill the customarily oral genre of testifying to—of showing and telling—the reality of Christ, God, and the spiritual world of their design.

Again, the public dimensions of this artistic enterprise are dealt with more fully in the chapter to come; for now, I want to elaborate upon the personal meanings that her spiritual transformation heralded and how her self-portraits demonstrate the significance of the visual arena for Morgan’s understanding of her sanctification. For a woman who had artistic inclinations as a child, the closure of her time serving with Parker and Williams and her new, independent charge constituted a ripe stage for her to pursue drawing with more time and purpose.¹⁴⁹ With virtually no evidence of formal art instruction, she—like so many other self-taught artists—turned to materials and sources readily at hand: existing illustrations and

¹⁴⁵ Guy Mendes, “The Gospel According to Sister Gertrude Morgan” unpublished transcription, 1974 in *Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980* exhibition files, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 3.

¹⁴⁶ Fagaly, catalogue no. 9.

¹⁴⁷ Sister Gertrude Morgan, “the lambs Bride in 1956,” undated and unsigned manuscript, copy in the files of William Fagaly.

¹⁴⁸ Revelation 14:6.

¹⁴⁹ Morgan reported an interest in drawing at a young age by observing her sister. See Fagaly, 4.

inexpensive materials (re-purposed cardboard supports, pencils, pens, crayons, and—reportedly—white shoe polish). As mentioned in the introduction, bible illustrations for her independent mission are believed to be her earliest efforts. But her self-portraits are my focus because they personally to address the artist in the third person as well as other viewers.

The small drawing entitled *CANTY* tells us about Morgan's personal response to her bridal crowning [fig. 40]. She began by sketching and coloring a self-portrait in which she appears neatly attired in a black dress with a wide collar and hat, primly heeled and clutching a white glove as her other hand holds her purse. This outfit marks her as a bible teacher associated with Triumph the Church. She then put a ballpoint pen to cardboard surface, writing a reminiscence directed to her portrait that begins, "I am very happy for who I am the Bride of Jesus Christ. I cant hardly Realize this is me. Little Gertrude Williams. Be Big dada turned me over to a earthly man to live a married life and then Preserved me for himself and Jesus Christ. I never did meet so great a friend to love me as those two great men." She refers to herself here by her maiden name, and links her girlhood self with two later relational transformations: her legal marriage to William Morgan in 1928 and her divine marriages to God the Father in 1942 and then to Christ in 1957. Sister Gertrude Morgan thus understood her newly-wedded status as the climax along a divinely-guided path towards increasing spiritual intimacy. If we read *CANTY* alongside *A Poem of My Calling*, the artist was "crowned out" and made "the wife of my Redeemer" only after leaving Columbus, Georgia, away from her legal husband, and after the "18 years of teaching holiness and righteous" as a missionary. The portrait is thus an aggregation of Morgan's past, present, and incipient future.

The artist negotiates her sanctified self through picture and script. The "canty" ebullience of her devotion is founded upon the "cant hardly realize" response that "this is me": that an ordinary, African American woman would be "preserved" for marriage with God. Employing the proximal demonstrative "this" instead of the distancing effect of "that" (used, for example, when distinguishing oneself from a baby photograph and declaring "that *was* me"), Morgan's status as the "Bride of Christ" encompasses the simultaneity of her past and present selves oriented around a continuous narrative scripted by Big Dada himself. Gertrude Williams becomes Gertrude Morgan, who is chosen as, and comes to be, the Bride of Jesus Christ. Like *Rose Hill*, the subjective interiority of her sanctified experience gains pictorial representation as a figure who is minimally grounded upon patches of green and orange crayon.

Morgan inscribes references to biblical scripture to validate her sanctification in an authoritative source. The first citation, a reference to her 1942 revelation, not only establishes speaking positions between Morgan and her Maker, but also emphatically defines their relationship as one of intimate possession ("*For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called*"). Her own happiness can be textually grounded in the exhortation to be joyful from Revelation 19:7 ("*Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready*"). This citation describes her marriage to "Big Dada" and Christ while further indexing the artist's readiness that has qualified her for such

a betrothal. The third citation invokes yet another biblical invitation to which Morgan's depiction and writing respond. Revelation 22:17 appeals to a hearer to "*Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*" The act of depicting evinces her piety, announcing herself as one within the community of believers who have heard the message and responded to the divine call voiced in this passage. That these call-and-response exchanges are implied through citations and picture, rather than explained, only intensifies the display of Morgan's deep biblical literacy as a true follower.¹⁵⁰ "O that love they uster have for me keeps my heart thrilled," she declares, a feeling whose keenness endures through each looping of her capital B's, lower-case D's, and double L's. Morgan tells us boldly that "Big Dada" and Jesus "work in the spirit but they are Real." Her image and text suggest that her divine intimates are as real as the material of paint, crayon, pencil, and ballpoint ink on paper that she has applied to the paper support, for they have prompted her visual meditation.

Faith in the communicability of Christian truths through pictures—the capacity of a text carefully to control pictorial ambiguity—was central to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Protestant evangelical visual culture, including that of African American Baptists. Picture lesson cards such as "How the Boy Timothy Became a Missionary" illustrate its typical denotative functions [fig. 41]. The caption on the back begins unwaveringly, "*This boy in the picture is named Timothy,*" a model of humble learning at his mother's knee. One can imagine a small classroom setting in which text relies upon oral recitation to reinforce the beholder's identification with the picture. Popular illustrated bibles marketed through the National Baptist Convention's publishing board mobilize similar uses of text to frame a picture as a carefully directed, religious drama.¹⁵¹ The process of apprehension initiated by religious visual culture such as these didactic objects assumes a "covenant of transparency" with religious believers.

¹⁵⁰ "For the African-American preacher and his congregation, knowledge of the Bible and the ability to use Bible verses liberally and appropriately to apply to any phase of life are the hallmarks of the true follower of Christ...by quoting a Bible verse...the preacher is 'proving' to his congregation his continuing ability to respond spontaneously from the depth of his Christian commitment." Gerald L. Davis, 73. For an exploration of "the requirements of literacy as the ear takes on the functions of 'reading'" in African American sermons, see Hortense Spillers, "Moving on Down the Line: Variations on the African-American Sermon" in *Black, White, and In Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 251-276.

¹⁵¹ A 1937 mail order catalogue of the National Baptist Publishing Board, the official supplier of Sunday School materials and ecclesiastical objects for the denomination, provides a sense of the visual culture marketed for the National Baptist Convention, and is employed here in lieu of an archive at the present-day NBC Sunday School Publishing Board. In this catalogue, picture lesson cards could be purchased for five cents per Sunday School quarter. These contained "beautiful lithographed copies of the picture on the large lesson roll [available for one dollar]," and were intended to be distributed weekly during a child's class as a reinforcement of the lesson and memory aid. *A Descriptive Catalogue, Literature, Books and Supplies for the Sunday School, Church and Home*. Nashville, Sunday School Publishing Board of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., 1937, American Baptist Historical Society, Atlanta, GA. Some best-selling illustrated bibles for sale included *Hurlbut's Story of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation Told for Young and Old – Self-Pronouncing* (1932) and Charles Foster's *Bible Pictures and What They Teach Us* (1886).

This foundation of belief in communicative media endows word and picture with commensurability, as David Morgan argues, to a “commonsense” notion of reality that harmonizes humanity, divinity, and the believer’s social world. Moreover, covenants with images provide rules for representation and interpretation, through which religious conviction itself becomes reproduced and circulated.¹⁵²

Morgan’s other self-portraits similarly depend upon this triangulation of speech, text, and picture to realize sanctification, but swap bourgeois didacticism for first- and second-person address. For example, Morgan establishes a script for the beholder in another small crayon work, supplying the key exegetical lines to create a conversation around the picture: “Who are you little lady? The Lamb’s intended wife. I’m the happiest feeling soul I ever ben in life” [fig. 43]. This short question-and-answer exchange turns upon the use of pronouns “I” and “you,” another appearance of linguistics shifting to direct a beholder-listener’s attention. The pronouns realize inter-subjective relationships between speakers as speech is uttered (or in this case, read).¹⁵³ We speak Morgan’s sanctified self into being through our act of beholding, posing her question and supplying her remark. The portrait, as a whole, thus activates a sensory process revolving around the status of Morgan’s body. The frontality of her painted pose arrests our gaze and directs us to look, read, and attach a belief in Morgan’s sanctification to the drawn portrait staring out at us. Etched into the green waxy crayon below are a date and a name, facts that further profess the fervency with which Morgan testifies to her full sanctification as something already prophesied, promised, and accomplished. To return to art historian David Morgan’s proposition, her sanctification is a “commonsense” occurrence, though also remarkable because it is unexpected. Gertrude Morgan greets her inner transformation with a creative outpouring that develops her sanctified selfhood at its highest attainment through a process of generative dialogue.¹⁵⁴

Other instances demonstrate more straightforward use of text to illuminate the spiritual “naturalness” of Morgan’s transformation [figs. 42-45]. “This is the Lamb’s Bride...She got in the race and O how she did run,” she writes in one. “I am stepping swiftly on my journey trying to make my round, I’m on my way to the promised land and that’s where I am bound,” fills the upper ground in another, rhythmic tenor of the words expanding into the space around her. Bound only by the edge of the drawing’s support, Morgan’s self-portraiture practice is driven by an insistence *to tell* as well as to *show* what she has known to be true. Hence their near-formulaic structure: a full-length figure (often frontally posed), a simple grounding with bold colors, and text to frame her self, in body and spirit, as the essential site for sanctification’s transformations. Yet their formulaic repetition should not be mistaken for lack of creative drive, but rather

¹⁵² David Morgan, 103 and 105.

¹⁵³ These pronouns are “characterized by the sign of the person” and thus “through verbal dialogue...human beings constitute themselves as self and other.” Judith T. Irvine quoting Emile Benveniste in “Shadow Conversations: The Indeterminacy of Participant Roles” in *Natural Histories of Discourse*, Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 142.

¹⁵⁴ Hortense Spillers, “All the Things You Could Be By Now, If Sigmund Freud’s Wife was your Mother’: Psychoanalysis and Race” in Elizabeth Abel, ed. *Female Subjects in Black and White: Race, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 141, 150-151.

recognized as a blissful re-visitation of a life's turning point. For in the face of the mystery of God disclosed in her full sanctification—her divine union—how else could Morgan channel her emotions but in repeated proclamation, and what else could divert her from this desire?

Divine Intimacies

Already, but not yet: such was tension of being in “Revelation Time,” as *A Poem of My Calling* declares. She was the Bride of Christ, meaning that she had crossed a threshold of piety that united her with Christ in the spiritual present, but the total consummation of their union had to wait for the arrival of the New Jerusalem, the temple of God that would descend as Christ came to earth for the second time as prophesied in Revelation.¹⁵⁵ In the interim, Morgan had been given the task to preach this coming reality and to appeal to non-believing audiences to prepare themselves morally and spiritually—to repent of sin—to enter this coming kingdom of heaven.

Giving corporeal imagery to the spiritual and affective state of bridal mysticism has had a deep history in medieval practice, generating a range of images in prayer books, canticles, and other devotional objects alongside textual accounts of individual experiences of divine ecstasy.¹⁵⁶ Gertrude Morgan's matrimonial portraits share in their visionary operations, in that they were created to express the artist's privileged intimacy with Christ through the visualization of biblical, spiritual metaphors. Indeed, Morgan's New Jerusalem pictures imagine the city of cities, what St. John's Gospel (chapter 14:2) describes as God the Father's house with “many mansions,” as a multi-tiered structure comprised of smaller, domestic facades often surrounded by the twenty-four elders and forty-eight angels that eternally worship there [fig. 46]. However, in light of her calling to be a vessel to bring “men women boys and girls” to belief, her bridal pictures invite consideration as objects to be viewed outside of Morgan's own private contemplation (and indeed, they eventually entered public circulation and purchase by 1970). In this closing section, I want to concentrate on an artwork in which her bond to Christ is the focus to unpack the meanings Morgan brings to bear in depictions of her marriage to Jesus Christ, as well as the social meanings activated by portraying Christ as a light-skinned, auburn-haired man [fig. 47].

Gertrude Morgan rarely wrote or spoke explicitly in racial terms. Textually speaking, words can evade racial marking. Take, for example, the following: when asked about Jesus Christ's “whiteness,” Morgan was said to reply, “Jesus has always been white.”¹⁵⁷ “White” in this statement can be taken doubly, as either a cultural term connoting race or religiously

¹⁵⁵ “Already but not yet” summarizes the eschatology of fulfillment and promise, which I detect to be the driving belief of Morgan's worldview following her bridal crowning. See also Hans Schwartz, *Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000) 136-139. It has been popularly circulated by theologians like Timothy Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City.

¹⁵⁶ Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), especially chapter 2, 147-8.

¹⁵⁷ Phone conversation with Hazell Boyce, a French Quarter denizen who was acquainted with Morgan and Larry Borenstein, February 27, 2013.

symbolic term of holiness. Yet in her pictures, Morgan reveals that she could not imagine Christ nor God the Father as any race other than white, due to the conventions conditioning the visual culture of race that would have been engrained in her as a woman raised in the Jim Crow South.

Leigh Raiford and Elizabeth Abel remind us how race and racism are inescapably sited in the field of vision in moments when “we see ourselves being seen.” By this assessment, race and racism are both social as much as they personal. As social constructions based upon beliefs about the body, they manifest in highly unstable ways, “constantly [needing] to be made and remade, taking shape and realizing power through our own daily iterations and invocations.”¹⁵⁸ Without a doubt, we can point to the racist motivations tied to urban policy that governed nearly all of Morgan’s life in Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana. Yet can we internalize them on behalf of the artist? The makings of race can, and have been, sudden and violent; one only needs to recall the unforeseen objectification of “epidermalization” summoned by a young girl’s cry (“Look mama, a Negro!”) upon the sight of Franz Fanon’s dark skin or the history of lynching to make this case.¹⁵⁹ Yet the grounds of race are also diffuse, accruing force because they are “saturated with sentimentalisms that increase its appeal.”¹⁶⁰ As Laura Wexler and Laura Ann Stoler’s works have argued, feminine spheres of domesticity and family—not unlike the white homes in which Morgan worked as a young nurse and maid—are crucial sites for conditioning affective attachments that naturalize and ratify certain beliefs about racial difference. In this regard, the valences of race in Morgan’s interracial bridal imagery can be productively explored in their “ordinary affects,” of which Morgan’s effusive texts provide much to consider.

Anthropologist Kathleen Stewart defines ordinary affects as “public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation, but they’re also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of. . . . They can be experienced as a pleasure and a shock, as an empty pause or a dragging undertow, as a sensibility that snaps into place or a profound disorientation.”¹⁶¹ Often occurring in ways that evade clear or rational description, ordinary affects provide a way for thinking about how the circulation of racisms can be interrupted and remade as functions of affect and religious belief for an artist like Morgan. Consider Stewart’s elaboration below alongside the shiftiness of racial discourse:

To attend to ordinary affects is to trace how their potency of forces lies in their immanence to things that are both flighty and hardwired, shifty and unsteady but palpable too. At once abstract and concrete, ordinary affects are more directly

¹⁵⁸ Leigh Raiford and Elizabeth Abel, “Introduction: Photography and Race” in *English Language Notes* 44:2 (Winter 2006), 161.

¹⁵⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008 [1952]), 112.

¹⁶⁰ Laura Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010 2nd ed.), 159.

¹⁶¹ Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 2.

compelling than ideologies, as well as more fractious, multiplicitous, and unpredictable than symbolic meanings.¹⁶²

Morgan's bridal crowning intensified the immanence of the Holy Spirit in her life, to which she responded with surprise, joy, wonder, action, and devotion. My approach, then, is to argue for the multivalent ways the visual language of race charges her bridal iconography with tensions that have riddled the history of race in the United States. Yet the power of her bridal iconography does not derive solely from a flirtation with American taboos. Rather, her bridal imagery openly professes a second, visionary sight in which whiteness is symbolic of spiritual power, one that she now wears (literally, in white pigment, as a sign of her spiritual elevation). Through white men Morgan contests the embodied irreducibilities codified in racist discourse in favor of imagining other social and spiritual possibilities—most of all her intimate, privileged spiritual reality.¹⁶³ How sanctification might have altered, reinvented, and reinvigorated her racialized self-perception is what I now seek to explore using the language and behavior of race and affect.



Morgan's bridal crowning was a powerful turning point for the artist, signaling the moment when the scriptures took on lived and affective meaning. It prompted Morgan to shed her black collared dress in exchange for white garments to symbolize her new role as the Bride of Christ. This gesture accords with Revelation 19:8, in which the Christ, the sacrificial Lamb, has come to the bride, "grant[ing] that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." Morgan was fastidious in exercising this spiritual right of displaying her holiness and righteousness. Photographs of the artist show that she possessed an array of white clothing: simple cotton or waffle-knit dresses with buttons and lace trim, cotton sweaters, and a fluffy overcoat with satin sleeves, among other types of clothing. She similarly covered her head with a white cap or piece of white muslin, while she donned white stockings, shoes, and gloves to assume her consecrated identity completely [figs. 48-51].

Morgan was not unique in wearing white as a symbol of spiritual and moral purity; her sartorial language was used in a range of African American Christian ritual practices, including baptisms and Catholic vesting ceremonies for nuns, blacks and whites alike. Within African American Holiness communities, wearing white was also the particular privilege of church mothers and female leaders whose seniority aligned with the depth of their personal sanctification and dedication to serving the church. Eudora Welty's 1939 photographs of a Holiness congregation in Jackson, Mississippi stage haunting presences of female "brides" by

¹⁶² Kathleen Stewart, 3-4.

¹⁶³ My understanding of doubled uses of literate skill is informed by Grey Gundaker's analysis of Rebecca Cox Jackson's "visionary literacy," in which she argues that in areas of Western and Central Africa, people mask in white to invoke spiritual identities. *Signs of Diaspora*, 111-121. I have avoided arguing along the lines of African retentions because these ethnic and racial boundaries were not labelled as such by Morgan, but I fully acknowledge that these African-derived meanings were probably active for the artist.

exploiting the glow of backlit windows and candlelight to conjure their other-worldly, consecrated roles within the humble interiors of the church [fig. 52-53]. Photographs also document several of Morgan's gospel-performing associates in white [fig. 54-56]. The unidentified woman with whom Morgan visits a New Orleans church is the same as the one seated at the far left of Jules Cahn's photograph. In both, she is clad in a white dress and head cover, similar to Morgan's. That they sit together in the church's front pew suggests the uniform's functionality as a symbol of honor within the African American evangelical community.¹⁶⁴

What distinguishes Morgan's adoption of white from these other religious practices—as far as I have been able to determine—is that she wore her white dress daily, both at home and on the streets, rather than for ceremonial occasions [fig. 57]. Morgan never wrote explicitly about this choice, but certainly understood its capacity to define her public identity as she took to the streets shortly after 1957 to preach, entering the French Quarter's milieu of eccentrics that frequented its streets. It clearly set her apart from other street evangelists, such as Sister Idell Williams' group who were regularly stationed along the Quarter's most trafficked blocks. The spectacle of her dark skin framed by bright white distinguished her, for example, from Ruth Grace Moulon, better known as Ruthie the Duck Lady, who wore a dirtied wedding gown and who had a train of ducks following close behind.¹⁶⁵ Morgan's appearance also differentiated her from Mrs. Lopez, a woman fabled to be enacting a lifelong penance by walking the streets, in white, while carrying a cross and pulling a wagon behind her. Within this public field of vision, Morgan's white dress became an icon of her identity as the Bride of Christ evangelist in the Vieux Carré, providing her the platform from which to testify to the inward transformation that she felt and believed so deeply. The extent to which her white dress participated in defining her black female body in her public performances is something I explore in the next chapter. The point I would like to make here is how her dress produced a kind of branded identity that she transferred to her bridal self-portraits.

Painting and drawing bore its own set of imaginative possibilities for Morgan as she sought to circulate her fully sanctified identity publicly. In a work like *It Is Time to Set in the Swing*, Morgan exhibits the privileged ease that characterized the interior life of the sanctified [fig. 58]. She is ensconced between two white men, God the Father and God the Son, one of whom cradles her shoulders with his left arm. The picture leverages the symmetry of gendered figures and her racial difference to call out the artist's singular identity. The trio, set on a green

¹⁶⁴ Morgan's associate with the cat-eyed eyeglass frames remains unidentified, for she does not appear in any of the JazzFest program books or papers for 1971. I have tentatively identified the church in Noel Rockmore's photograph as Greater New Sunrise Baptist Church on 4123 Melpomene Street, based on a magnification of the photograph, the address number that also appears in a Sacha B. Clay's Collection (#001), and confirmation that Pastor Willie Dempsey—whose name appears in those papers—was leader of that church. Morgan was likely in touch with him about a preaching engagement there. "Pastor's Rites Due Saturday" *Times-Picayune*, 15 February 1974, section 4, 22.

¹⁶⁵ John Pope, "Ruthie the Duck Girl Dies of Cancer at 74," *Times-Picayune* 12 September 2008 [accessed 11 July 2014], http://www.nola.com/news/index.ssf/2008/09/ruthie_the_duck_girl_dies_of_c.html.

porch swing, thus provides the visual point of departure for the stream of Morgan's preacherly text that surrounds them. Morgan exhorts her reader: "It is time to set in the swing now for this Judgment day[;] swing your troubles over to God say Lord teach me how to Pray." In this signifyin(g) word play, Morgan makes "swinging" into a trope of conversion ("set in the swing now for this Judgment day") and mode of action ("swing your troubles over to God"). Her picture-sermon proposes that to swing over to God is to sit pretty like the artist, who has implicitly already gotten "in line and enter[ed] in at the straight gate" of salvation. *The little Bride in Conversation with Her Two Dadas* illustrates just one of Morgan's joys in walking the path of sanctification: being in intimate communication with the divine [fig. 59]. With arms raised in the posture of "going up in prayer," Morgan approaches her two "dadas," one of whom reaches down his arm to touch her shoulder. Whorls of color in the surrounding space give the only form to a spiritual exchange that we, as observers, cannot hear but perhaps can only sense through our eyes.

In calling her two husbands "dadas," Morgan also positions herself as a child or subordinate, rather than as a bride. She appears nearly two head lengths shorter than her counterparts, reinforcing the diminutive position she assumes before them. Thus, her white dress recalls the uniform of black subservience in roles that Morgan had formerly occupied, especially as a nursemaid. If she indeed attended a rural school, we might also imagine her wearing the white cap and apron that signified dutiful learning by students in the Homemaker Club for Girls, which we saw earlier [fig. 14]. Spotless white clothing on a black woman's body was the attire of service and obedience in Morgan's social worlds. When she adopted these garments in the context of her sanctified faith, they retained the tinge of paternalism even as they signified her spiritual elevation within this hierarchy.

In the most significant way, pictures permitted Morgan to create representations that flirted with the social taboos of interracial marriage. Yet they are neither coy nor forcefully transgressive, but sweetly provocative in the artist's adoption of generic postures of middle-class respectability to present her wondrously intimate union with the Christian trinity. An exemplary artwork in this regard is *Jesus Christ the Lamb of God and His Little Bride*, which elaborates upon her sanctified relationship with abundant text and portrayals of Christ (Dada Jesus) and the Father (Dada God) [fig. 47].¹⁶⁶

In each side of Morgan's halved composition, the artist appears in bridal dress and stands alongside Jesus who is tuxedoed, mustachioed, and auburn-haired with peach-colored skin. Sweetness and propriety permeate this decidedly non-caricatured image of a sanctified embrace. At left, Jesus caresses the petite artist's shoulder with one peach-colored hand and her face with the other. Covering nearly half of Morgan's face, the position of this second hand might appear clumsily applied; however its appearance on her face provocatively visualizes the intimate, biracial union that is the theme of this artwork. Though Morgan's sketchy application of color

¹⁶⁶The following interpretation is a slightly different version of my essay, "Acts of Conversion: Sanctification and the Sense of Race in the Art of Sister Gertrude Morgan," *Sensation Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice*, ed. Sally Promey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014): 403-411.

and wild-eyed expression might convey a gesture of coercion, the surrounding poetic couplets diffuse its force with their intermittent, gentle rhymes. Indeed, the curvature of her writing and under-drawing suggest that she drew the two portrait vignettes in pencil before adding pen inscriptions and crayon ornamentation that secures the intent of the bluntly outlined forms:

Jesus Christ the lamb of
God and his little bride.
O is'nt that a lovly couple
he's got her right By his side
in fact shes in his arms
to. he does his work
through her. you know
he leads her wh-
ere ever she go.
he uses her
mouth to talk
through. you no
its written in
the Bible he's
got some Body
to love him some one
that is rel-
iable¹⁶⁷

Does Christ possess Morgan, or does Morgan possess the spirit of Christ? And what is the nature of this possession? On a narrative level, the poem-drawing suggests the artist is firmly (and delightedly) ensconced in the embrace of her groom. “O isn’t that a lovly couple,” Morgan remarks, summoning the frame that points the reader to the referent of the demonstrative “that”: the “her” that Jesus has “got right by his side.” She further modifies their physical proximity to emphasize the depth and security of their embrace, for “in fact she’s in his arms to.” This mounting sense of closeness between Morgan and Christ intensifies with the lines of cursive script that knit them together, and in our process of viewing, the objectifying power of visual representation begins to warm with the movement of the artist’s subjective, affective thought. Put another way, seeing the picture and reading the writing together launch both beings into intimate action and animation: “He does his work through her” and “leads her wherever she go” while her writing-as-action fulfills this work. Like the aqua blue ground that supports them across the span of the page, Morgan resolutely becomes that “some Body . . . reliable,” ready to assume his commission (to be in possession of him) and channel his voice (to be possessed by

¹⁶⁷ Line breaks, spelling, and language are consistent with the drawing, and [sic] should be understood throughout when Morgan’s text is quoted.

him).¹⁶⁸ Identities indwell one another here; the artist-Bride's face bears the mark of the Other in that striking patch of peach crayon that overlays her cheek. Morgan's drawing-poem is both a representation and performance of what theologian Miroslav Volf has called the "drama of embrace" in which self and other merge, cleave, and release in mutual fashion.¹⁶⁹ Sight and speech may be the means by which Morgan awakens us to the implications of embrace ("O isn't that lovely couple"), but the mutuality she describes refers to another sensory basis: the "reciprocal motility of touch" occurring at a level of intimacy shared between "the great master and his darling wife."¹⁷⁰

We would not be off the mark to be startled by the vocabulary of enslavement invoked here, for Morgan's image of black femininity under the "master's" white masculinity recalls too readily the harrowing history of sexual victimization of black women by white slave owners. Yet we would do well to take seriously her self-designation as "darling wife" and the fealty to Jesus and God the Father that it prompts:

this is the great master
and his darling wife.
they are useing this wife
for this great Kingdom to
Brighten up their life. They
wanted some Body to work
through and its time for
them to Be well honored
and humored and well glorified too
I want to tell you darling
dada the world
is mad and it
seem like
they are
mad with
I and you. But I'm gone
stand straight up not part the
way cause I no you are
able to carry me through.

¹⁶⁸ Despite injunctions within the African American Baptist church and related Sanctified denominations such as the Church of God in Christ against women preaching, Morgan essentially took on the role of preaching once settled in New Orleans. See *A Poem of My Calling* as one example in which Morgan designates the operations of "preaching" as "teaching."

¹⁶⁹ Miroslav Volf, "The Drama of Embrace," in *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 140-156.

¹⁷⁰ Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 171.

Her closing affirmation hinges upon belief in “darling dada” and his unconditional acceptance and constant devotion to his “darling wife.”¹⁷¹ Here again, the provocation of touch crystallizes the intent between divine father and wife, both the spiritual sense of God’s nearness and the depicted touch of Morgan’s bi-colored face on the left. In these affectionately shared names, we receive a “retrospective and recursive insight into the originating terms of the inspiration [of embrace] itself:” a poetics that preserves alterity through bonds of self-giving love. This poetics of love is other and within, by “her side” and through her “Body” and voice—sustained over and through the “mad” world that “seem like [is] mad with I and you.” Whether the madness to which Morgan refers is an opponent of sanctified Christianity or New Orleans’ voodoo practitioners whom Morgan vocally despised we cannot know with certainty; but the point to garner is the security of a promise between two speakers that underpins the artwork’s textual language.¹⁷²

Quite different, then, is Morgan’s conception of recognition from Frantz Fanon’s sobering reassessment of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic under the exploitative conditions of slavery; Morgan’s “big dada” the “great master” seems not to “[scorn] the consciousness of the slave” or display mere “paternalistic curiosity.” From her position of black femininity and sanctified belief, Morgan’s art elaborates upon Fanon’s concluding appeal in *Black Skin, White Masks*: “Why not simply try to touch the other, feel the other, discover each other?”¹⁷³ This promise of “connection and intelligibility” inhabits poetic, verbal form, according to Susan Stewart; thus we sense in her hybrid lines of rhyme and speech, weighted with irresistibly falling intonations, a firmness in Morgan’s devotional posture towards God and Christ.¹⁷⁴ We understand “great master,” then, as a doxology directed to her intimate and divine interlocutors. In this devotional gesture, Morgan reworks the language of white oppression to declare her allegiance to “the Lamb.”

Morgan’s Religious Visual Culture

Within the history of African American evangelicalism, Morgan’s portrayal of Jesus as a white man would not have been a given by the 1960s, the drawing’s approximate date of production. Even though fourteen million prints of Warner Sallman’s 1941 painting, *The Head of Christ*, were circulating the Nordic-featured visages of the Christian savior by 1945, as early as 1913, some African American preachers were already theorizing that Jesus was, in fact, “a

¹⁷¹ Morgan’s sensory and religious alternative counterbalances the revolutionary politics of the Martinican psychiatrist. Fanon, 195 fn. 10, 196, 206.

¹⁷² Fagaly, 30, 62-3.

¹⁷³ S. Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, 199.

¹⁷⁴ S. Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, 332. My analysis relies upon Susan Stewart’s approach to the poetic voice, especially her concern with the production of voiced presence through language’s invocation of the senses. Especially helpful in considering Morgan’s poetic and written voice is her discussion of rhythmic repetition at the core of “invocatory activity” and rhythmic irregularity associated with the speaking voice. Together, these poetic juxtapositions are “animating features that add to the embodiment of voice in a poem” that are the “implicit tie of intelligibility between speaker and listener” (emphasis original, 65 and 104).

negro.”¹⁷⁵ Church of God Minister James Morris Webb stated the possibility baldly in *The Black Man, the Father of Civilization, Proven by Biblical History* in 1914: “God honored the black man by allowing some his Ethiopian blood to flow in the veins of His only Son Jesus Christ, and I unhesitatingly assert that Jesus would in America be classed a Negro.”¹⁷⁶ Webb published a similar message on September 6, 1924 in *Negro World*, the weekly newspaper and mouthpiece of the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). In this small advertisement, he also announced the sale of “A Picture of Jesus as a colored man with woolly hair and a book proving the same. Price, \$1.”¹⁷⁷ This idea was not exclusive to Webb, for in the same *Negro World* issue, the newspaper reports that such a racial paradigm shift was the subject of a religious ceremony in Liberty Hall, New York on August 31, 1924. Bishop George A. McGuire—the founder of the African Orthodox Church—presided and urged audience members to recognize that “the greatest obstacle we have to face [is] the failure of even educated Negroes to see that they must quit the white man’s country, the white man’s church, and theology.”¹⁷⁸ The key to realizing one’s status as the free, “New Negro” was self-determination in all areas of life, including religious life. Artists and writers of the Harlem Renaissance explored these ideas as well, bringing an African Christ into visual representation as part of an emerging symbolic vocabulary created to re-imagine a utopian future founded upon a new pan-African identity. In Aaron Douglas’ *Crucifixion*, one of eight illustrations for James Weldon Johnson’s 1927 publication, *God’s Trombones*, the artist endows the cross-laden figure with rounded profile features meant to signal his African descent [fig. 60]. Though Weldon’s text speaks of “Black Simon” who carried the cross when Christ faltered, Douglas’s darkened silhouette leaves the possibility for viewers to identify the man as either Christ or Simon. From 1939 to 1944, William H. Johnson reworked several classic religious themes of Western art history, creating several oil paintings depicting scenes from the life of a dark-skinned Jesus [fig. 61].¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ David Morgan, “Warner Sallman and the Visual Culture of American Protestantism,” 26. For a cultural history of Sallman’s artistic practice, see Erika Doss, “Making a ‘Virile, Manly Christ’: The Cultural Origins and Meanings of Warner Sallman’s Religious Imagery.” Both chapters are in *Icons of American Protestantism: The Art of Warner Sallman*, David Morgan ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996). In 1913, Arthur Anderson argued that Abraham had dark skin, and therefore Christianity was originally a religion of “negro” people. *Prophetic Liberator of the Coloured Race of the United States of America: Command to His People* cited in Maffly-Kipp, 224.

¹⁷⁶ Quoted in Maffly-Kipp, 224.

¹⁷⁷ “Jesus Was a Negro By Blood,” *The Negro World*, September 6, 1924, page 6. At the time of writing, I have not been able to locate one of these pictures. Additionally, Webb recorded two sermons in 1926 and 1927 with Paramount Records that emphasize the African roots of key biblical figures. Whether Morgan heard these is difficult to determine. Reverend J.M. Webb, “Somebody’s Wrong about the Bible” and “Moses was Rescued by a Negro Woman,” *Preachers and Congregations, Volume 6*, Document Records, DOCD-5560, 1997, compact disc, originally recorded by Paramount Records, 78 rpm disc.

¹⁷⁸ “Religious Ceremony at Liberty Hall That Corrects Mistake of Centuries and Braces the Negro; Jesus, The Christ, Spiritual Deified as a Black Man of Sorrows, and the Virgin Mary Canonized as a Black Madonna,” *The Negro World*, September 6, 1924, pages 5 and 12.

¹⁷⁹ “The Flowering of the Harlem Renaissance: The Art of Aaron Douglas, Meta Warwick Fuller, Palmer Hayden, and William H. Johnson”, by David Driskell in *Harlem Renaissance Art of Black America* (Abrams and Studio Museum in Harlem, NY 1987): 105-154.

Whether Morgan encountered these ideas, in print or in popular discourse, is difficult to determine. When she expressed concern with the fate of the African American race, as she does in a manuscript entitled “Ethiopia”—what could either be a written meditation or preaching outline—she does not adopt the separatism of the Black Nationalist position. On the one hand, she grounds her thoughts in the mythic and ancient land of pre-enslaved African civilization, a site that offered a collective identity within the diasporic African American imaginary since the mid-nineteenth century, uniting Northern blacks, freed Southerners, and Africans [fig. 62].¹⁸⁰ Additionally, she opens her text by citing part of a biblical genealogy from Genesis 10:6 that mentions “Cush the son of Ham,” believed by generations of black historians, intellectuals, and theologians to be the patriarch of the African race.¹⁸¹

In joining religious discourses on the sacred origins of race, Morgan is not unique. However, Morgan dwells less on a nostalgic longing to recuperate pre-colonial African unity (and the grandeur associated with ancient Ethiopia) than on exhorting her audience to spiritual courses of action:

a little Black girl like me to do just what you and dada say. I love you my little darling girl[,] this is the Black Man’s day. Now dada so many people don’t understand about the Black man’s day. you will hafter turn to God in holiness and Righteousness and Put all your sins away. Read the bible 5 Chap of galations. Put hatred out of your life. humble your self[,] fight with Prayer you can’t make it through sin and strife[.]¹⁸²

In this passage, Morgan applies Holiness teaching to the problem of race relations, racial progress, and “sin and strife.” Unlike her religious predecessors, who conceived of racial unity in terms of emigration to Africa and evangelism to pagan brethren in places like Liberia and Sierra Leone, Morgan understands the future of the “Black man” in eschatological and individualist terms, which she explicitly cites. Galatians 5 invokes the rhetoric of liberty as a condition of the Spirit and bondage as that of the flesh. Morgan employs the all too familiar terms of enslavement, but implies that it is a condition that can be volitionally changed through holy living: “Wake up...read Run” she urges her reader, the first reference to scripture unequivocally commanding that “ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44). In other words, the sanctified life is the way forward towards the “Black Man’s day,” which seems to be coterminous with Christ’s second coming, or “when the Son of

¹⁸⁰ Gitter-Yelen Collection, New Orleans.

¹⁸¹ The “Ethiopian prophecy,” referring to Psalm 68:31 (“Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God”), led many sacred historians to frame racial unity in terms of Christianity. For an account of the diverse ways in which African American thinkers, missionaries, and ministers theorized Ethiopia and negotiated their distance from the African motherland, see Maffly-Kipp, chapter 4, “Exodus and Ethiopia,” 154-200. In 1929, Countee Cullen’s poem “The Black Christ” also brought such a possibility into the African American religious imaginary.

¹⁸² Undated manuscript from the Gitter-Yelen Collection, New Orleans.

man shall come in his glory” (Matthew 25:31). Not only does Morgan recast the desire for African unity along a cosmic timeline, she places the responsibility of uplift on the reader to undertake holy living, whether she be black or white.

When asked about Jesus Christ’s “whiteness,” Morgan was said to reply, “Jesus has always been white.”¹⁸³ Taken at face value, Morgan is the “naïve,” an unconscious adopter of the light-skinned savior-type derived from dominant religious imagery. She would have copied the relief image of Christ that hung in her prayer room [fig. 63].¹⁸⁴ We know she copied illustrations from Spicer’s book, and it is possible that she turned to newspaper society pages for models of wedding portraits [figs. 64-66]. Yet Morgan’s understanding of “whiteness” as symbolic of spiritual power and righteousness, as well as her pictorial proposition of an interracial *marriage*, complicate what would appear to be a simple idealization; for if we read her picture against the legal and social discourses of anti-miscegenation, the redemptive possibilities in the use of the marriage metaphor exceed naiveté.

African Americans enduring Jim Crow would be hard-pressed to imagine whites as friends or benefactors, let alone as spouses. Until the Supreme Court declared state anti-miscegenation statutes unconstitutional in *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), nineteen states—including the states of Morgan’s youth, Alabama and Georgia—maintained prohibitions on black-white marriages. Though abolished briefly during Reconstruction, Louisiana’s anti-miscegenation laws were similar to many throughout the U.S. southern states. The state’s 1808 civil code did not recognize marriage between whites and free people of color or enslaved blacks, and legislation further criminalized interracial relations by making concubinage between whites and blacks a felony in 1908. Such laws managed the rights of mixed-race children, who occupied an ambiguous social and racial position.¹⁸⁵ As Eva Saks has carefully shown, post-Reconstruction anti-miscegenation cases sought to control not only the legitimization of social unions, but more importantly the legal disposition of property to children of such unions.¹⁸⁶ Legislating race went hand in hand with determining class.

Morgan’s religious community’s position on racial integration and interracial marriage cannot be determined definitively. For African American Holiness-Pentecostals, what had begun historically as an integrated movement of worship eventually lost momentum and fell prey to

¹⁸³ Phone conversation with Hazell Boyce, a French Quarter denizen who was acquainted with Morgan and Larry Borenstein, February 27, 2013.

¹⁸⁴ William A. Fagaly reported to me that this object was an image in relief. Whether Morgan painted it, or if it was originally painted, is unknown. Conversation with Fagaly, July 17, 2015.

¹⁸⁵ Jennifer Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 178-214.

¹⁸⁶ Eva Saks, “Representing Miscegenation Law” in Werner Sollors, ed. *Interracialism: Black-White Inter-marriage in American History, Literature, and Law* (Oxford, 2000), 69. See also William D. Zabel, “Interracial Marriage and the Law” in Sollors, 57-59; Virginia R. Dominguez, *White by Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986, second printing 1997), 25; Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 6; and in Sollors, 69.

segregationist practices. Consequently, many African American congregations, including the grassroots congregations in Morgan's circles, likely followed the course of secular practice and cared for those in their immediate, segregated vicinity. Ministering and conducting business across racial lines were possible within prescribed boundaries, but interracial marriage for a black woman would most likely have met opposition or ambivalence on both sides of the color line.¹⁸⁷

If there was one actual circumstance in Morgan's life of a socially normative, cross-gendered and interracial relationship, the artist-patron affiliation between Morgan and her two foremost benefactors, Larry Borenstein and Allan Jaffe, fulfilled this role [fig. 116]. The two became business partners in 1961 and managed Preservation Hall, the French Quarter music venue where Morgan would occasionally perform her gospel songs. As I detail further in chapter 2, Borenstein and Jaffe positioned themselves as impresarios, cultural preservationists, and countercultural crusaders on the one hand, and friends and neighbors to the black musicians whom they promoted—often meeting their practical needs. In Morgan's case, they covertly purchased her home to relieve her of financial obligations, while Borenstein arranged for her performances in festivals, and above all, aided in the distribution of her artworks. They were paternal in an intensely tangible way.¹⁸⁸ Though Morgan never portrayed herself with Borenstein or Jaffe in self-portraits, the terms of their care and attention make them suggestive analogues for paintings like *It's Time to Set in the Swing*. Yet to negotiate one's subordination in lived experience across racial lines is one thing; to re-signify racial hierarchies in representation during the 1960s and 1970s (when she created the majority of her work) suggests another.

In this way, we can view Morgan's interracial imagery as the capacity for sanctified belief to reconcile social taboos by reframing them as spiritual transformations authored by the Holy Spirit, a power that Morgan fully possessed upon her crowning. Sanctification was a doctrine that proclaimed the possibility of unity along continuums of extremes: humans are sinful but can be perfected during their earthly existences, and Christ as both man and God makes such spiritual transformation possible. Additionally, Morgan's emphasis on the book of Revelation magnified the future potential of God reunited with humankind. In many ways, then, sanctification dovetailed with whites' historical and cultural claims to physically unmarked and invisible power, bodily transcendence, symbolic purity, and universality, all of which have been culturally coded as heterosexual and masculine—and perhaps most significantly, legitimized by

¹⁸⁷ Nannie Helen Burroughs, a women's leader within the National Baptist Convention, weighed in on interracial marriage, advocating that blacks "should pitch in and make the race worth belonging to instead of escaping into a race that is already made." "Church Leader Argues Against Mixed Marriage," *Ebony* (November 1951): 51, quoted in Renee Romano, *Race-Mixing: Black-White Marriage in Postwar America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 88. Pentecostal attitudes are more difficult to define. Despite an early period of interracial worship from 1906-24, denominational splits tended to fall along racial lines. Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971, Second ed. 1997).

¹⁸⁸ See chapter two of this dissertation.

white Protestant Christianity.¹⁸⁹ Thus, Morgan's interracial imagery can also be understood to reappropriate racialized whiteness' masculine claims to power by reinterpreting and reorienting its fluid meanings by way of her individual agency and art. The combination of handwritten text, crayon ornamentation, and figuration is replete with this signifying intention; Morgan marshals these visual strategies to announce her exceptional status as the Bride. The decision to picture her black body next to his peach-colored one was a part of this visual design. Created for a public that Borenstein made available to her (discussed in chapter 2), Morgan's art confronted the taboo of interracial marriage in service of creating pictures in which she appears as the object of sight and simultaneously the author of its vision.¹⁹⁰

The combination of writing and depiction allows Morgan to negotiate her objecthood and subjecthood. According to Susan Stewart's formulation of language and personhood, "good faith in intelligibility" accompanies poetic language and is the "means [by] which we recognize each other as speaking persons."¹⁹¹ Taken one step further, Morgan's written poetic speech goes beyond soliciting mere recognition. Its assertive visuality entreats viewers to recognize its creator as a volitional, sensing, and embodied person. The tension between surface and depth activated by Morgan's formal choices in *Jesus Christ the Lamb of God and His Little Bride* announces her creative presence [fig. 47]. One such decision was to complete an interlocking "ground" of writing and picture interspersed with orange dashes. Words recede if we follow the jaunty turns of crayon marks, only to stretch and rise to the surface as they bend around figures and exert their claim for space and legibility. Morgan's juxtaposition of words and crayon ornamentation forms the bridge upon which perception of the inscribed surface travels from visuality to textuality and back again—between "I see" and "I read;" the oscillation between the two sensate processes generate the perception of her picture's vitality. So the visually garrulous "ground" resounds with her performative and textual voice, oscillating between graphic notation and linguistic signification. And so it also forms the architecture of Morgan's vital, sanctified self in which waxy pigment mortars each brick-word. Both rough and prolific, the word-wall divulges her creative agency and spiritual receptivity as she drags crayon across the paper's grain and impresses pen's point into its surface.

The perceptual suspension commanded by Morgan's expressionism, I would argue, gains greater power when considered as an erosion of racist logic that fixes social identities within biological theory—and whose legal legitimation was most fiercely and publicly challenged in the social activism of the Civil Rights Movement. Morgan's racial consciousness would be impossible to deny: she not only came of age in the Jim Crow South and a black Baptist congregation, but "Ethiopia" makes reference to "a little black girl like me" and the "Black

¹⁸⁹ Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), especially chapters 1 and 2.

¹⁹⁰ My argument has been helped by Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby's discussion of Sojourner Truth's negotiation of securing private personhood (self-possession) as a means of controlling one's right to publicity. This paradox meant that former slaves "needed to objectify themselves—to see themselves as they were seen by others—in order to attain full self-possession." *Enduring Truths: Sojourner's Shadows and Substance*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press), 2015.

¹⁹¹ S. Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, 105.

Angel.” Yet rather than submit to white taboos and assertions of illegitimacy attached to interracial marriage permeating twentieth-century American imaginations, Morgan adopted an idea of a light-skinned Christ as her divine partner. What Morgan experienced in her sanctification, and what her drawing-poem models as a matter of sensory perception, was the *possibility* for social equality and reciprocity between dynamically changing identities that are founded upon irreducible, embodied differences.¹⁹²

Morgan makes such equalities visible in unlike formal symmetries. In a passage like the deliberate overlap of Christ’s peach hand squarely atop the brown “skin” on her face, the relational structure that gives race its divisive potency is the hinge for this couple’s connection. This area, in which Morgan’s face appears both black and white, visualizes the dependency of one racial term on the construction of an opposite. What segregationist policy enforced as a matter of racist disenfranchisement collapses together in this appearance of Morgan as half black and half white; the symbolic white agency of her groom bleeds into Morgan’s racial blackness—and at the bodily site of unique personhood, no less. Morgan rivets our gaze with her wide eyes, drawing attention to the tenderness of Christ’s hands as he peers downward towards her. He “leads her wherever she go” in this half of the drawing-poem, and Morgan signals this submission of will by framing her visage with the racialized whiteness of Christ’s hands and the tonal white paint that colors his button-down shirt. Coexisting side by side is the symbolic purity coded as an additive color with the originary, transcendental power historically aligned with the “colorlessness” of whiteness. Moreover, Morgan wields the creative agency of whiteness to picture the incarnate Logos, the primal power that brings forth life, in a move that bends the flexible construct of racialized whiteness to ratify her identity as a black woman, while sustaining her converted status as the Bride of Christ.¹⁹³ The poem-drawing is both action and reaction, with conviction, emotion, and intelligence suffusing it with—to borrow Hortense Spillers’ rich phrase—the artist-wife’s “articulated syntactic particularity.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Volf, 146. “The equality and reciprocity that are at the heart of embrace can be reached only through self-sacrifice.” He continues, writing that such self-sacrifice may “not [be] a positive good, but a necessary *via dolorosa* in a world of enmity and indifference toward the joy of reciprocal embrace. Such self-sacrifice is modeled on Christ’s self-sacrifice, which is nothing but the mutuality of Trinitarian self-giving in encounter with the enemy.” I do not claim that Morgan intentionally and politically engaged public discourses. However, the power of belief, which she held as real and universal, urges beholders of her art to consider its personal and social implications.

¹⁹³ Elizabeth Abel’s argument concerning the construction of race through visible and linguistic signs in photography has been central to my argument here: “The language of Jim Crow attempts to recruit the creative power of the originary word to articulate the foundational divisions of the universe out of a primal formlessness....Often less creation than negation, less ‘let there be’ than ‘let there not be,’ this language performed a dual function: mapping the social world and exempting white people (the locution of choice) from the implications of that mapping by inflecting Genesis with a tradition of Christian dualism that aligns whiteness with the primacy of the word and the purity of soul that lodges only lightly in an embodied world.” *Signs of the Times: The Visual Politics of Jim Crow* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 66.

¹⁹⁴ Spillers, “‘All the Things You Could Be By Now,” 145. Spillers’ conception of cultural analysis interprets African American speech as part of “substitutive identities” that break towards “new potentialities of becoming.”

The right vignette, a formal inverse of the left, completes this image of reciprocity and embodied opposition.¹⁹⁵ The couple's rhyming posture signals the symbolic sameness achieved by the white pigment surrounding Morgan's face at left, while skin color and clothing contrasts preserve gender and racial difference.¹⁹⁶ In this half of the drawing, part of the sensory dynamism between Morgan and her divine intimates for which I have been arguing rests upon the slipperiness of words that can apply to both descriptions of race and formal characteristics. If a viewer were to describe the relationship between the sitting and standing figures, a sentence like "A black woman in white stands behind a seated white man in black" makes more obvious the inverted correspondences between color and racial concept that Morgan's image playfully activates.

This sensory vitality further corresponds with an open-ended contingency that characterizes Morgan's sanctified relationship with Christ and God. Her drawing-poem materializes an aesthetic form that "intends toward the future and is never closed by its reception. . . . [it depends upon] our sense of the cohesion and ongoingness of persons in general . . . to which we adhere *even when we cannot know its ground.*"¹⁹⁷ This stake in her futurity is the remarkable, poetic profession of Morgan's faith that dispossesses race of its biological determinism. *Jesus Christ the Lamb of God and His Little Bride* mobilizes the character of poetry itself in visual form, mobilizing the "good faith" of language through which we recognize persons as individual and changing speaking voices across time. We, as present and future viewer-beholders, are included in her audience. Thus we bear witness to the love between a prophet and her "great master" and to the breadth of her transformation that now addresses us as a third party. Her signature, "Prophetess Morgan," functions much like one that closes a love letter and distills the artwork's emotional response into a self-possessed resolve to continue serving as God's mouthpiece. The two-page format she links with the open pages of the "talking book" intensifies her claim in the artworks' capacity to bear the truth of God's Word spoken through them.

Finally, Morgan seems to hold a secret delight in announcing her intent to keep her two husbands "well honored and humored and well glorified," which I have only hinted at previously. After all, within her Holiness circles, preaching, testifying, dancing, and singing were the primary modes of worship. Art-making was an endeavor that seemed to come from Morgan's singular background and allowed her to activate a private reservoir of agency, intellect, and sacred power outside of which believers and unbelievers alike stand. "Their unbelief is their loss," her illustrated missive seems to say, as it obliquely provokes and invites viewers into her

¹⁹⁵ Alternatively, the right seated figure could be God the Father, the "great master" and her first divine husband who "married" her in 1942. Though this supposition does not change my argument concerning Morgan's understanding of sanctification and race, it does propose that this drawing is less a doubling focused on Christ than a triple and more complete portrait of Morgan's sanctification that includes Christ (left), God the Father (right), and the Holy Ghost (through graphic index and in Morgan's self-portraiture).

¹⁹⁶ William Fagaly interview with Lee Friedlander, October 8, 1996.

¹⁹⁷ S. Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, 331, my emphasis. She continues, "This is the prophetic aspect of every poem, regardless of its theme."

sanctified reality. As witnesses, we overhear and peek at her spiritual conversation with her “darling dadas,” never fully privy to the intimacy that she presents to us in plain sight. Morgan’s double-consciousness contrasts with the tumultuous spiritual and psychic life that du Bois felt as “two warring ideals in one dark body.”¹⁹⁸ Morgan instead joins herself to God and Christ as her spiritual founts. In recognition of the interdependency among the three of them, Morgan draws from the animating flow of their affections for her, and her affectively charged devotion to them.

“some of the history of my life”

Around February 26, 1967, Morgan commemorated the twenty-eighth “anniversary” of her arrival in New Orleans with a series of remembrances of her sanctified journey. In her customary fashion, Morgan’s interior thoughts abound with nothing less than a profusion of devotional speech: “I’ve Ben following you to men so long, since 1934 this holy Road is so sweet and true its no other way I desire to go...[I’m] thanking you for strengthening me. to love and serve you day and night cold or hot wet or dry snow or sleep as happy as I can Be.”¹⁹⁹ We cannot know the precise contours of experience she has in mind when expressing this sentiment, but from the writings and pictures assembled in this chapter, we know that they have everything to do with calling and response, the affirmation of divine promises, the empowerment to speak and to tell, and a community within which Morgan pursued the promises of sanctification in the earthly realm.

Given the conversational structures of these themes, it is not surprising that Morgan’s modes of self-representation are intertwined with a sanctified orality involving the personae of her “two dadas.” Morgan was first and foremost a speaking and worshipping being. This posture emerges when she adopts the form of the “Talking Book” for her self-portraits that are filled with written speech. Yet the address of her narratives in many cases had an evangelistic aim as well, as I have suggested but left unexamined until now. “God put it into my mind to tell some of the history of my life,” she explained once, “that some one may make up their mind to come out of darkness into this marvellous light.”²⁰⁰ How Morgan responded to this call to evangelize and the media she employed are the subjects of the following chapter.

¹⁹⁸ W.E.B. du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Terri Hume Oliver (New York: Norton, 1999), 15.

¹⁹⁹ Sister Gertrude Morgan, “28th Years Anniversary Sister Gertrude Morgan the lamb’s wife Feb. 26 1939,” undated manuscript #0011A, Sacha Borenstein Clay Collection, New Orleans.

²⁰⁰ Sister Gertrude Morgan, “some history of life,” undated manuscript #0013A, Sacha Borenstein Clay Collection, New Orleans.

Chapter 2

Possessing Traditions

I don't know if I had ever felt passion before—that pulse-churning excitement that makes you want to possess a thing, to fuse with it and have it fuse with you, that makes that thing seem greater and more wonderful than any other thing in the world. That's what I felt for the sound of George Lewis's clarinet.

– Tom Sancton, on his first evening
at Preservation Hall ca. 1960

*Lord I'm running to make this my home / in that land so fair / you went on to
prepare / Lord I'm running to make this my home... Lord I'm singing to make
this my home... Lord I'm praying...*

– Sister Gertrude Morgan

During the 1960s and onward, the space at 726 St. Peter Street became saturated with spirits. Tom Sancton, a native New Orleanian and jazzman who learned to play at the knee of elder African American musician George Lewis, recalled that his first experience in this unassuming space was spellbinding. “More than mere music, his clarinet seemed to fill the room with soul and spirit, something deep, dark, and eternal.”²⁰¹ For Sancton, Lewis’ playing epitomized the passion and power of music, whose expressiveness seemed to flow effortlessly phrase after phrase—a “liquid tone.” The vibratos, steady beats, and expansive timbres of tunes like “The Old Rugged Cross” were part of an entire repertoire that, for listeners of Sancton’s white, middle-class generation, became the object of their nostalgically-tinged and steady devotion [audio 1, appendix 1, and figures 67-68]. In what would become enshrined as “traditional New Orleans jazz,” this musical style and the older, primarily black, musicians who still played it were consecrated as relics of a bygone era, a flame of the past in need of tending lest it be forgotten. That some jazz critics at the time deemed such enthusiasts as “moldy figs”—a dismissive label imputing backwardness of taste—only intensified their commitment, deepening the temporal and stylistic line in the sand between “revivalists” or “purists” and their “modern,” avant-garde antagonists.²⁰²

The epigraphs are taken from, respectively, Tom Sancton, *Song for My Fathers: A New Orleans Story in Black and White* (New York: Other Press, 2006), 53 and Sister Gertrude Morgan from an untitled spiral-bound notebook, undated, private collection.

²⁰¹ Sancton, 53.

²⁰² The earliest use of the invective “moldy fig” was aimed at revivalists in 1942 by Barry Ulanov, writing for *Metronome*, one of the two mainstream jazz journals that would regularly dismiss New Orleans jazz as retrogressive in comparison with swing and later bebop styles of jazz. For an overview of this critical discourse, see Bernard

Sister Gertrude Morgan also passed through the halls at 726 St. Peter Street during these same years, introducing a distinctly different kind of sonic liquidity and temporal vector. Unlike Lewis's tranquilly bubbling melodies, her voice flowed over rougher terrain. In a performance like "I Got a New World in My View," the throb and jangle of her tambourine propels song and spoken word forward with Morgan's religious fervency [audio 2 and figs. 69-70]. When Larry Borenstein, the manager of what was then the Associated Artists Gallery, invited Morgan to perform there, the sanctified Bride of Christ fit neatly into the kind of local novelty he was interested in hosting in his commercial space, an auditory attraction to bring in tourist dollars. But as this recording and her writings suggest, Morgan seized this platform for performance—plumb center in a modern-day Babylon of sensual pleasure and vice—to sound off about the coming of the New Jerusalem and eternal judgment as foretold in the biblical scriptures she knew well. Here she declared Jesus's intention to return and "live with you, in your human body, and He in the Spirit. So don't get the bible mixed up...[a generation before] was blessed for what they knew and you gon' be cursed for turning the Word down. Amen!...Let's wake up now and get in line."

Taken separately, Sancton's reception of Lewis's hypnotic performance and Morgan's missionary zeal outline two opposite narrative temporalities, one preoccupied with sounds of the past and the other motivated to invoke the future. Yet at their intersection, as this chapter argues, a culture of preservation clustered and multiplied, engendering reciprocity across boundaries of class, education, race, and gender. Morgan's artistic practice matured within this fluid community; the ways in which her art inflected this cultural environment and was formed by it are the subject of this chapter. It charts Morgan's development from a street evangelist into a singular artist, paying attention to the attractiveness of her expressive output in the 1960s and early 1970s to those in the French Quarter's countercultural community. This trajectory reiterated, with local particularity, the folk revivalism of the post-WWII decades that sought to conjoin disparate social classes through an idealized, mutually defining relation achieved in the production, consumption, and performance of live and recorded music.

The reciprocity that interests me, however, was not necessarily always harmonious nor did it travel predictably. Consider the following recording from August 19, 1961, in which Morgan sings "Let Us Make a Record" while Lewis and "Kid" Thomas Valentine on trumpet follow her lead [audio 3].²⁰³ As Morgan vocalizes a spiritual rallying cry, Lewis and Valentine add cascades of notes beneath the percussive twang of Morgan's untuned guitar. The repetition of Morgan's verse is a mercy here, for other selections on this reel capture these musicians' struggle to follow Morgan to any kind of coherent, melodious success. It sounded "like cats

Gendron, "'Moldy Figs' and Modernists: Jazz at War (1942-1946)" in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 31-56.

²⁰³ "Gertrude Morgan with George Lewis and Kid Thomas, copy of Gospel music recorded at Larry Borenstein['s] 730 St. Peter Street, Sunday morn[ing] Aug 19, 1961," reel-to-reel tape, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University.

wailing,” offered an archivist who assisted me with these materials.²⁰⁴ Taken as a whole, the tracks on this remarkable recording are indeed more than slightly out of tune. Yet Morgan’s conviction never wavers and the recording is kept to this day as an artifact of culture at Tulane University’s Hogan Jazz Archive. Amid the aggregate of sounds and people—old yet newly assembled—something was named and promoted as “traditional,” and Morgan gained traction for her evangelism in front of audiences eager to listen [fig. 71].

My account concentrates primarily on the proliferation of communicative media to which Morgan turned to spread her gospel, comprising songs and sound recording, visual art and writing, and staged performances that activated the auditory and visual field. These mediated forms, I stress, have their basis in orality and auditory expectancy. Their founding moment, not coincidentally, extends from the trope of the talking book discussed in the preceding chapter. Comprising the historical corpus on Morgan’s life that remains, these multimedia engagements provide essential insight into the aesthetic terms which were available to her and by which she, as an African American sanctified woman, strove to be recognized. My inquiry asks *how* Morgan fashioned her persona as the Bride of Christ in order to instantiate her Holiness-Pentecostal beliefs in the presence of and upon others.²⁰⁵

Foundational precepts of Morgan’s religious worldview are obviously significant, not only in doctrine. Her profession of faith *in something* points us to a more general relationship between belief and practice, including those motivating the actions of Borenstein and organizers of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. Both similarly professed faith in technologies of preservation—sound recording, art, the festival event—as well as commercial sales to secure the vitality of expressive culture tied to New Orleans. Forming the unlikely link between Borenstein and Morgan were a set of compatible aims, or complementary modernities, pursued in the name of two differing strands of tradition.

Ultimately, the aspects of traditionality for which Morgan’s identity and art were recognized—her minimal schooling, the aesthetic rawness associated with the purity of a past culture—were, in fact, coterminous with her measured engagements with technology and commoditization that have become hallmarks of modernity. The first part of this chapter considers media she employed to act upon her millennialist interpretations of cosmic history, concentrating upon sound recordings and a notebook of writings. The second portion focuses on Morgan at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festivals from 1970 to 1974, an annual multi-day celebration of local music and culture at which she had an exclusive performance and sale space. By closely examining documentary photography and Morgan’s personal correspondence, I situate Morgan as a woman who recognized and adapted to the opportunities to reach a wider market for her gospel. Contrary to historical formulations of “the folk” as unconscious, passive bearers of unchanging traditions, Morgan became a financial and economic agent as a

²⁰⁴ Conversation with Lynn Abbott, June 11, 2013. Alternately, Abbott also remarked that this experimental combination could very be “the cat’s meow” depending on the interests of the listener.

²⁰⁵ Roach, 5.

consequence of her deepening engagement with producing and selling her artworks, however modestly.

While “tradition” at its most simplistic designates a concern with temporal continuity, maintenance of social bonds, and stability of cultural practices, anthropologists and art historians alike have noted its complex, slippery multivalence. But its unwieldiness does not imply insignificance; scholars have stressed the power of “tradition” to legitimize and venerate ideas about canon, history, and collective identity.²⁰⁶ Following the discourse on invented traditions, the compelling questions became when, why, how, and for whom traditions shift and are redefined. As my title, “Possessing Traditions,” suggests, I consider the events leading up to and surrounding Morgan at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festivals from 1970 to 1974 as the intersection of multiple so-called traditions that mobilize a variety of pasts and social and spiritual obligations. The religious, preservationist, and capitalist ideologies that guide these engagements can generate shared social commitments that cause traditions to dovetail at some points. They can also cause disparate traditions to deflect and branch off from one another at others. Underpinning the enactment of each tradition is ultimately the pursuit of an individual identity within a group; to possess tradition is to create value for and sense of ownership of oneself.

Ideologies of race is one “tradition” of thought and action that is significantly interwoven throughout the cultural continuities I tease out in this chapter. The microhistories of cultural preservation central to “traditional New Orleans jazz” and JazzFest are founded upon an exchange of cultural capital in which white patrons, folklorists, and dealers objectify and market the artistic talents of black musicians and artists.²⁰⁷ No matter how benevolent or liberal the politics, such attitudes continue to traffic in the overdetermined conceptions of African Americans as existing outside of history, as “authentic” bearers of oral traditions. Yet my account seeks to counter these essentializing narratives by illuminating the agency I believe Morgan exercised amid such racially patronizing attitudes. These actions do not make Morgan the kind of political anti-racist activist that celebrated and oversimplified Civil Rights histories present. What her actions do propose, rather, is a chance to assess how creative intention communicates across this social field. Addressing this issue attempts to balance an artist’s intention, the vagaries of reception, and aesthetic readings that her artworks afford as we view them today. Only then can we fully acknowledge and reckon with the reach of Morgan’s

²⁰⁶ For two such overviews, see “Tradition” Henry Glassie in *Eight Words for Expressive Culture*, ed. Burt Feintuch, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 176-197 and Obiora Udechukwu, John Brewer, et al., “Notes from the Field: Tradition,” *Art Bulletin* 95:4 (December 2013), 518-543. A key text in studies of tradition is also Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), 1983.

²⁰⁷ Further complicating this picture is Borenstein, Jaffe, and Wein’s Jewishness, an aspect I hope to develop in further iterations of this project.

religious and artistic ambitions, and how this remarkable woman sought recognition by re-fashioning the terms of her social visibility.²⁰⁸

My emphasis is that multiple traditions can position the same cultural objects differently and simultaneously. Though perhaps obvious, this approach has seldom been adopted to consider “folk” objects, which scholarship has historically assumed are static and unchanging.²⁰⁹ By analyzing the culture around Morgan as a series of performances, I stress the social agencies of art and persons meeting at the densest points of cultural traffic. The totality of Morgan’s expressive practice makes understanding her performances essential—namely their public nature, premise of communication, capacity for appropriation and misunderstanding, and transformative potential.²¹⁰ Performance, then, is the point of intercultural exchange where, to use Joe Roach’s evocative phrasing, “the perimeters of reciprocity become the center, so to speak, of multilateral self-definition.”²¹¹ Because this chapter is primarily concerned alternately with sound and written media as precursors to her visual practice on the one hand, and the conditions for these adoptions of different media on the other, close readings of individual artworks and consideration of Morgan’s pictorial auto-didacticism will be discussed at greater length in chapter 3.

One last introductory note: the creativity, expressive adaptability, and public aspects of Morgan’s expressive repertoire that we glimpse in her performances at 726 St. Peter Street and the festival provide an example of vernacular religious practice that is co-created with, not separated from, a so-called secular sphere. As my account demonstrates, the rift between religion and modern life that Enlightenment discourses have long presumed collapses here. The edges around Morgan’s religious practice are, in fact, inextricably shaped by and bound to the infrastructures of capitalism—realized namely in arenas of advertising, folk music recording, and heritage tourism.²¹² Such is the ever-evolving character of the study of vernacular religion, which Leonard Norman Primiano describes as a method that

appreciates religion as an historic, as well as contemporary,
process and marks religions in everyday life as a construction of
mental, verbal, and material expressions. Vernacular religious
theory understands religion as the continuous art of individual

²⁰⁸ For a discussion on the paradox of hypervisibility/invisibility of tropes of black womanhood, see especially chapter 2, “Colorism, Vision, and the Dark Female Body” in Nicole Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011).

²⁰⁹ Critical treatments of “contemporary folk” and “outsider” artists as unqualified artists have opened the door to more nuanced and interdisciplinary treatments of their bodies of work. Notable among them are Ardery 1998, Sachant 2003, and Anderson et al. 2007.

²¹⁰ Deborah Kapchan, “Performance” in *Eight Words for Expressive Culture*, ed. Feintuch, 121-145.

²¹¹ Roach, 189.

²¹² For a critical summary and analysis of the impact of Enlightenment discourses on the study of visual and material cultures of religion, see Sally M. Promey, “Introduction,” *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice*, ed. Sally M. Promey (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 1-21.

interpretation and negotiation of any number of influential sources... even after it has been reified in expressive or structured forms. Vernacular religion is rooted in the general concept that the individual theorizes even as he or she is living.²¹³

These creative and malleable aspects of religion not only characterize Morgan's religio-cultural practice, but also pervade the cultural atmosphere of New Orleans in ways I would consider "spiritual," once enacted within the public life of the city. In this regard, this chapter also works toward an understanding of how aspects of religious life such as creeds, ritual, and moral claims motivate presumably secular practices. Expressive practices like Morgan's interlocked with New Orleans' musical culture of the early 1970s, which pivoted upon its own set of orthodoxies about its urban identity as the birthplace of jazz. "Spirituality" in its everyday elusiveness and sensory indeterminacy clarifies, paradoxically, the dynamics of belief that shape lived experience.

PART 1: Sounding Off

As argued in the preceding chapter, Morgan's sanctified identity was formed within African American Baptist and Holiness-Pentecostal faith communities. Her millennialist teleology was also derived from this context and resounds throughout her recordings, writings, and early crayon drawings in both content and form.²¹⁴ The relationships between word, hearing, speaking, and writing, and Morgan's faith in these media's ability to generate belief, are my main concerns here.

Sister Gertrude Morgan's beliefs did not deviate widely from those that had been held and practiced by evangelical Christians in the United States since the mid-nineteenth century. Like those before her whom God had called into lifelong devotion, the ear was figured as the organ of divine encounter. As she explains in *A Poem of My Calling*, the impetus for her commitment to life as a missionary was the "strong power words He said [that] was [*sic*] so touching...you are a vessel to call men women girls and boys." Morgan's calling, as her autobiographical accounts and sanctification narratives make clear, is borne out of the "conversational intimacies of orality" that generated the perception of her two heavenly husbands' nearness.²¹⁵ In this formulation, the clarity of Morgan's spiritual hearing elicits the

²¹³ "Manifestations of the Religious Vernacular: Ambiguity, Power, and Creativity" in Marion Bowman and Ülo Valk, *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief* (Bristol, CT and Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2012), 384.

²¹⁴ I agree with William Fagaly's proposed stylistic development for Morgan's work that indeed, the crayon drawings, which are also the most didactic, are her earliest visual works. See *Tools of Her Ministry: The Art of Sister Gertrude Morgan* (New York: Rizzoli and the American Folk Art Museum, 2004), 31-45.

²¹⁵ Lee Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 7.

sensation of divine presence; her expression of this hearing as a tactile affect (“touching”) resounds as the foundational moment of divine encounter.

This touchingness has an additional spatial dimension that is registered in the declaration, “you are a vessel.” Divine touch, understood this way, does more than just make felt contact with one’s consciousness. It opens her, intensifying an awareness of corporeal contours to create the void through which divine prophecy would be conducted. Religious historian Lee Eric Schmidt explains that, in the lives of evangelical believers dating back to mid-nineteenth century revivalism, “scriptural words were reverberant; they echoed in the interiors of those who knew them with such tender familiarity [...] The divine intimacy of evangelical piety was formed in a scriptural echo chamber.”²¹⁶ In Morgan’s case, listening for one’s calling formed and created that very chamber, buttressing the believer’s body from within in much the same way her white dress—the garments of righteousness—cloaked her from without.

The words that Morgan received were prophetic visions from Daniel of the Old Testament and St. John from the final book of the New Testament, Revelation. As a missionary and street evangelist, the audible voice was the medium for affecting the work of God. Morgan’s opening prayer on a recording made at 726 St. Peter Street on October 22, 1961 expounds upon sound’s spatial dimension to incorporate her listeners as audiences of the series of songs and exhortations that follow: “O God, I realize you said that heaven and earth is mine and have promised therefore...seek and you shall find...knock and the door shall be opened. I’m at your mercy door knocking asking you to have mercy on each and every one that’s...under the sound of my voice” [audio 4].²¹⁷ Within the confines of the gallery’s two rooms, Morgan’s supplication covered a small number of souls in range of the live recording. However, we can extrapolate her ambitions for “waking up” listeners through activating the auditory sphere by considering how sound technologies could stimulate and expand, socially as well as geographically, the sanctified imagination and potential converts.

In retrospective accounts, Morgan referred to the period of mission work with children as “broad cast[ing] the word... through the streets” [fig. 72].²¹⁸ In these circuits of street evangelism, Morgan executed her prophetic work through sounding her voice and guitar, and sometimes with the illustrative assistance of one of her Revelation charters. Bracketing the use of artwork in evangelism for the moment, I want to emphasize two performative dimensions of Morgan’s use of the term “broadcasting.”

The first turns upon a belief in the power of the uttered and ingested word to generate further belief. Consonant with African American sanctified belief, Morgan understood earthly life as the battleground between Christ and Satan for souls. In this spiritual economy, the

²¹⁶ Lee Eric Schmidt, 48.

²¹⁷ Reel 1, Session recorded October 22, 1961, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University.

²¹⁸ Sister Gertrude Morgan, *Poem by the Two Lord’s Wife*, Collection of Richard Gasperi. For similar language that mentions her artwork, see *Sister Morgan did some great work for God in the Run of thirty years*, Collection of Robert Roth: “the Boys and Girls have helped you hold the cha[r]ter / on the streets. and I’ll say they was very / sweet. do you Remember seeing the Reaching the / Charter in the streets. thats a great way of / Broad casting God’s word.”

“sanctified” were those rescued by God in their proclamation of faith, whereas the unsaved—recognized by their worldly “wicked” behavior of drinking, fornication, and other “unclean” behaviors—were those whom the devil was “dragging down” or “deceiving” with his lies. By “eating the word” or accepting biblical teaching, one could profess faith in Christ through belief and fend off Satan’s incursions on earth.²¹⁹

In his cultural history of sound reproduction, Jonathan Sterne reminds us that the term “broadcast” derived its meaning from an agricultural reference to “broadcast seeding,” or scattering seeds over a large area of land. In reference to audio amplification, “broadcasting” sound dispersed the auditory not only across space, but also in time through means of simultaneous transmission.²²⁰ I believe this metaphor allows us to get closer to what Morgan believed her work to be doing, while accounting for her embrace of sound amplification and sound recording technologies. Her “broadcasting” was not a model of attenuated sound, but of localized generativity: each song, poem, or articulated prayer had the potential, like a seed, to take root in the hearer with its spiritual truths. In confronting the opportunity to have her voice recorded, she exercised a certain faith in sound recording technology to capture and reproduce the gospel’s potency.²²¹

Seen this way, the spoken word was not only effective, but its power was immediate—which is the second performative aspect of informing her notion of “broadcasting” the word. Such immediacy was especially important within a millennialist imaginary, in which time was dangerously “winding up” toward Christ’s second coming. At that point, God would render final judgment upon souls and spiritually adjudicate between eternal damnation or eternal life.²²² Because of this sense of rapidly elapsing time, evangelical missionaries like Morgan saw themselves as “soldiers in the army of the Lord,” as the gospel song of the same name attests [fig. 77].

²¹⁹ In her performance of “I am that Living Bread,” Morgan urges hearers to “eat the word” of the gospel. *Let’s Make a Record* recorded ca. 1971, True Believer Records and Preservation Hall, 78 rpm and re-released by Rope-a-Dope, 2005, compact disc.

²²⁰ Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 205-6.

²²¹ Sterne’s thesis emphasizes that belief and desire preceded the technology. To make this point clear, he includes an excerpt from Emile Berliner’s remarks on the first presentation of gramophone at the Franklin Institute, 1888, which significantly employ communication among religious believers to demonstrate the power of sound recording and reproduction: “Supposing his Holiness, the Pope, should desire to send broadcast a pontifical blessing to his millions of believers, he may speak into the recorder, and the plate then, after his words are etched, is turned over to a plate-printer, who may, within a few hours, print thousands of phonautograms on translucent tracing paper...[they] are then sent to the principal cities in the world, and upon arrival they are photo-engraved...the resultant engraved plate is then copied, *ad infinitum*, by electrotyping, or glass moulding, and sold to those having standard reproducers.” Quoted in Sterne, 205.

²²² The language describing the polarities of a sanctified, clean, and Christian life versus an unsanctified, wicked, and deceitful life of sin pervades Morgan’s writing. For an example, see *satan enters the garden of eden* [sic] in the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Evans and reproduced in Fagaly, 79. “Time is Winding up” is a folksong alluded to in several of Morgan’s writings and artworks. For examples, see “Revelation 1” and “What time is it”, undated manuscripts from the Regenia Perry Papers, Collection of Kurt Gitter and Alice Rae Yelen, New Orleans.

The ostensible enemy was that “lying wonder,” Lucifer, who deceived people into following “idols” other than God. Lucifer’s strategy, as Morgan saw it, was deception. Therefore, her evangelism was a battle of words for belief: “You dirty demon / you trying to take possession of / this earth ...you tell your faithful followers and all your imposter lying friends yes / [if] they want to live with my God they must be borned [*sic*] again” [fig. 73]. According to Morgan, Lucifer deployed spirit guides such as Black Hawk and Uncle Bucket, local figures entrenched within Spiritual Churches, which she believed diluted and challenged the orthodoxy of her evangelical belief. Morgan’s role as prophetess and missionary was to articulate, announce, and declare these imminent spiritual realities. In the sonic release of utterances and song, she sought to weaken Lucifer’s discursive deception by exerting a counter-discourse conveying the “spiritual blessings” of Christian belief. In the theater of the street, then, the spoken word was the choice weapon of Morgan’s mission—and “broadcasting” was the technology for amplifying the truth of her gospel message over greater distances while winning spiritual ground for His coming kingdom.

The opening to a Sunday session recorded on April 26, 1959 suggests Morgan recognized the opportunity to communicate to unknown listeners. Morgan starts with a recitation of a poem that she composed [audio 5 and appendix 1].²²³ Her deliberate speech differs markedly from the rapidity that characterizes her more familiar spontaneous delivery of prayers, rhymes, and call-and-response. The rustling of paper, registered about two-thirds through the excerpt, suggests she is reading from a page and for the recorder, adding to the recording’s overall formality. This poem is immediately followed by a performance of the popular sanctified song, “Jesus on the Mainline” [also audio 5]. Imagining the savior at the other end of a telephone connection, Morgan urges listeners to “tell Him what you want.” In doing so, she relies upon a belief in technology’s capacity to record, replicate, and transmit her voice in all its spiritual efficacy.²²⁴ When presented with the opportunity to leave her mark upon future listeners, her faith in sound technology would be equal to her faith in the power of spoken word to awaken listeners near and far.

“Let’s Make a Record”

In April of 1971, Borenstein produced an LP of Morgan performing fourteen tracks [fig. 74]. The album, *Let’s Make a Record*, contains Morgan’s variations of traditional themes and melodies (“I Got a New World in My View” and “Way in the Middle of the Air”) and renditions of gospel songs closer to their popular arrangements (“Take My Hand, Lead Me On”). Perhaps most powerfully, the incantatory tracks like “Power” and “I am the Living Bread” entrance listeners with the repetitive tambourine beats. Morgan’s sonorous voice invokes Holy Ghost power.

Morgan left little comment about this packaged sound recording except for a letter dated August 9, 1972 to Regenia Perry, communicating a desire to give her some copies to sell and

²²³ Sacha Borenstein Clay Collection. I am indebted to Sacha for making this and other recordings available to me.

²²⁴ Sterne, 285.

“pass out over in that part of the world that would be interested to hear me.”²²⁵ “That part of the world” was Richmond, home to Virginia Commonwealth University, where Perry was an associate professor of art history. The two women met one another through Borenstein while Perry was conducting research on Clementine Hunter in 1969. As an African American woman, Perry undoubtedly appreciated her capacity to cultivate a relationship with Morgan in a way inaccessible to Borenstein and other non-blacks. This factor likely generated their warm correspondence over the early part of the 1970s, as Morgan sought increased exposure outside of New Orleans for her work.

In her letter to Perry, Morgan’s tone is polite and matter-of-fact as she works out the logistics of transferring a case of 25 albums to her by Christmas. But the pun in the album’s title, *Let’s Make a Record*, suggests that the transactional nature of Morgan’s correspondence intertwined spiritual endeavors (registering and preserving a religious testimony) with material ones (producing a vinyl LP). A postscript added to the bottom of the page further reinforces this ambition. Morgan has added the words “Joseph thou son of David,” a quotation from Matthew 1:20. Morgan does not complete the verse here, but inscribes a set of instructions: “Read Run teach the People Plenty.” Morgan omits the remainder of the verse, but the missing words contain an implication too striking to take lightly. It ends, “Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.” The appeal to enjoin oneself to another on account of a sacred indwelt Word is exactly what Morgan wishes for Perry and future hearers to do. Through this group of written and unwritten associations, Morgan implies, “Buy my record and listen to what I have to say, for it is from God, for you.” Thus, from this position of spiritual authority and urgency, Morgan embraced another mode of sound recording and reproduction as an opportunity to amplify her voice—and thereby her message—over time and space.

The historical record does not suggest that Morgan distinguished between the archival role of her recordings at 726 St. Peter Street, which were made in collaboration with Larry Borenstein and Richard B. Allen, and the popular circulation implied in producing *Let’s Make a Record*. Rather, similar to her attitude towards street evangelism, producing a music album was her way of combating the sounds of the devil, who, ostensibly through the popularity of blues and jazz music, “got his music going all through the streets” causing “people so many of them shaking by Lucifer music from their head to their feet.”²²⁶ Any kind of missionary utterance became a spiritual barb launched against the devil.

Her approach to the sonic realm as a space of moral influence echoes the evangelical attitude towards mass media earlier articulated by Pentecostal evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson in 1925, a pioneer in the use of radio in American religion: “Radio is such a big thing—has come to be such a potent force in the world today.... We all know what radio, in broadcasting jazz music, can do for the feet, but I did want to tell them what radio could do for

²²⁵ Letter from Morgan to Perry, 9 August 1972. Gitter-Yelen Collection, New Orleans.

²²⁶ Sister Gertrude Morgan, *Poem By Me SUB-J its getting late*, undated manuscript #40A, Sacha Borenstein Clay Collection.

the heart of mankind.”²²⁷ While Morgan did not have access to the capital that McPherson mobilized in the construction of a \$25,000, five-hundred-watt Western Electric Station to run a radio station from her southern California Angelus Temple, the two women shared a common mission and belief in sound technologies as a tool for reaching numbers previously unimaginable.²²⁸

Though sharing a similar evangelical belief, McPherson, as a white woman, and Morgan, as an African American, had different cultural opportunities to realize their missionary callings. McPherson could capitalize on her charisma, a social climate that hungered for that “old-time religion,” a growing number of followers reached through revival tours, and her self-published newsletter to build the Pentecostal Foursquare denomination. In contrast, Morgan’s path to recognition was delineated in large part by the ways in which her religious practice accorded with dominant preconceptions about African-American religious practices. Morgan was like other little-known performers who were “discovered” by record producers and folklorists who scoured countrysides and bars for new talent—for gospel, blues, and hillbilly music in the 1950s and 1960s. Nevertheless, her willingness to record and be recorded tapped into a desire to participate in a broader missionary enterprise. Embracing the medium of sound recording, in other words, inaugurated her as a member of an imagined community of evangelists—African American and white alike—whom she likely heard during the course of her missionary work.

The colorblindness of the evangelical impulse notwithstanding, black religious recording had been in place for about half a century and likely shaped Morgan’s conception of what she was accomplishing by making her records. Starting in the mid-1920s, major record labels such as Okeh, Columbia, and Vocalion had begun to record and distribute recordings by African Americans for an African American market. An estimated five hundred of these “race records”—which included secular blues as well as religious sermons and songs—were issued each year between 1927 and 1930, plummeting to a mere 150 in 1933.²²⁹ Religious “race records” were intended to appeal mostly to working-class blacks, who consumed them in identification with the rhetorical intensity and ecstatic appeal of Pentecostal chanted sermons and simulated services—probably similar to the style of worship at Triumph the Church and Kingdom of God in Christ, the church of Morgan’s earliest New Orleans affiliation.²³⁰ And while it is difficult to establish a direct correlation between religious “race records” and Morgan’s expressive practice (i.e.,

²²⁷ Aimee Semple McPherson, “The Heavenly Aeroplane,” *The Bridal Call Foursquare* 9:5 (October 1925), 21.

²²⁸ Matthew Avery Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 79.

²²⁹ Paul Oliver, *Songsters and Saints: Vocal Traditions on Race Records* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 273. Oliver gives no reason for this dramatic decline in production, though the onset of the Depression is likely a major factor.

²³⁰ Jonathan L. Walton’s fine-grained analysis of religious “race records” contests a one-dimensional interpretation that holds them as representative of the critical voice of “the folk.” Instead, his discussion emphasizes their potential to reinforce racial and gender stereotypes and interprets their production as commercial exploitation of the urban poor in acts of social control. Jonathan L. Walton, “The Preachers’ Blues: Religious Race Records and Claims of Authority on Wax,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 20:2 (Summer 2010), 205-232.

recording, writing), their common sanctified tropes and language strongly suggest that Morgan was aware of this genre of popular religious recording. Reverend J.M. Gates, who made more than two hundred sides on twenty different labels between 1926 and 1941, recorded tracks with titles like “Ye Must be Born Again,” “Dry Bones in the Valley,” “I’m A Soldier in the Army of the Lord,” and “Get Right With God;” these subjects appear throughout Morgan’s repertoire [audio 6a; figs. 75-77].²³¹

Perhaps a more compelling precedent for Morgan were the celebrity and prestige of Elder Utah Smith, a sanctified preacher with the Church of God in Christ in New Orleans. Smith’s recognition was crafted over radio waves and vinyl in as much as it was forged in local tent revival meetings. Smith’s sermons and singing were broadcast every Saturday night from station WJBW starting in the spring and summer of 1944. Weekly revival meetings held each Saturday and special musical variety shows, featuring visiting pastors and “battles” between gospel soloists, continued to be broadcast on the radio station KENT through at least 1953, by which time Smith had established his own church, the Two Wing Temple.²³² Except for the few years from 1947 to 1949 for which they have been unaccounted in city directories, Morgan, Parker, and Williams’s sanctified labor at the 533 Flake Avenue orphanage from the early 1940s through the 1950s coincided with the period of Smith’s recording and radio production.²³³

Utah Smith is interesting here not simply because his radio presence overlapped with Morgan’s pre-bridal years, but also for how he built a popular reputation as public evangelist among the roughly 1,500-2,000 people who gathered for his revivals (in addition to his radio listeners).²³⁴ To paraphrase music historian Lynn Abbott, Smith frequently donned a pair of “life-sized” feathered seraphim wings when he played at a Church of God In Christ convocation meeting or revival gathering, securing his identity as the “Two-Winged Preacher” and electric guitar evangelist [fig. 79].²³⁵ Because it was rare for working-class African Americans to own electric guitars, seeing one of Smith’s raucous performances drew significant crowds to his weekly meetings throughout the city. Adopting a signature song and generating a branded identity around that theme defined his place in the public spotlight. Between 1944 and 1953, Smith produced three commercial recordings of the song “I Got Two Wings,” a rollicking track in which congregation claps are electrified with guitar riffs to aid in the spiritual elevation of

²³¹ Walton, 215.

²³² See Abbott, especially Chapter 5, “New Orleans: ‘A Two-Winged Temple in the Sky.’” It contains advertisements in the *Louisiana Weekly* that announce these meeting times and their radio broadcast.

²³³ 1947 and 1949 New Orleans City Directories. No city directory was issued for 1948. Even though directories from 1950 to 1955 do not place the three women at the same address (Cora Williams died November 13, 1955), the uneven development of this edge of eastern New Orleans could account for the patchiness in official documentation. The fact of their sole ownership of 533 Flake Avenue in 1953 suggests that they anchored their activities in that house. See chapter 1, pages 50-54 for my conclusions about these missionaries’ whereabouts.

²³⁴ A writer for the *Louisiana Weekly*, New Orleans’ African American newspaper, commented on the size of Smith’s “big summer resort tent meeting,” writing that “The crowd is still increasing every night from 1500 to 2000 people, hearing Rev. Utah Smith preaching an evangelistic sermon and playing his electric guitar.” *Louisiana Weekly*, September 23, 1944 quoted in Abbott, 61.

²³⁵ Abbott, 37.

mind and body [audio 6]. Its lyrics draw from the prophetic passages concerning seraphim and angels in the Old Testament books of Daniel and Isaiah, and Revelation. It closes with an exclamation that would have been every sanctified believer's refrain: "Heaven's gonna be my home!"

Given this history of sound culture in sanctified practice, I would argue that Morgan's willingness to serve as God's witness in the streets—and what brought her into 726 St. Peter Street—was not naïve submission to a calling. Rather, she labored under the belief that her obedient service, gratified by new and wider listening audiences, would be rewarded richly with entrance into heaven. The sanctified spiritual "When I've Done the Best I Can" articulates how the promise of eternal reward sustained the believer through the difficulties and failures of earthly life. In a work depicting her ministry in the Lower Ninth Ward, Morgan stakes her heavenly claim on her street work: "I did the Best I could now I want / my crown telling satan and all his followers his / Kingdom must come down come on down you dirty Demon" [fig. 80].²³⁶ Idelle Williams and her missionary partner Luella Pitts further affirm this sanctified motivation when they sing, "I'm a soldier in the army of my Lord / I'm working for my crown."²³⁷ Far from a simplistic activity, the street work of Morgan and these others was indeed work. Their spiritual and musical labor functioned like a deposit on a future reward that they were called to pursue. Through recording her voice in sound—and writing and pictures, as we shall see—Morgan incrementally possessed the spiritual reward to which her calling had awakened her.

"Write Right": Transcriptions of History

Morgan's work was not only occupied with vocal performance. Through her writings, Morgan expounded upon her millennialist beliefs. There was not a moment to be lost on pettier things, for in her view the battle against Lucifer was a battle within the unalterable ending of time: "[N]ew Jerusalem is coming on the earth...come on down out of your high mind humble yourself Read God's word and dont you be contrary...cleaning sin of the earth and death will Be

²³⁶ A rendition by Bozie Sturdivant at Silent Grove Baptist Church, recorded between 1934 and 1942, expresses this hope with the conviction, perseverance, and yearning of a spiritual soldier: "*When I've done the best I can / I want my crown, yes, my crown / Some time I'm stumblin / Falling on down / Sometimes leveled with the ground / When I've done the best I can I want my crown / Lord, you know how much I suffer In this world of sin, God knows... Got to carry the Gospel message / From door to door / Yes, door to door / With my sword and my shield / I'm gon' stay on bended knees / Oh, when I've done, Lord The best I can I want my crown / Yes, I want my crown.*" *Negro Religious Field Recordings from Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee Vol. 1 1934-1942*, compact disc, Document Records DODC-5312, 1994.

²³⁷ Recorded by Richard B. Allen at Preservation Hall, December 10, 1961, 7 ½ ips reel-to-reel tape, reel 2 of 3, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University. Idelle Williams has also been identified elsewhere as Della, Idella, and Idelle Gatling. See "The Gospel Singers" in *The Community Standard Monthly Awards Magazine, French Quarter Louisiana* (December 1974), reproduced at "Gospel Singers: A Gift of Songs," accessed 8 March 2013, www.mitchellspublications.com/cs/2/pe/.

so many...wake up people.”²³⁸ The missionary’s aim was to jolt the unbelieving into an awareness of a history that climaxed at the unknown moment of Christ’s second coming, at which point the New Jerusalem will descend, the saved will join Him in eternity, and the wicked will be condemned to eternal death. This linear teleology was derived from an interpretation of Revelation 20 that describes a one thousand year period during which evil will be subdued and Christ’s heavenly rule will commence.

The specifics of Morgan’s theology are densely compiled in a spiral-bound ruled notebook found in the artist’s home upon her death in 1980 (now privately held) [figs. 81-82]. Among the nearly fifty pages filled with writing, instructions addressed towards readers and “your service” suggest that the book’s original use was a study tool or worship book.²³⁹ Services were ostensibly held every Sunday and Thursday night at her Everlasting Gospel Mission, a sacred space that occupied the front room of 5444 N. Dorgenois Street, her home during the last 15 years of her life [fig. 83]. Reference to the “Everlasting Gospel Singers” may likely point to a gospel quartet or part of her religious community that assisted her during these formal gatherings.²⁴⁰ Given the meditation on the “Betsy Flood Sept 9th 1965” that appears in these pages, we know that the notebook contains entries from at least the fall of 1965 and onward.²⁴¹

The notebook’s contents demonstrate some of the modes of writing that appear in her paintings. She delivers exhortations in second-person address (“wake up people” and “realize what time it is brother its judgment day”); scripture references as invocations of biblical authority; rhyming couplets that resolve with conviction (“its not only praying time its time to look up / your redemption draweth nigh give up all that worldly stuff”); verses and chorus lyrics for popular and self-composed spirituals; call-and-response dialogues that Morgan has scripted; and stream of consciousness sentiments that ascend toward God (“oh how happy I am to be the wife of you”).²⁴² Occasionally, small icons appear in the marginalia: Ezekiel’s vision of a wheel inside another wheel, the multi-tiered architecture of the New Jerusalem, and a rendering of the bible book.

As in her sound recordings, her writing practice betrays Morgan’s sensitivity to her media. For example, a poem penciled on the notebook’s front cover demonstrates Morgan’s signifying skill to call forth, in even the most unsuspecting objects, a sanctified ethic in the material world. Tucked into the right triangle formed by the cover’s graphic design, her script begins, “I can’t make it with[out] you / Help me / repeat / Lord help me to walk right.” Her writing continues, unabated. In each new phrase, Morgan substitutes seven different words in the

²³⁸ Undated manuscript copy, “This is missionary Morgan,” Smithsonian American Art Museum curatorial files, Washington D.C.

²³⁹ Pages 11 and 36. N.B. Page numbers for this notebook have been given by the author for ease of reference beginning with the first ruled page as “1”, though the actual notebook is itself not paginated.

²⁴⁰ Page 1. Morgan specifically identifies “Mr. David Cartell [Cantell?] and group” as these singers, though referencing city directories yielded no other information for this partially legible name.

²⁴¹ While some of the songs from her album, *Let’s Make a Record*, appear here, there is no way of confirming if these written lyrics precede or follow the recorded performance of 1971.

²⁴² Pages 9, 10, 12, 32.

latter phrase for the verb “walk”: “Lord help me to talk right” comes next, followed by lines that make an appeal to do, pray, act, live, sing, love right. In this rhetorical acuteness, resultant verses awaken from monotony the silvery word “composition” printed at the upper left. In the same way, its termination at the printed tagline “Write Right” injects her poem with self-referential awareness of the means she employs to convey her intent. The moral rectitude that Morgan urges for all aspects of lived experience arises here conceptually; the expressive means (writing), formal execution, and semantic content reverberate with a sense of correctness fitting to their means.²⁴³ Viewed in counterpoint to other double-voiced strategies, notably the parody and pastiche that anchor Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s genealogy of African American literary traditions, Morgan’s sanctified speech outlines another kind of rhetorical ground. Her wordplay is not intended to split voices for pluralistic or anarchic ends; there is a “right” and a certitude which ground her speech. Her tactic in the verbal (scriptural) battle with the trickster-figure (Lucifer) engages in a play of the signifier to differentiate the two moral paths, polarized between damnation and salvation.

In light of this rhetorical self-awareness, it is surprising to discover that the notebook’s closing nine pages are direct transcriptions from a pre-existing text, a Seventh-Day Adventist book by a white author, William Ambrose Spicer, entitled *Our Day In Light of Prophecy*, first published in 1917 and subsequently by six other publishers through 1952. Although a copy has not been linked to her personal effects, the precise correspondences it has with her writings and a set of Morgan’s crayon drawings strongly suggests that she owned or had direct access to an actual volume of this popular text.²⁴⁴ This deep engagement with Spicer’s text also implies the extent of agreement between Morgan’s eschatology and the author’s millennialist interpretations of natural disasters and world events, all of which were understood to be affirmations of biblical prophecies.

The passages she transcribes are either written by Spicer or poems he has included in his book. Each pivots around the impending certitude of the climactic resolution of cosmic history, which represents for Morgan her long-awaited reunion with the divine. “He Will Come for His Own,” a four-stanza poem by L.D. Santee reprinted in *Our Day*, describes the future bliss of the sanctified who will be taken up in rapture at the start of the millennial year. It rhapsodizes about

²⁴³ Morgan’s speakerly text, it could be said, “luxuriates” in the semantic associations drawn from the world around her. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1989), 47-8.

²⁴⁴ Inquiries with Review and Herald Publishing Association, and librarians at Loma Linda University, a Seventh-Day Adventist college, yield scarce historical information about W.A. Spicer’s intent in publishing the volume or the source of its illustrations. Further archival investigation beyond basic biographical information has yet to be conducted on Spicer, who was President of the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists from 1922 to 1930. Ephesus SDA church in New Orleans, a historically black church, was founded in 1892. The network of religious communities in Central City could also be a point of contact for Morgan and this denomination, as well as any number of colporteurs from whom she acquired bibles, such as Marcus Pergament. See Jason Berry’s essay in Fagaly, 81-82. Colporteur versions of *Our Day* are dated as early as 1917.

the life with “starry crowns” wherein “they will share the life immortal.”²⁴⁵ “The Ransom Paid” by Nikolaus Zinzendorf appears in the notebook like a scripted prayer for recitation, where the reader could confess belief by reciting lines such as, “Lord, I believe Thy precious blood...forever doth for sinners plead / can cleanse my guilty soul indeed.”²⁴⁶ Clara Thwaites’ “The Last Hour” mourns the passage of time signaled by the setting sun, pleading readers to note the irrecoverable time lost for evangelism and repentance.²⁴⁷ Poetic meditations follow, registering the longing to hear “thy pardoning voice” and “let me among thy saints be found, whenever the archangels trump shall sound, to see thy smiling face.”²⁴⁸ The final page amounts to a meditation upon Morgan’s own place within a longer history of believers and missionaries who have worked towards attaining union with God. “Path the Missionary Trod” reads as a majestic summary of Morgan’s work that “tell[s] the love, attest[s] the might of him whose messengers...to [the unbelieving] salvation bore, hope, freedom, gave.” One imagines Morgan poignantly imagining herself as one such messenger referenced in the closing verse sharing, alongside former prophets, the view toward “the gates of pearl afar.”²⁴⁹

Why would Morgan, with poetic and literate abilities of her own, turn to a formal text to close her homemade prayer book? One possibility derives from her belief that words uttering millennialist truths should be mobilized to wage her spiritual battle. To the degree that portions of the book are copied verbatim, Morgan treats Spicer’s text as authoritative and useful in evangelism, if not also pleasing because the poems’ regular poetic meter packages spiritual truths in succinct literary form. To quote and include from this book signals her participation in the larger enterprise of interpreting historical events as signs of the end times for those in her purview. “As the closing events take place,” transcribes Morgan from Spicer’s text, “the Lord has in his providence so ordered it that no one need be ignorant of the signs of the time fulfilling before the eyes of men.” Morgan, having been called as a missionary, by action and implication self-identifies as one of the “material agencies for the work” of proclaiming the gospel message.²⁵⁰

But why write? The small-scale, communal function for this notebook seems to have dictated the employment of the written word, but other archives reveal that Morgan’s writing practice was expansive, inscribing warnings, instructions for salvation, and bible verses on scraps and sheets of paper with customary urgency: “when I lay one pencil down I just reach and get another and keep writing cause Lucifer is busy and I am to. I aint got time to loose looking around to get another.”²⁵¹ A sense of time’s rapid elapse certainly motivated such a prolific

²⁴⁵ Spicer, William Ambrose, *Our Day in the Light of Prophecy* (Washington, D.C. and New York Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1918), <http://archive.org/details/ourdayinlightofp01spic>. Pages 103 and Morgan, 36-37.

²⁴⁶ Spicer, 227 and Morgan, 37.

²⁴⁷ Spicer 114 and Morgan, 38.

²⁴⁸ Spicer 63 and Morgan, 39-41.

²⁴⁹ Spicer 308 and Morgan, 42.

²⁵⁰ Spicer, 319 and Morgan, undated manuscript #21, Sacha Borenstein Clay Collection.

²⁵¹ “Crying Holy”, Jaffe Collection.

practice. But why did she not pick up technologies of mass reproduction to accelerate cosmic time towards its ultimate fulfillment? The potential for printing to hasten the onset of “closing events” is hailed in *Our Day*; Spicer claims that “the printing press is one of the chief of the marvelous enlightening agencies of this time of the end...[printing] pages of truth...falling over the earth ‘like leaves of autumn.’” Nevertheless, only one example of Morgan’s engagement with printing exists from 1963 [fig. 37].²⁵²

Morgan’s financial poverty was undoubtedly one significant factor. As discussed in chapter 1, Morgan never held a wage-earning job once she became a missionary in 1939. She and Mothers Parker and Williams subsisted from donations given for street performances, church offerings, and food grown on their Flake Avenue property, as well as a series of property transactions in the 1940s.²⁵³ Yet upon pursuing her individual ministry, Morgan seemed to lean increasingly on the benevolence of others for basic needs.²⁵⁴ Without regular disposable income or additional financial patronage, producing printed media would have likely been beyond Morgan’s ability.

Her economic condition notwithstanding, the belief that her body was a sanctified medium (“a vessel”) for God’s word was the preeminent factor circumscribing her material productions. While charged with announcing spiritual truths concerning the end times (“God wants some Body near By to advertise him Jesus said an I if I Be lifted up from the earth [I] will draw all men unto me now,” she once wrote to Perry, in 1972), Morgan’s task was premised upon watching for immediate opportunities for proselytizing.²⁵⁵ In so doing, one could participate in the cosmic unfolding of history by imbuing these conveyances with sanctified intent. According to Spicer’s book, these kinds of conveyances were broadly defined. Technological innovations—ships, locomotives, air flight, and the telegraph—as well as “missionary endeavor, love of adventure, commercial enterprise, and scientific interest” could be construed as resources that God had made available for the “opening of all lands” to the gospel [figs. 84-86].²⁵⁶ This wide swath makes almost every situation possible for evangelizing. Each point of access is “see[n] distinctly [as] the hand of Providence swinging open doors into all countries.”²⁵⁷ Handwriting could be on par with mechanized printing when it came to replicating and extending God’s message.

²⁵² Spicer, 319.

²⁵³ Fagaly, 8.

²⁵⁴ The Jaffe Family, Blair Ziegler, Larry’s wife Pat Borenstein, Mr. and Mrs. Willie Brown, and Regenia Perry all report purchasing groceries for Morgan. Fagaly interviews, electronic document shared with the author. After Morgan ceased painting in 1974 per God’s command, Perry facilitated the process of getting Morgan on the Social Security payroll that would have supported her until her death in 1980. Author’s interview with Perry, May 1, 2014.

²⁵⁵ Letter from Morgan to Perry #2.1, Gitter-Yelen Collection.

²⁵⁶ Spicer, 310. This passage derives from one of Spicer’s chapters entitled “The Time of the End,” a section that Morgan seemed to have read and selectively copied in several parts. Her depictions of trains and bridges suggest that her ideas about technology were affirmed, if not formed, by Spicer’s text.

²⁵⁷ Spicer, 309 and Morgan, undated manuscript #21, Sacha Borenstein Clay Collection.

In essence, then, Morgan embraced the opportunity to perform and teach offered by Borenstein—however organically and progressively it developed—as one laid at her feet by her Lord.²⁵⁸ She might have considered Borenstein, the key figure in producing *Let's Make a Record*, in the same divinely-ordained way that she regarded her relationship with Perry to whom Morgan sent some of her artworks to sell: “I want to say God sure fit you in the right place when he sent you over here in New Orleans at the time you came for your business.”²⁵⁹ In the scheme of Morgan’s calling, she could construe an individual’s interest in her work as Holy Spirit-led and make it useful for her evangelizing purposes.²⁶⁰

During the early 1970s, Morgan might have sensed that God was opening up many lands to His Bride. Her writings, which were produced during this period of growing awareness, demonstrate just some of Morgan’s ambition to reach audiences beyond her. The ways in which her writing—and eventually, her pictures—were inducted into this new terrain are the focus of the following sections.

At “Larry’s Art Store”: Pilgrims, Entrepreneurs, and a Bride

How had God “opened the lands” for Morgan, as a sanctified missionary? A 1961 snippet from the archives of ethnomusicologist Richard B. Allen, whose collection of lore and oral history forms the heart of the Hogan Jazz Archive at Tulane University, encapsulates the kind of occurrence that cultural preservationists were apt to record. We are back in Borenstein’s commercial art gallery space, which had adopted its new identity as Preservation Hall just six months earlier. Allen’s field notes document the following event in the third person:

Sunday afternoon, 12/3/61, a spiritual singer, Mother Margaret Parker, chanced by the session at 726 St. Peter Street (Preservation Hall) [*sic*] Her singing set the band on fire. Slow Drag Pavageau was slapping his bass. RBA reports the following conversation verbatim:

[Drag:] You know my wife, Annie Pavageau, from the Morning Star Baptist Church?

²⁵⁸ Following a survey of innovations in transportation, Spicer writes, “We see the hand of the living God opening the doors into all lands, and His wonderful providence laying at the feet of this generation agencies for quickly covering the whole earth.” Spicer, 313.

²⁵⁹ Letter from Morgan to Perry, August 9, 1972, #1.7, Gitter-Yelen Collection, New Orleans.

²⁶⁰ Alfred Gell’s process of “abduction” describes the process of social inference that fits with this kind of agency that Morgan exercised: “The means we generally have to form a notion of the disposition and intentions of ‘social others’ is via a large number of abductions from indexes which are neither ‘semiotic conventions’ or ‘laws of nature’ but something in between.” The cognitive processes that derive from this situation are the material index, “the outcome, and/or instrument of, social agency.” Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 15.

[Mother Margaret:] I'm a Holy Roller.

[Drag:] Let the good times roll.²⁶¹

Allen's unadorned description, like the walls of the Hall's unassuming interior [fig. 87], offsets the colorful incident that unfolds within our imaginations. The humor that inspired Allen to record it derives from Parker's *non sequitur* and Pavageau's nimble response. Answering neither yes nor no, Parker's declarative statement implies a number of things: no, she does not know his wife, since Holy Rollers' ecstatic worship ostracized them from the propriety of mainline denominations (e.g., established Protestant groups, such as Baptists, African Methodist Episcopalians, Presbyterians, etc.); possibly, to the extent that Parker's appearance at the Hall suggests a possible connection with Annie Pavageau, who was also a singer of intense interest for white folk music collectors (Annie Pavageau had been recorded 1954 and 1956 on Folkways records). Finally, Parker's response indexes the emotional tide carried out by her singing. Rather than sort out her indirection, Slow Drag picks up the dialogue without skipping a beat.²⁶²

Exemplary in this archival fragment is how a spontaneous exchange transitions into a performance of music—the traditional past performed live and up close. Serendipity ushers in the metaphysical in Allen's anecdote (Parker is noted as a “spiritual singer”), which is savored by his reported speech.²⁶³ This culture of discovery and documentation that nucleates around the “genuine folk article” (as Allen once put it) is imagined as a kind of spiritual dormancy that awakens within the city's everyday landscape.²⁶⁴ These unpredictable, contingent discoveries demonstrate the permeability between religious experience and the ostensibly secular sphere.

Though we can only speculate as to why Morgan parted ways around the late 1950s and early 1960s with Mother Parker, the two women have in common their separate appearances at Preservation Hall [figs. 69, 87]. This commonality was not coincidence, but a consequence of preservationists' desire for events like the one just described. Morgan and Parker belonged to a longer list of sanctified and gospel singers who entered 726 St. Peter Street from the French Quarter's sidewalks. These included Luella Pitts, Idelle Gatling (sometimes identified as Della Williams), George Boone, and Anthony Madison [fig. 71].

Metaphors and structures of religious experience were not only objects of ethnography, but characterized preservationists' investments in traditional forms of music. Allen's interest in

²⁶¹ “Pavageau, ‘Slow Drag’ vertical file, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University.

²⁶² *Music from the South, volume 9: Song and Worship*, recorded by Frederic Ramsey, Jr., Folkways FA2658, 1956, re-issued as a compact disc.

²⁶³ Bakhtin: “Thanks to the ability of a language to represent another language while still retaining the capacity to sound simultaneously both outside it and within it, to talk about it and at the same time to talk in and with it—and thanks to the ability of the language being represented simultaneously to serve as an object of representation while continuing to be able to speak to itself—thanks to all this, the creation of specific novelistic images of languages becomes possible.” “Discourse in the Novel” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1982), 358.

²⁶⁴ Richard B. Allen Interview with Elizabeth Snapp, 21 March 1961, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University.

the history of New Orleans music and its transmission is one of the scholarly dimensions of the “jazz pilgrim,” a devotee and historian of jazz, who built his passion by pursuing music “at the source.”²⁶⁵ Jazz pilgrims typically traveled great lengths to pay homage to living older musicians when alive, or combed shops for rare records, which were treated as relics of individuals since passed. Though many such pilgrims were outsiders to New Orleans—discovering music while stationed nearby during World War II or taking the journey upon hearing old records—the most stalwart questers eventually became locals and ardent promoters of the “pure” sound.²⁶⁶

Purists creating the “jazz revival” in New Orleans distinguished their allegiances from so-called modernists. Stylistically speaking, purists rallied around the collective improvisation of “traditional jazz,” in which strong melodies fronted by a trumpet or clarinet were supported rhythmically by a banjo, guitar, and drums. The “Tiger Rag,” performed by George Lewis and George Guesnon, is an upbeat major-key tune recalling the pulsating dance halls and river boat parties that served as the social spaces in which “traditional jazz” flourished [audio 7]. By the 1960s, this “hot” form was dated in light of the flashier be-bop style developed by the likes of Charlie Parker and the “cooler,” cerebral playing of Miles Davis.²⁶⁷ While possessing as quick a tempo as “Tiger Rag” [audio 7], Parker’s “Ornithology” excites through its complex harmonic variety and unpredictable improvisations [audio 10]. Motivated in part by nostalgia, anti-intellectualism, and anti-elitism, the jazz pilgrims animating the landscape of Sister Gertrude Morgan and Preservation Hall would be the ones stoking the flames of what is categorically known as “traditional New Orleans jazz.” The orthodoxy of jazz pilgrims’ veneration of this style had much to do with the salvage efforts to bring musicians out of retirement, as well as the pleasure of partaking in the past at this fount of music. Traditional New Orleans jazz and its musical influences were seen by modernists as passé and nostalgic. However, the seeming availability of such sounds on the streets of the city intensified jazz pilgrims’ fervor to follow the trail of streetcries, spirituals, brass band processions, and blues already documented by a series

²⁶⁵ Sociologically speaking, Raeburn writes that the study of jazz was “more of a modern American odyssey than a strictly scholarly undertaking, for the strategy was to seek out surviving New Orleans pioneers dispersed from coast to coast and to get to know them.” Bruce Boyd Raeburn, *New Orleans Style and the Writing of Jazz History* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 56.

²⁶⁶ Raeburn, 58. “Jazz pilgrim” is a historicizing term of the 1990s used by music critics and scholars, and not a part of the discourse at mid-century. Nevertheless, the devotional intensity formed by the pursuit of rare records, the reliance on close-knit networks, and ritualistic processes of documenting musical performance exemplifies the complementary structures that allowed for the felicitous confluence of preservationists interest and Morgan’s intent.

²⁶⁷ For more detail on this “jazz schism,” see Raeburn, especially the chapter entitled “Jazz Schism: The Perils of Intellectualization.” Traditional New Orleans Jazz historically has borne the label “Dixieland jazz,” connoting the mimicry of black ensembles by its white performers and for white audiences. Like the terms “folk” or “outsider,” “jazz” is laden with racial politics whose history I cannot fully address here. In addition to traditionalists and modernists, African American artists and musicians theorized contemporary jazz forms, like bop, for their emancipatory aesthetics and potential for political progress.

of Folkways Recordings in the 1950s [audio 8].²⁶⁸ Moreover, the lineage of traditional jazz had been historicized for this generation in *Jazzmen*, a seminal tome published in 1939, which fixed New Orleans as its origin before the form was transmitted to Chicago and New York.

In this sense, sanctified singers were not only welcomed into Associated Artists/Preservation Hall, but were also sought out to affirm the vitality of tradition. In the case of Margaret Parker and Slow Drag, Allen's text interprets the scene as an example of the "folk process," a glimpse of oral culture that would have otherwise escaped notice. As a music lover and ethnomusicologist, Allen was typical in his interest in collecting "the genuine folk article" that withstood pressures of commercialism and modernization. In an interview from March 21, 1961, Allen reveals that the folk have a certain resiliency that the discerning collector can identify: "In your daily living you will always have the folk around you, you will always find their music and song, and some things that are possibility not quite music, but they are also pretty sounds."²⁶⁹ From Dora Bliggen's street vendor's cry to Idelle Williams' rendition of "Motherless Children" / "Come on In This House," each field recording added to the body of knowledge concerning the circulation of a song or a new kind of sound situation.

Larry Borenstein was the primary facilitator of these moments of cultural communion. His art gallery [fig. 70] was merely a few steps away from Bourbon Street, the spine of the Vieux Carré around which a kaleidoscope of hard boozing, flashy showgirls, raucous music, and buzzing activity swirled and throbbed amid lanes of art, food, antique and music shops.²⁷⁰ In the early 1960s before Associated Artists Gallery transitioned to Preservation Hall, musical performances were secondary to the sales of artworks. In its guise as Preservation Hall, this relationship was reversed; his gallery now thrived as a family-friendly place with "no drinks – no girls – no gimmicks – Just Real Music!"²⁷¹ Its social decorum, however, did not diminish the heady mixture of characters who could be found congregating there. Recalling the wondrous allure of Preservation Hall in the early 1960s, Tom Sancton writes, "Where else would a kid my age [thirteen years old] have encountered such a colorful swath of humanity: writers, artists, pimps, hustlers, defrocked preachers, ruined heiresses, ex-cons, beautiful women, and exotic foreign travelers?"²⁷²

A composite portrait gathered from news profiles emphasized Borenstein's infuriating ingenuity as one of the central founders and sustainers of 726 St. Peter Street. Once described as a man who would get nervous if he had "\$100 in the bank that [wasn't] working for him,"

²⁶⁸ For example, see *The Music of New Orleans*, a series of five albums released between 1958 and 1959 by Folkways Recordings, covering the "music of the streets", Mardi Gras, dance halls, the Eureka Brass Band, "the birth of jazz," and its "flowering." Folkways album numbers FA02461- FA02465, 1958-1959, 78 rpms.

²⁶⁹ Richard B. Allen Interview with Elizabeth Snapp.

²⁷⁰ See Jason Berry's essay in Fagaly for a sketch of the French Quarter during Morgan's time, including colorful details of regular features like burlesque theater star Evelyn West, who was billed as "Biggest and the Best, the Girl with the \$50,000 Treasure Chest Insured by Lloyd's of London," 81.

²⁷¹ William Carter, *Preservation Hall: Music from the Heart* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 151.

²⁷² Sancton, 56.

Borenstein's enterprising spirit was a natural extension of his earlier experiences.²⁷³ A native of Milwaukee, Borenstein arrived in New Orleans in December 1941 following stints along the carnival circuit, as a magazine salesman and promoter for the American Vacation Association. His imminent departure was stymied by the attack on Pearl Harbor, whereupon he put his showman's sensibility and business savvy to work in the French Quarter, joining its colorful cast of bohemian denizens.²⁷⁴ Of Borenstein's entrepreneurial activities, his engagement with supporting black musicians at Preservation Hall left its deepest mark on the cultural landscape. What began as informal jam sessions evolved into an extended business partnership with Allan Jaffe, a jazz pilgrim who arrived from Philadelphia with his wife, Sandra. The Jaffes formed an internationally touring band and a steady program of weekly concerts. In addition to running the hall, Borenstein and Jaffe were the two most important people supporting Morgan's art.²⁷⁵

Most of what is known about Borenstein and Morgan's working relationship comes from oral histories that date their first meeting to around 1959-1960 at the corner of St. Peter and Bourbon Streets, one of her regular preaching spots, an intersection that lay at the heart of the French Quarter.²⁷⁶ Eventually, Borenstein invited her to hold a Sunday session at Associated Artists Gallery, his other gallery in the Royal Sonesta Hotel, and other commercial properties he owned.²⁷⁷ This former carnie worker undoubtedly seized upon Morgan's gravelly forceful voice, religious fervor, primal rhythms of speech, and striking visual presence as something unique and commercially attractive. That she also made pictures during this period [fig. 89; see caption] likely must have appealed to his business sense as well, for her style differed greatly from the art Borenstein typically sold in his galleries. His stable of artists included Xavier Callatay, Andrew Lang, and Noel Rockmore, who tended to depict New Orleans' urban landscape and musicians in stylized, but recognizable forms [figs. 90-92].

Perhaps as a commercial and social experiment, Borenstein, among others, encouraged Morgan's production by supplying her with paints, while he and Jaffe also sought to give her exposure to visitors and potential buyers.²⁷⁸ Among the individuals Borenstein and Jaffe

²⁷³ Sancton, 60. See also Carter, 108-136 and Luba Glade, "The Landlord of Royal Street" in *Figaro* 7:48 (December 6, 1978).

²⁷⁴ Tom Bethell's profile of Borenstein particularly revels in the exotic details of the pugnacious businessman, which likely played to the delight of the *Vieux Carré Courier's* bohemian readership. In addition to quotations from Borenstein that enliven the text ("I could sell a snowball to an Eskimo"), Bethell provides a humorous survey of his carnie days (lecturing on embryology in front of fetuses in formaldehyde and gaping audiences), as well as Borenstein's business adventures and failures in unearthing Mexican antiquities, art dealing, and of course, in providing a venue for an older generation of jazz musicians. *Vieux Carré Courier*, February 9-15, 1973, 5-7.

²⁷⁵ Ken Mills, Barbara Reid, William Edmiston, and William Russell were original members of The Society for the Preservation of Traditional Jazz. For broader history of Preservation Hall, see William Carter, *Preservation Hall: Music from the Heart*.

²⁷⁶ Fagaly interview with Pat Borenstein interview, April 23, 1996.

²⁷⁷ Such as Vaucresson's restaurant. Fagaly interview with Vernal Bagneris, May 30, 1996.

²⁷⁸ Other private collections containing significant numbers of Morgan's work (over 10) assembled during the 1960s and 1970s include those of R&B disc jockey Nathaniel "Magnificent" Montague and poet Rod McKuen (collection status undetermined as of yet). The Montague Collection was eventually sold in 2012. It is now owned and managed

introduced to Morgan and her work, the most significant (in terms of reach) include William Fagaly of the New Orleans Museum of Art, Susann Craig in Chicago, Janet Fleischer of Fleischer/Ollman Gallery in Philadelphia, and Regenia Perry. Both women brought her work directly to market. Their patronage grew more involved over the years, as the two men were among several over Morgan's lifetime to provide for her day-to-day needs by delivering groceries and relieving her of boarding costs.²⁷⁹ In sustaining her, they navigated the fine line between commercial exploitation and cultural safeguarding.

If Borenstein saw in Morgan an opportunity to support her art and musical talents for commercial ends, Morgan saw in Borenstein and Jaffe the profitability—spiritual and financial—of art-making. Her frequent performances in Associated Artists Gallery, in which paintings and painters were omnipresent, might have encouraged her to contemplate pouring more of her energy into making her art [fig. 93-95]. Yet if she had any hesitations, God provided the ultimate encouragement. Morgan once relayed to photographer Lee Friedlander (Borenstein had introduced them) that God told her in a dream to stop playing the guitar and begin making pictures of biblical passages.²⁸⁰ “God told me to go get up in the middle of that bed and rest,” she wrote on the only painting that shows the artist painting [fig. 96]. The command to “rest” signaled the end of her work in the “black robe” as a teacher of orphaned children and street preaching. This word from God inaugurated yet another phase of the Bride of Christ's service in the role of an artist.

PART 2: Morgan at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival

Borenstein, Jaffe, and Morgan's remarkable partnership culminated in her appearances at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festivals from 1970 to 1974—an annual multi-day celebration of Louisiana music and culture where she performed songs, sold paintings, and possibly preached. These public festival performances galvanized her identity as an artist, serving as the access point that connected her gospel message to a market that surpassed her street evangelism. The distribution of her artworks expanded, first into private collections and later into regional and national art institutions.

by Clinton F. Byrd of Tallahassee, FL. Tiffany Alexander, “Black History ‘Undertaker’ Loses Treasures”, *CNN.com*, accessed October 30, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/05/08/us/montague-collection-auction/> and Montague Collection website, accessed October 30, 2015, <https://montaguecollection.com/team/clinton-byrd/>.

²⁷⁹ They were not the only ones who supported Morgan in this way, see Fagaly interviews. Borenstein and Jaffe acquired 5444 North Dorgenois Street, where Morgan lived from around 1967 until her death in 1980, from Debra Ann Daniels on October 19, 1973 for \$5,500. Felicien Y. Lozes, Notary Public, NA110323, COB 722 Folio 151.

²⁸⁰ Fagaly interview with Lee Friedlander, October 8, 1996. As recorded by Fagaly: “When LF asked SGM why she made art, she told HIM she had a dream where God told her to lay away the guitar and illustrate the Bible. She told LF she didn't know how to do that. Her first ptgs were done on shirtboard and other cardboard and with black and white liquid shoe polish.”

The 1970 program cover for the first New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival is exemplary of the aesthetic and symbolic interface between the festival organizers and the artist. It reproduces two of Morgan's self-portraits [fig. 97]. At left, Morgan appears in religious black robes and holds a tambourine, while her script identifies the "holy dance" and musical praise she is offering to her God. "I'm a soldier in the army of the Lord," written below, summons the rousing melody to which her figure moves. But even if this African American spiritual was unfamiliar to viewers, the strokes of surrounding wash communicate the intensity of her praise. Morgan has laid translucent red-pink washes more densely in the outer areas of the background, leaving a glow of fainter pink around the figure. The way in which this array of darker marks mindfully surrounds her sleeves and robe registers the spiritual energy that her body radiates. Flourishes of sunflower yellow and violet infuse the field of magenta with an upbeat vitality to match the tone of her exhortation to "praise God with music." This gestural immediacy causes her to vibrate with movement across the denser patch of green paint that runs downward, earth-bound. Though more somber, the portrait at right still resonates with a similar degree of vitality. The plaintive refrain from one of Morgan's songs wraps around the artist who clutches a bible and travelling sack to her side. It reads "Lord I don't want to be burried [*sic*] in the storm," which could refer to any number of hurricanes that impact the city from season to season (Morgan lived through Hurricanes Betsy in 1965 and Camille in late 1969). In spite of this evocation of evacuations, flooding, and breached levees, Morgan still appears here fastidiously dressed in her white cap, buttoned blouse, lapelled jacket, skirt, hose, and heels. Her spotless appearance and the musical chorus bolster the storm's poetic dimension. When read with the painting on the left, it supplies the emotive contrast between resilience and vulnerability, conviction and plea—setting up a visceral drama generated by one picture's vibrant, gestural immediacy and the other's heavy-handed lettering upon a ground of sobering red. Morgan's black and white clothing underscore these wrenching sentiments, as does her handwritten signature. Not just a mark of authorship, Morgan's cursive name ultimately binds the portraits to the body and the life that produced them.²⁸¹

Seen in this way, Morgan's paintings represented one of the fullest and resolute integration of emotion, lived experience, artistry, and optimism that festival organizers packaged for attenders. Positioned beneath these reproductions, the caption unassumingly states, "For over three decades Sister Gertrude Morgan used the streets of our city as her Church." Evoking the handwritten casualness of a homemade poster, the caption links Morgan's piety with the organizers' bid to consecrate the improvisatory spirit of traditional jazz. Implying the voice of a native New Orleanian in the phrase "our city," the program cover further cultivates a sense of "hereness" that encompasses the visual and semantic intrigue of Morgan's paintings, just as it uses their striking visuality affectively to touch the beholder, inducting him into the musical world of the festival.

²⁸¹ For an extended discussion of the role of signatures and black identity, see Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby's *Enduring Truths* (Chicago: Chicago University Press), 2015. I am grateful to the author for sharing her manuscript with me prior to its publication.

To be sure, the primary objective of the early JazzFests was evoking jazz's lowbrow origins in bars, dancehalls, and floating parties of the 1910s and 1920s for non-local tourists. The opening event for the 1970 festival was an evening Mississippi River Jazz Cruise concert aboard the historic *S.S. President* [fig. 98-100]. Afternoon and nighttime billing at the Municipal Auditorium included programs entitled the "Roots of Soul," the "World of French Louisiana," and "Ragtime to Jelly Roll," while other nationally-recognized names included gospel queen Mahalia Jackson, Al Hirt, and Duke Ellington and his Orchestra. As Bob Jones, one of the festival's early producers, remarked, these performers provided name recognition so that "Joe and John Doe would come and see them...but they would also see Mississippi John Hurt or Cousin Emmy or see other kinds of things" and pick up "other interesting sounds."²⁸² In this regard, the festival organizers used Morgan's appearance on the program cover to provide the imprimatur of timelessness and rootedness to frame the main attractions—collapsing her symbolically with a musical form she would have personally refused to endorse.²⁸³

Yet in the atmosphere of the festival, Morgan's expressive aesthetic captured the ethos of affective encounter with local performers and vendors set up for visitors at the Louisiana Heritage Fair. A group of open-air tents and stages located just outside of the auditorium, the fair offered a "living exhibition" of Southern Louisiana's music and crafts in an array of sights and sounds, all for the inclusive ticket price of \$3.²⁸⁴ True to the multisensory, experiential format of festivals, visitors were invited to "stroll through historic Beauregard Square to sample the unique native food, look at the exhibits and hear the gold sounds that only Louisiana's rich culture could produce."²⁸⁵ This "wing-it type of atmosphere" attracted diverse crowds, from hippie dance troupes to middle-class families [figs. 101-107].²⁸⁶

Organizers presented music on four stages by genre, showcasing New Orleans' musicians who both performed and represented the so-called folk traditions that shored up the city's claim as the "cradle of jazz." Festival goers could sample the lively sounds of Ambrose Thibodeaux in a Cajun jam session [audio 11, fig. 108-109]; Babe Stovall singing soulfully on the Blues stage [audio 12, fig. 110]; the rousing choir of Morning Star Baptist Church [fig. 111]; and the Eureka Brass Band on a scaled-down, but still eminently danceable, "old-timey" parade [audio 13, fig. 112].²⁸⁷ They might have also seen Mahalia Jackson and Duke Ellington dropping in on the Louisiana Heritage Fair before their evening gigs [fig. 113]; or they might have stopped at the Gospel Tent, where Idelle Gatling and her performing group could be found providing musical support as Sister Gertrude Morgan sang and taught from the bible [fig. 114]. Within this lively

²⁸² Oral History with Bob Jones, part 1, 30. New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival Foundation Archive (hereafter NOJHFFA).

²⁸³ I use "JazzFest" as shorthand for the entire program of the festival, inclusive of the evening programs and Heritage Fair.

²⁸⁴ Compared with \$6.50, the highest price for evening concerts. See advertisement in *Vieux Carré Courier* 6:60, April 17, 1970, 8.

²⁸⁵ 1970 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival Program, 4.

²⁸⁶ Donald M. Marquis review of "JazzFest 1971." NOJHFFA.

²⁸⁷ *The Second Line*, published by the New Orleans Jazz Club (May-June 1970), 315-6.

county fair atmosphere, Morgan was not mentioned by name in the program, but was listed as part of the “blues, gospel, Cajun, and street singers at different locations around the square,” adding a sonic layer to the visual montage of artworks on display along fences, “in keeping with the traditions of the French Quarter.”²⁸⁸

The New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival was not the first effort to package jazz as a national tourist attraction.²⁸⁹ Similar to earlier efforts run exclusively by New Orleans white elite—members of the preceding International Jazz Festival of New Orleans, Incorporated, included the manager of the Royal Orleans Hotel, local attorneys, and members of the tourist commission—JazzFest organizers implicitly imagined their primary income bearers as white audiences.²⁹⁰ By featuring national-recording artists like clarinetist Pete Fountain and trumpeter Clyde Kerr on the evening roster, they cast their hopes on the popular appeal of “Dixieland jazz,” synonymous with the purist “traditional” New Orleans style. As the name suggests, this commodified and sanitized tradition of music was made popular by white bands who played and recorded a sound for whites that had been historically performed by black musicians. Like these earlier festival iterations, the 1970 JazzFest was not a great financial success, ending with a paltry profit of \$58.²⁹¹

However, several factors set this festival ship on a vastly different course than its predecessors. The foremost distinction was the incorporation of local culture at the Louisiana Heritage Fair. Producer George Wein, folk and jazz music impresario who launched, among others, the Newport Jazz and Newport Folk Festivals in the 1950s and mid-1960s, was the first to recognize that the economic welfare of the festival depended upon including local communities, transforming them into commercial as well as social stakeholders [fig. 115].²⁹² Bob Jones, who gained his scouting experience by traveling across the country with Ralph Rinzler, co-founder of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, recalled his mentor’s emphasis upon having good food and crafts for a successful festival; and above all, “You need to involve the community that you are

²⁸⁸ “Three Days of Music, Food, and Art: Jazz Heritage Fair Featured,” *Vieux Carré Courier* 6:60, 17 April 1970, 5.

²⁸⁹ See Monifa Ife Johnson, “The Coming of JazzFest: Jazz Festivals, Desegregation and Tourism in New Orleans, 1940-1970,” Masters Thesis, Tulane University, Submitted April 2000; Allison Miner and Michael P. Smith, *JazzFest Memories*, Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 1997; and Helen Regis and Shana Walton, “Producing the Folk at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival,” *Journal of American Folklore* 121:482 (2008), 400-440.

²⁹⁰ “Heritage produces the local for export,” describing just one of the general dynamics of how heritage makes “locations” into “destinations.” Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 153. JazzFest’s programming emphasis on booking nationally-recognized artists such as Stevie Wonder in 1973 (a move that Allan Jaffe called “blatantly commercial”—see Bethell, “Heritage and All that Jazz,” *Vieux Carré Courier* April 13-19, 1973, 8) was bid for tourism that was the culmination of approximately 25 years of organizing on the part of the city’s administration, hotel and retail associations, and elite enthusiasts to concretized New Orleans as the “birthplace of jazz” as a desirable tourist attraction. Mark Souther, *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and Transformation in the Crescent City* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press), 102-131.

²⁹¹ Email correspondence with Rachel Lyon, archivist at the NOJHFFA, 19 March 2014.

²⁹² George Wein Oral History, NOJHFFA.

in even if you are not from that community.”²⁹³ This recognition that the economic welfare of the festival depended upon including local communities was the same impulse informing the staging of other events—most notably, the Newport Folk Festival for which Wein was also pivotal organizer.²⁹⁴ Consequently, local businesses were invited as vendors. Buster Holmes’ red beans and rice, Vaucresson’s sausages, Angelo Brocato’s spumoni, and even the fried chicken from “Al Sykes’ wife’s church”²⁹⁵—among others—became part of the tradition and identity of JazzFest up through to the present.²⁹⁶

Another factor contributing to JazzFest’s longevity was a strong preservationist current originating with a generation younger than Dick Allen, Bill Russell, and Larry Borenstein that merged with Wein’s business acumen [fig. 116]. The key figures in this regard are Allison Miner and Quint Davis, two young people then working at the Hogan Jazz Archive in Tulane University [fig. 117]. With a countercultural aversion to the mainstream, an activist’s fervor to preserve a notion of “the authentic” that was neither commercial nor produced for tourists, and a youthful idealism to move forward on the promises of Civil Rights, Miner and Davis provided Wein with on-the-ground labor to scout local talent for the Louisiana Heritage Fair. The two embarked on many “search and discovery” trips throughout southern Louisiana for little-known musicians during the early years of the festival. In bringing these artists to a centralized stage, theirs was a salvage operation that sought to give second life to marginalized, obscure, aging performers as heritage.²⁹⁷ The resuscitation of Henry Roeland Byrd’s career, more famously known as Professor Longhair, is an archetypical narrative of the most successful re-launchings of a onetime obscure musician.

As cultural anthropologists Helen Regis and Shana Walton have argued, festival organizers used a discourse of cultural endangerment and salvage to justify the terms by which musical “traditions” get recovered, revived, and positioned in opposition to the commercial

²⁹³ Bob Jones Oral History, 43-44. Joyce Wein, George’s wife, also encouraged the place for crafts within the program of the Louisiana Heritage Fair. Not until Vitrice McMurry joined the festival organization in 1973 did craft juries make the Heritage Fair competitive. As the JazzFest expanded, Bob Jones noted with a tinge of regret the inclusion of “talented things...but to me it wasn’t [folk craft]...too many jewelry [*sic*]—bad earrings and stuff like that.”

²⁹⁴ Robert Cantwell leans upon folklorist David Evans’ four-stage development of the folk revival with the qualification of its decidedly institutionalized and commercial orchestration that defined a particular “folk style” as authentic. Stage three is marked by the reissue of obscure recordings from pre-WWII commercial records to market with high-fidelity sound and exposed folk revivalists to folk singers and musicians who later enjoyed second careers as festival, coffeehouse, and concert performers. See *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 34-9.

²⁹⁵ Harry Hildebrand III Oral History, NOJHFFA.

²⁹⁶ George Wein Oral History, NOJHFFA.

²⁹⁷ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 149. Richard B. Allen (curator of the Hogan Jazz Archive at Tulane University), William Russell (historian and contributor to the 1939 tome, *Jazzmen*, that formed a consensus about New Orleans jazz), Allan and Sandra Jaffe (managers of Preservation Hall, a venue dedicated to providing a stage for a generation of aging musicians), and Larry Borenstein were also crucial figures who were motivated by a discourse of preservation.

popular music industry.²⁹⁸ It also turned crucially upon the racial politics of white middle-class agents patronizing and supporting predominantly African American musicians. This facet highlights JazzFest's restorative aims. Speaking from a position that was personal as much as it was political, George Wein refused to produce a festival in New Orleans in the mid-1960s when approached by the mayor, councilmen, and leading businessmen. Yet still variously bound by segregationist policy, the city refused to house black performers and to manage racially integrated performances.²⁹⁹ What tipped the scales, according to Allison Miner, was timing. She succinctly expressed the political dimension of JazzFest retrospectively, saying,

[I]t was just the beginning of an opportunity for people to party together, to hear each other. [Given] ...the scene in America because of the politics of the 60s—people didn't want to hurt someone of another race, you know you didn't want to continue this bitter agony ... [of] hundreds of years in this country; slavery and humiliation for black people. So by celebrating their culture with everyone there—black and white, it became an opportunity for people to say...I'm going to see things differently.' And I think that's what our festival did.³⁰⁰

Braided into the founding narratives of New Orleans jazz was a message of liberal pluralism and its aspiration for a racially integrated utopia.³⁰¹ JazzFest organizers depended upon black voices and proximity to black bodies, enlisting their racially marked presence—construed within the

²⁹⁸ Regis and Walton, 410-11.

²⁹⁹ See George Wein's memoir with Nate Chinen, *Myself Among Others* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press/Perseus Group, 2003), especially chapter 11.

³⁰⁰ *Reverence: A Tribute to Allison Miner*, directed and produced by Amy Nesbitt, V. Veracity, VHS, 1998. This sentiment has trickled down to the spiritual narratives of personal transformation and transcendence that Shana Walton has documented in recent ethnographic research. In these stories told by largely white and middle-class attendees, JazzFest affords them the chance to "pay homage to and participate in the African American roots of New Orleans culture." In these spiritual narratives of the festival, JazzFest becomes a place where people can be kinder or friendlier, less hung up or stiff, happier or more willing to connect to other human beings, particularly across normal social barriers. Shana Walton, "I Only Go to Church Once a Year": Transformation and Transcendence in JazzFest Narratives," *Southern Journal of Linguistics* 36:1 (Spring 2012), 105 and 122.

³⁰¹ "The ideological foundation of contemporary American folklife festivals is a species of liberal pluralism, which promulgates a symbolically constructed image of the popular roots of American national culture by traditionalizing, valorizing, and legitimizing selected aspects of vernacular culture drawn from the diverse ethnic, regional, and occupational groups seen to make up American society....The sometimes tacit, often explicit, assumption is that folk festivals can serve as instruments of such preservation and encouragement." Alongside these general remarks, Richard Bauman, Patricia Sawin, et al. frankly acknowledge that little is known about the effect of these frames of cultural representation on participants. Their publication attempts to fill in this gap. *Reflections on the Folklife Festival: An Ethnography of Participant Experience* (Bloomington, IN: Folklore Institute, Indiana University, distributed by Indiana University Press, 1992), 1.

festival context as lyrical personae, not necessarily political ones—to participate in forging visible harmonious relations across these boundaries.

These visionary aims marked the Louisiana Heritage Fair with the spirit of 1960s folk revivalism. Documentarian John Cohen had the following to say about folksongs in 1961, employing words that echo precisely the experiential atmosphere hailed in Morgan’s art. His statement is an ideal textual analogue for the cultural work that Morgan and other musicians at the festival were called upon to perform:

There are certain qualities we demand from the music...a sense of immediacy, of personal involvement, a sense of tradition as well as appreciation for that which carries things to a point where they can go no further...a rejection of compromise...an obsession...with the song material and a sense of an event with every performance.³⁰²

Through this expectation of felt empathetic response, the “JAZZ” signifier from the 1970 festival program cover references the purist disposition that had been actively shaping the cultural landscape of New Orleans by jazz pilgrims and venues like Preservation Hall. The New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival was designed to instigate such intense individual encounters in order to catalyze social and personal transformation. Robert Cantwell has summarized this dynamic of the folk revival as “a form of social theater in which we develop the protocols for negotiating relations among groups and classes, as well as our own transition from one state, condition, or membership to another, discovering ourselves contrastively as we invent the ‘folk,’ experiencing ourselves reflexively as we emulate them.”³⁰³ Such collective transcendence was not only one of the tacit principles of the founding years of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festivals, but it was—as Allison Miner stated—part of the politics of 1960s liberalism and counterculture.

Just 17 years old when she came to New Orleans from Daytona, Florida for the first time in August of 1967, Miner arrived when the intensity of local racial confrontations was rising.³⁰⁴ In November of 1960, Ruby Bridges was escorted as the first black student to enroll in a white school, signaling the start of the city’s effort to desegregate schools and functioning as a national barometer of civil rights progress. The passage of a liberal stop-and-frisk legislation was

³⁰² John Cohen, “Folk Music Today: A Symposium,” *Sing Out! 2* (February-March 1961), 23. Quoted in Cantwell, 327.

³⁰³ Cantwell, 54-55.

³⁰⁴ While New Orleans did not experience a large-scale eruption of race riots that tore Birmingham, Newark, Detroit, or Los Angeles during the 1960s or 1970s, it was not without its own history of violent clashes in the fight for civil rights. The ability for JazzFest to defuse racial tension or participate in the cultural politics of the Civil Rights movement will be considered in chapter 3 through the strategies of artist Bruce Brice. For an account of the racial violence in New Orleans, see the opening three chapters in Leonard N. Moore, *Black Rage in New Orleans: Police Brutality and African American Activism from World War II to Hurricane Katrina* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 1-95.

challenged by CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), CCPM (Concerned Citizens on Police Matters of Police Brutality and Harassment), and the NAACP in 1967. A number of police homicides of black youth intensified the urgency among social activists; and police met protesting students at the Southern University-New Orleans in the spring of 1969 with violence, after students replaced the United States flag with a Black Nationalist one and made demands for black studies and the removal of certain administrators.³⁰⁵ The 1960s closed with the election of mayor and Civil Rights supporter Moon Landrieu—a white candidate who won with more than 90 percent of the black vote—and the establishment of the Black Panther Party in New Orleans. These events prepared the ground for and heightened the stakes of social progress that could be won, however incrementally or gradually, through the cultural visibility of black musicians and the veneration of their musical forms under the rubric of heritage.

It is little wonder, then, that associating with brass bands marching through the streets—with a “second line” of followers dancing behind—became one of the primary strategies for stating one’s liberal position: in other words, enacting racial redress through the celebration and veneration of this African American custom. For many jazz pilgrims, participating in brass band processions was an initiatory rite into the local musical community. “English musicians come to New Orleans by the drove and support themselves however they can [to learn from elder musicians],” Allen reported in 1966 to Whitney Balliett, jazz critic for *The New Yorker*. “It’s their Mecca.”³⁰⁶ For photographers like Lee Friedlander and Michael P. Smith, African American cultural life in New Orleans and especially neighborhood parades, led by brass bands and sponsored by Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs, became icons connecting the city’s past with the present. A selection of photographs by Lee Friedlander and Michael P. Smith, who prolifically documented New Orleans street life during the 1960s and 1970s, picture the dignity and vibrancy of the second line procession that the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival desired to capture and make spectacular [fig. 118-121].³⁰⁷

In her critique of the heritage tourism industry, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has acutely noted the effects of foreclosure upon objects of heritage, in which exhibition and performance within cultural scripts exclude them from present-day politics.³⁰⁸ Instead, the logic of heritage participates in a ritual of forgetting the histories of practices by virtue of its rehearsals of

³⁰⁵ Especially chapters 2 and 3 in Leonard Moore. For biographical information, see Alison Miner, *Reverence!* VHS. The path toward healing of black-white relations undergirding the festival’s integrationist project experienced a dramatic shift in 1978, when the Afrikan American Jazz Festival Coalition confronted Wein about the commodification of black art and culture. Evolving from the militancy of black power, the African American activists gained agency for the community with the establishment of Koindu, a site in the festival for which Africa and African roots gained visible foothold. For a history, see Helen Regis, “Producing Africa at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival,” *African Art* 46:2 (Summer 2013): 70-85.

³⁰⁶ Whitney Balliett, “Mecca, La.” afterword to *The Jazz People of New Orleans*, photographs by Lee Friedlander (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 1992), 98.

³⁰⁷ On the urban politics of the second line in New Orleans, see Helen Regis, “Blackness and the Politics of Memory in the New Orleans Second Line,” *American Ethnologist* 28:4 (November 2001): 752-777.

³⁰⁸ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 159-64.

sanitized, romanticized, or repudiated versions of culture. Heritage exhibits what it “consigns to oblivion.”³⁰⁹ This irony was not lost on Jazz Fest’s critics. The most vocal, Tom Bethell, bemoaned the festival in a 1973 issue of the *Vieux Carré Courier*, directing his skepticism at the increasing presence of grants, corporate underwriters, and commercial spectacle that supported the festival’s operations. The risk, as he saw it, was neglecting the vernacular culture and makers who produced jazz in the first place.³¹⁰ “Who Killed Louis Armstrong?” his headline asked. The subtitle provided the answer: “Heritage and All that Jazz.” His critique of the 1974 festival further crystallized his concerns. “It occurred to me that this ‘heritage’ business is really something analogous to pressing flowers and leaves between the pages of a book; where they will reside, embalmed, receiving an occasional fond glance, over the succeeding years.”³¹¹ Giving music a second run with “cultural laurels,” the festival’s obsession with staging the past resulted in negligence of contemporary talent. Bethell’s clear preference was for an audience notably comprised of “soul-brothers stroll[ing] about the [auditorium] in their peacock gear,” who approached the music as “entertainment.” The danger occurred when the same music would be staged the next year for “middle-class whites, critics, and jazz fans” who intellectualized it as “art.”³¹² The problem was not so much this divided audience per se, but the way in which the festival perpetuated and capitalized upon the legitimizations offered by the latter. This racially-defined bias resulted in the festival suffering a “more severe case of schizophrenia.”³¹³

George Wein, as producer of the festival, understood these critiques as necessary tradeoffs. They were collateral effects of what he argued was necessary for making the New Orleans festival important and distinguished: local buy-in from government and businessmen would ensure Jazz Fest’s profitability and future sustainability. “I made the decision that what counts in New Orleans is the musical heritage. Thus the heritage fair...[next year] we must begin to make it big as well as *important*, which it already is...now that a good percentage of the community is aware of what we are doing, we must make it attractive to more people.”³¹⁴ In other words, to book popular headliners like B.B. King for the “soul brothers” who enjoyed music in its “authentic” form—as entertainment—the identity of the festival needed to be consecrated, incontrovertibly and foremost, upon the sound of traditional jazz for white

³⁰⁹ Steven Mullaney, “Strange Things, Gross Terms, Curious Customs: The Rehearsals of Culture in the Late Renaissance,” *Representations* 3 (1983), 48, 49, 52; quoted in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 160. See also Renato Rosaldo, “Imperial Nostalgia,” *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 107-122.

³¹⁰ Bethell, *Vieux Carré Courier*, April 13-19, 1973, 1, 8-9.

³¹¹ Tom Bethell, *Vieux Carré Courier*, April 25-May 1, 1974, 17.

³¹² Tom Bethell, *Vieux Carré Courier*, April 25-May 1, 1974, 18.

³¹³ Tom Bethell, *Vieux Carré Courier*, April 25-May 1, 1974, 17. Lee Hoppel registered his own critique of the festival in 1971. Also writing for the *Vieux Carré Courier*, Hoppel noted the festival’s “obvious lack of the big names that would have assured getting a greater number of the Black Community...like Miles Davis, Herbie Mann, James Moody, Cannonball Adderly, Ray Charles, B.B. King, etc.” that would have jolted New Orleans out of its obsession with the past. With this list of suggested artists, Hoppel argued for cool, smooth, and hard bop jazz genres, along with popular blues and soul artists. Nevertheless, his critique seemed motivated more by fashion than political activism. Lee Hoppel, “JazzFest Blues,” *Vieux Carré Courier* 30 April-6 May 1971, 1-2.

³¹⁴ Emphasis original. Wein, letter to the editor, *Vieux Carré Courier*, 14-20 May 1971, 4.

aficionados. Wein's eventual success in securing the financial future for the festival was one major factor in bringing New Orleans folk like Morgan into view and thereby opening up a space for them in the city's social memory.

The extent to which these ramifications of the festival were detrimental is a topic of another discussion for more well-versed scholars and musicians.³¹⁵ Worth explicating here, however, is how Larry Borenstein and Allan Jaffe defended their positions vis-à-vis the skepticism registered in Bethell's editorial. To Borenstein, the local jazz "establishment" that comprised the festival Board of Directors consisted of "naïve" men who would have preferred nationally popular white jazz lounge performers over the working local black musicians.³¹⁶ Jaffe, who was managing the band and nightly concerts at Preservation Hall, asserted that "[New Orleans musicians] need the fair and we don't need the auditorium concerts—not if the people they are going to feature don't help jazz in New Orleans."³¹⁷

To the degree that Borenstein's barbs were strategically launched (he was the consummate businessman who did not shy away from controversy) and Jaffe's comments sincere, they were both based on a decade's experience of commercial and personal investments in the city's cultural life, particularly at Preservation Hall. In their management of the Hall, Borenstein and Jaffe made it a priority to pay aging musicians union wages, in addition to supplying instruments, dentures, transportation when needed, and regular audiences to support the performers in practical ways. Their responses to critics like Bethell further defined their racial and class allegiances, positioning their anti-establishmentarian enterprise as Jews and against New Orleans' white elites. This social boundary was consolidated and spectacularized annually in the processions of the oldest, most exclusive Mardi Gras krewes.³¹⁸ In their cultivation of an alternative bohemian community that nurtured relationships among writers, artists, and musicians—and within which friendships with African Americans declared their

³¹⁵ For a polemical voice on the life and death of jazz, see trumpeter Nicholas Payton's blog entry, "On Why Jazz Isn't Cool Anymore," November 11, 2011 [<http://nicholaspayton.wordpress.com/2011/11/27/on-why-jazz-isnt-cool-anymore/>]. For a history on jazz and jazz criticism, see Raeburn.

³¹⁶ As reported by Bethell, Dr. Edmond Souchon, Arthur Q. Davis (Quint's father and prominent architect in New Orleans), Lester Kabacoff, Winston Lill, Clarence Jupiter, and Archie Casbarian were Borenstein's named targets, and their musical tastes summed up by the styles of Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass, and Henry Mancini. Bethell, 8.

³¹⁷ Bethell, 8.

³¹⁸ Since the 1870s, outsider observations of the social rituals of some of the oldest parading krewes, the Pickwick Club and the Krewe of Comus, refer with intrigue to the secretive exchanges that had "coagulated [social positions] into timelessness," in Joe Roach's words. In the *Hand-Book of Carnival* by J. Curtis Waldo (1873), the writer explained how the process of secretive social selection for their Mardi Gras balls "have ever been a subject of the deepest anxiety with a certain class of our population. The beautiful and costly cards of invitation and the mysterious manner of their distribution, combine with the social position of those selected, to invest this part of the entertainment with a still deeper interest." Quoted in Roach, 261-2. The reluctance of the krewes of Comus, Momus, and Proteus to abide by a 1991 city ordinance that proscribed discrimination based on race, sex, religion, or sexual orientation (they instead abstained from public parading) demonstrates the recalcitrance of certain elite traditions that sustain social exclusion and garnered their conservative reputation. See Roach's chapter on "Carnival and the Law" for a penetrating analysis of a present history of race and class in New Orleans Mardi Gras.

countercultural stance—Borenstein and Jaffe consolidated their position as the preeminent gatekeepers of traditional jazz, a role they cultivated together as business partners.

Indeed, one of their recurring narratives cites their frequent run-ins with segregationist law as a badge of pride. As the story goes, Borenstein ran his gallery into the evening hours before 726 St. Peter Street became Preservation Hall, inviting musicians into the gallery for “rehearsals” for select friends and passers-by who initially “paid” musicians with tips. As the noise and interest grew, the racially mixed band was taken to night court, wherein the judge delivered his warning as he let them go: “We don’t want Yankees coming to New Orleans mixing cream with our coffee.”³¹⁹ From that point on, Borenstein only sought black performers to come through the gallery, providing musicians a new lease on their careers by cutting new records and touring nationally with the Preservation Hall Jazz Band as the venue operations stabilized. Profits from these album and ticket sales went directly back to the musicians themselves.³²⁰

“Larry didn’t want to be associated with the civil rights movement, and yet he gave us a lot of free space in his building if we wouldn’t tell anyone. He was all for it, but he didn’t want it to hurt business,” according to Severn Darden.³²¹ Allan Jaffe, by contrast, was remembered as a man as commercially-skilled as he was warm, generous, and transparently humane in his crusade to bring black musicians out of retirement (“to my wonderfull [*sic*] boss” reads one note written by pianist Emma Barrett to Jaffe—and notably, not to Borenstein).³²² Between the law and politics, Borenstein and Jaffe’s social entrepreneurship sought commercial profits in service to their compassionately driven patronage of black musicians.

Morgan was never a high-profile participant during her years at the festival. Nevertheless, her regular inclusion in the festival’s events was due in significant part to how she epitomized the role of a timeless and rooted “folk” in the social cast of figures that the organizers and her impresarios had desired for their countercultural community-based jazz revival in the city. As an African American street evangelist in white clothing, Morgan visually conveyed sanctity reminiscent of baptismal robes donned by converts about to receive cleansing within Southern rivers. She also confirmed the spectacularity of second line parades wending along the streets of working-class African American neighborhoods. In her commitment to dress as the Bride of Christ, Morgan invited the gazes of passers-by, and by extension, put herself in a position to become an object that could stir one’s imagination in all sorts of directions. For African Americans, she would have appeared familiar as a revered church mother. Yet for white

³¹⁹ From Borenstein’s introduction to *Preservation Hall Portraits*, Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1968; this anecdote is cited in full in Carter, 115-117; and often told to this researcher from locals today. In variation told by cornetist Charlie DeVore, the judge delivered the threat of imprisonment with an appeal to the “good old days” of black submission under white threat, before giving the coffee line. William Carter, 119-122.

³²⁰ For a detailed history of the hall and the people involved in its founding, see Carter.

³²¹ Carter, 128.

³²² Thanks to Christopher Botsford for showing me this note, which was written with a request from Barrett to Jaffe to purchase holiday cards on her behalf.

Southerners, Morgan's short stocky figure in a white dress and cap would have readily called to mind a black mammy or nursemaid.

Yet at the Louisiana Heritage Fair, Morgan's most compelling significance was generated in the ways in which her appearance bespoke the theme of redemption that festival organizers sought in their preservationist endeavors. This theme was especially important for Miner and Jaffe who were known to be fiercely generous to the musicians whom they managed. Today we do not have video footage to bring us closer to what Morgan's performances might have been like. Yet in pairing some of her audio with available photographs, one could conceivably imagine how the utter materiality of her white knit sweater, cotton nurse's uniform, nylons, leather shoes, plastic buttons, and muslin swatches could transmute during a performance into holy garments that matched her status as a sanctified woman, for blacks and white audiences alike. With a "mind [happily] stayed on Jesus," the sorrows and trials of racial violence might be mended.³²³ Or perhaps a black body cloaked in white could assert such a transcendent possibility for those who desired it. Whether her speech, prayers, songs, or art interacting with the spectacle of her blackness clothed in white could perform such conversions in the minds of festival-goers can only be a matter of speculation for lack of evidence. Nevertheless, I want to stress the semantic openness of her look and her message for those unconverted, as a way to account for why she was an ideal inclusion at the Heritage Fair.

Performing Sanctification at JazzFest

We have ample evidence that once she was there, Morgan embraced the opportunity to sing and preach at this new venue. Simultaneously, the festival atmosphere impressed Morgan with a growing sense of her art's autonomy in the ways that Borenstein and Jaffe displayed her paintings. Within the spaces of display, performance, and eventually commerce, Morgan was exposed to a new level of public spectacle and intercultural engagement. Though there are simply not enough oral histories to argue for a cohesive narrative of how Morgan responded to JazzFest, readings of selected photographs suggest some ways in which Morgan met the occasion with spectacular performances of her own, re-inventing her role as an evangelist in more dramatic ways resonant with a history of African American evangelical practice.³²⁴

In her earliest appearances at the Heritage Fair, which were held in Beauregard Square in the springs of 1970 and 1971, Morgan appears in extant photographs to have approached her performance in the Gospel Tent with relative ease, treating the festival as she would her street

³²³ Sister Gertrude Morgan, *I Woke Up this Morning with My Mind Stayed on Jesus*, fan construction formerly in the collection of Kristina Johnson and has since been sold at auction.

³²⁴ My analysis in this section leans upon Joseph Roach's concept of "vortices of behavior." As a site of social memory, vortices of behavior occur in "ludic spaces, a "kind of spatially induced carnival, a center of cultural self-invention through the restoration of behavior. Into such maelstroms, the magnetic forces of commerce and pleasure suck the willing and unwilling alike." Roach, 28.

work.³²⁵ Morgan's Revelation Charter—one of the largest and most ambitious kinds of paintings she produced—is tacked up against the backside of a piano [figs. 122-123]. Containing pictorial vignettes from the first several chapters of the book of Revelation, Morgan likely used it as a visual aid to performances of spirituals that draw directly from its imagery. For example, "I Got a New World in My View" and "Have You Heard of a City?" both appeal to a listener's visionary gaze and hearing, so that "someone will wake up out of sleep and pray."³²⁶ Though the names of the sanctified people shown here and Morgan's level of acquaintance with them has been difficult to verify, their grouping in these photographs indicates that they, like Morgan, turned to the visual as a tool to announce the coming New Jerusalem alongside song and word [figs. 124-126].

That Morgan actually viewed her JazzFest performances as continuous with her mission work is further suggested by a photograph showing a painting she made of her festival performance [fig. 127]. In this photograph taken at an unidentified location, Morgan holds a painting that renders the tent, the audience, the position of the piano, and her own Revelation Charter that details her experience. Notably, she designates her painted scene as "St. Ann Auditorium Festival Tent Meeting" where "[I] singed and taught the bible" to an audience of listeners.³²⁷ She not only refers to the location of the fair that was situated between St. Peter and St. Ann Streets, but also suggests that she viewed JazzFest as a sacred gathering akin to early twentieth-century tent revival meetings, still held throughout New Orleans' Sanctified communities in name at least, if not in venue. In size, scale, and didactic aim, Morgan's Revelation charter replicates the form of visual aids that have been linked to tent revivals from earlier in the twentieth century [figs. 128-129]. However, unlike the diagrammatic charts of 1930s revival banners (which her associate's banner seems to resemble, at least partially), Morgan's Revelation Charter breaks the former's linear clarity with its own zig-zagging logic of sequential illustrations. Starting at the top left, her pictures flow downward toward the bottom of the support, before turning to climb upwards as the narrative advances to the right.

In these photographs, Morgan handles her paintings, a gesture that retains a sense of their didactic utility. The Revelation Charter, for example, has been presumably carried, unrolled, or unfolded, and then hung on the piano's plastic sheeting for maximum visibility. Another of Rockmore's photographs shows Morgan standing before the altar of a small church and grasping a painting of the New Jerusalem [fig. 152]. In front of these audiences in the Gospel Tent and the African American church, Morgan's habit of grasping, pointing to, and directly handling her artworks demonstrates their intended use as portable objects instructive of the depicted biblical message.

³²⁵ Beaugard Square is known today as Congo Square in Louis Armstrong Park. The latter name has been retained in acknowledgment of the original site's role as the earliest gathering place for enslaved Africans and African Americans. A highly charged political space, my choice to use Beaugard Square is a historical one.

³²⁶ In addition to appearing on the recording made by Borenstein, these songs and other verses appear in the undated spiral notebook.

³²⁷ Letter from Morgan to Perry, undated, #2.1. Gitter-Yelen Collection.

This portability relates to the itinerancy that characterized Morgan's missionary work *before* visual art became the preeminent medium for her evangelism. Recall that the key aspect of her first calling was to "go ye into yonders world and sing with a loud voice" [fig. 7]. Morgan's first 18 years as a missionary was replete with travels, including not just her movement between several residences in New Orleans or Triumph the Church and Kingdom of God in Christ churches throughout eastern Texas and western Louisiana, but street evangelism itself. In embarking upon these journeys, Morgan literally fulfilled the scriptural call to go out on the "hedges and highways" from Luke 14:23.³²⁸ If she made any pictures at all, they would have to have traveled with her.

Yet within her partnership with Borenstein and Jaffe, her pictures could travel without her; in the name of art, preservation, and commerce, these two men provided the infrastructure that uncoupled their circulation from Morgan's own body. In these early years when the Heritage Fair was in then-Beauregard Square, they would have been perceived more likely as souvenirs, crafts, or even spiritual aids than as art [figs. 130-133]. As Henry Hildebrand recalls, "handmade in Louisiana" was the sole criteria for goods sold at the Heritage Fair. Organizers such as Davis, Miner, and Hildebrand were "more in the mode of begging vendors to participate in this unknown thing rather than filtering the (nonexistent) hordes of applicants."³²⁹

Her pictures' status seemed to matter little to Morgan so long as they could be made accessible to the audiences that she was determined to reach. In one self-penned document, she exhorts readers to "Read the bible take the word" to help her "wake up California...[since] God is able to throw his voice there" [fig. 134]. This same letter expresses regret that she was unable to send a Revelation charter out West, for "God let a white minister Be made a Present."³³⁰ Were economic means not an issue, one senses that Morgan would have travelled widely; but this option was not a part of God's plan, as it were. Instead, the lands he was opening for her were to be reached through her paintings and drawings—not herself. As her experience at the festival over the years would show her, her artwork could attract new audiences at JazzFest, as well as collectors and visitors whom Borenstein brought to her home in the Lower Ninth Ward. Among them were Lee Friedlander and Rosemary Kent, the latter who published a story about the artist in Warhol's *Interview* magazine in 1974 [figs. 135-136]. For Morgan, the attention garnered from these non-believing outsiders must have signaled access to an expansive market for her gospel through her pictures. Thus she would begin to invigorate and expand artistic production in discernible ways that would ready them for itineraries of their own.

Expanding Distribution, Negotiating Media

³²⁸ This phrase is used by Morgan in *Sister Palmore Had a Dream*, figure 17 and discussed in chapter 1. The original King James Translation of Luke 14:23 reads, "And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled."

³²⁹ Email correspondence with author, 31 March 2014.

³³⁰ Morgan, undated manuscript #18, Sacha Borenstein Clay Collection. Fagaly speculates that this man was the poet Rod McKuen.

In 1972, the Heritage Fair had moved from Beauregard Square to its current site, the New Orleans fairgrounds [fig. 137]. Larger than the venue closer to the French Quarter, the fairgrounds permitted Morgan to have her personal exhibition space at the festival that was to have a significant impact on her growing awareness of her artworks' autonomy. This "tabernacle booth," as others called it, was a structure built at the artist's request to protect her from the wind. Morgan reported that singing outdoors "make[s] you hose [hoarse?] so [Borenstein and others] fixed something very cute and had my pictures all around me[.] I in-joyed a few hours Saturday and Sunday that's the only work I would do on the Sabbath day."³³¹ The booth was a consistent feature of her presence in the rest of her festival appearances until 1974. This structure was a simple rectangular wood frame construction with beams and pegboard walls and doors opening outward to flank the artist as she sang [figs. 4, 5]. Photographs indicate that by 1973, the booth was whitewashed and a peaked roof was added, along with a cross and Star of David at each gabled end [figs. 131, 138]. While the motivation behind these religious symbols is unknown, it could have been a latent sign of the integral roles of Borenstein, Jaffe, and Wein as Jewish men in supporting Morgan's Christian mission and art practice. These individuals were probably responsible for the artist's transition from the craft tables of the 1970-71 Heritage Fairs to her standalone booth situated among the "art" areas of the larger fairgrounds venue in 1972-74 [figs. 139-140]. Described as the "little white 'tabernacle'" where Morgan "vends bright little primitive paintings," her booth reinforced the ways in which religion and tradition were commodified for audiences and buyers attracted to the novelty of New Orleans' spiritual past.³³²

The impact of this independent structure can be seen in three ways. First, it augmented Morgan's visibility as a singular artist and religious personality. In its original set-up [fig. 4], two benches have been arranged in front of the booth in a V-shape, creating an informal performance space that affords Morgan a small audience (in this instance, it includes a hippie and a woman seated to the left and Jules Cahn with the film recorder to the right). As she appears here, Morgan stands behind the base beam in mid-song, a position that establishes her as the performer upon her stage. I imagine that Cahn found this spectacle visually appealing not only because he knew Morgan previously (he and Borenstein were both active in the French Quarter real estate), but also because it offered a delightful vision of Morgan as the living version of her paintings. Cahn

³³¹ Letter from Morgan to Perry, undated, #2.1. Gitter-Yelen Collection, New Orleans.

³³² "A Complete Guide to the Jazz and Heritage Festival," *Vieux Carré Courier*, 20-26 April 1973, 2. Interestingly, Morgan does not have a strong presence in official and unofficial displays of festival memory. Among the life-sized cut-outs of festival "ancestors" on view at the 2014 festival, a historic site of the contest for African and African American self-determination and culture within the larger context of the festival (see Regis and Walton), Morgan is absent. Instead, organizers and high-profile musicians are represented. While one could interpret this as an omission or a sign of forgetting in the official arena, Morgan—like other local figures who left their footprints at the earliest Heritage Fairs—seems stashed away in the realms of personal memory, coming alive when called upon as evidence for a speaker's claim to "being there" at this early time. The artist, like those older jazz musicians who animate recollections of past festivals, belong to a culture of ease, acceptance, festivity, and individuality that the traditions of JazzFest memorialize and continue to nurture, even as its interdependence upon the economics of heritage rub up against its consecrating, spiritualizing aspirations.

captures this effect in a photograph taken of George and Joyce Wein with the artist, in which four of the six paintings hanging immediately above them echo the bright white clothing of Morgan herself [fig. 115]. Part of the charm of this snapshot arises from the way the Weins cross this threshold between performer and audience, entering the artist's creative space and posing for a visual souvenir. The series of glances that bounce from ours to George, and from Joyce to Morgan, make the viewer an additional participant in this crossing.

Second, this booth likely heightened Morgan's awareness of her paintings as objects inviting closer visual scrutiny by potential buyers. Consequently—and probably with Borenstein's intervention—her paintings began to increase in size and ambition, as we can see from a comparison of her booth displays from 1972 to 1973 [fig. 141-142]. Note, for example, the fan hanging on the lower right, which was a painted construction simulating the fans commonly used at African American churches. Another market effect was the diversification of Morgan's inventory, likely executed to make her works more affordable. This increase in supply, mediated through Borenstein, probably accounts for the stack of handwritten manuscripts from his office that remain. They consist of various types of writing that Morgan distinguished by providing titles such as "Poem by Me" and "History," or song lyrics for her readers to learn [fig. 143].³³³ Some are remarkably well preserved between panes of glass, sealed with masking tape and marked with a price of \$10.00. These were sold singly or mounted with smaller portraits and sold for \$30 [figs. 144-145]. Smaller tract-like writings were also found in Borenstein's inventory, which were likely framed in groups and sold at the lowest end of the price range [figs. 146]. A 1972 checklist includes a set selling for \$25.00, one-sixth the price of her Revelation Charters. Also available for sale were copies of her LP "Let's Make a Record." While it is possible that Larry asked Morgan to paint over the record albums' reproduced cover to increase the market price, her willingness to do so was also the result of personal preference [fig. 148-150]. In a letter to Perry, Morgan explains that she embellishes them since "I just don't want them without any color to them...[so] they will look better."³³⁴

As objects hanging on the booth's pegboard, her artworks in this context become more static and purely visual commodities, rather than the didactic tools that she handled in the 1970-71 Gospel Tents. This shift towards greater autonomy for her artworks evince the third impact that her personal booth had on Morgan's evangelistic practice: this new context enabled her to explore, if not also reinvent, religious performances that were reminiscent of her lived experience in small African American churches, both urban and rural. Beyond defining a generic performance space, the booth shared a kinship with the settings of black evangelical performances in ways that were recognizable and meaningful to the artist. Even without knowing the precise forms of these festival performances (none have been recorded with sound, to my knowledge), I want to stress the ways Morgan's cultural memory and kinesthetic imagination—a

³³⁴ Letter from Morgan to Perry, August 1972, #1.9. Gitter-Yelen Collection, New Orleans.

“way of thinking through movements—at once remembered and reinvented”—were dynamic factors in what photographs we do have.³³⁵

Morgan’s JazzFest booth structurally recalled the box-like space of small, working-class urban churches, some of which were storefront churches.³³⁶ In Charles L. Franck’s photograph of Pilgrim Travelers Baptist Church, for example, the worship space is essentially one extended rectangular room, with the sole focus aimed at the stage-like pulpit [fig. 151]. With slight variation, the church where Rockmore photographed Morgan teaching possesses a similar one-room floorplan with a frontal orientation, but is slightly wider to accommodate two sections of pews [fig. 152-153]. The central axis created by the aisle is similar to that created by the arrangement of benches in Smith’s photograph; the booth’s middle supporting beam further emphasizes the space’s symmetry.

The stage-like pulpit of these small African American churches effectively served as performance spaces for weekly sermons. In occupying spaces such as these, Morgan becomes the preacher-performer. Yet on special occasions, these spaces also hosted special theatrical productions in ways evoked by Morgan’s stances at JazzFest. Take, for example, two of Michael P. Smith’s photographs [figs. 6, 131]. In each, Morgan stands within the booth’s recess with one or both arms raised in mid-sentence, with a prop in hand to dramatize her message to the crowd (and at times supported by the accompaniment of Allan Jaffe on the sousaphone). Erol Barkemeyer’s photograph of Fifth Baptist Church document similar histrionics within an African American sacred space [fig. 154]. In this scene from a play called “Heaven Bound,” an angular stage prop with a picket fence frames the young boy performer who is clearly in the middle of a dramatic moment. The rest of the costumed cast sits in their silent supporting roles.

Morgan is not the sole exemplar of this kind of improvised adaptation of evangelical performance. James Hampton’s *The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations’ Millennium General Assembly* (ca. 1950-1965) and Elijah Pierce’s assembly of biblical woodcarvings (ca. 1935) also manifest the ways self-taught African American artists have adapted familiar cultural aesthetic forms to their artworks [figs. 155-156]. Both artists belonged to black working-class evangelical churches, and in each of these images, we see engagement with spectacular forms of viewing that would have been common to their church programs: symmetry and frontality in Hampton’s glimmering multi-piece installation, and costumed performance presented in Elijah Pierce’s staged photograph taken with his wife, Cornelia. As Lynda Hartigan has shown, the drama of religious visual experience derives from the theatrical staging tendencies in black urban

³³⁵ Roach, 27.

³³⁶ Storefront churches describe a social and architectural phenomenon involving African American migrants from the rural south to Northern cities. Seeking to recreate the social community of rural churches—often against the larger, more established middle-class black churches of mainstream denominations—working-class blacks would purchase abandoned retail spaces and convert them to churches. Though mostly associated with Northern cities, storefront churches can also be found in Southern cities like New Orleans. For more background on storefront churches, see Robert L. Boyd, “The storefront church ministry in African American communities of the urban north during the great migration: The making of an ethnic niche,” *The Social Science Journal* 35:3 (1998): 319-332.

churches.³³⁷ A particularly elaborate example can be seen in James Van Der Zee's photograph of Sweet Daddy Grace, a cult personality associated with the church United House of Prayer for All People. The headquarters for this largely African American church was in Washington, D.C., just blocks away from Hampton's garage, where he constructed his *Throne* [fig. 157]. Here, Grace assumes the role of a sacred character and gestures dramatically with both hands raised before whitewashed canopy—a working-class *baldacchino*—but no less glittering with the row of light bulbs lining the ceiling. With these examples in mind, we can return to a series of photographs from JazzFest, re-viewing Morgan's booth as a temporary outdoor pulpit. We can also situate each pitch of Morgan's head, her raised arms, her pointed finger, and the angle of her megaphone as another reinvention of these African American religious performances [figs. 5-6, 130-131].

Coinciding with her years at JazzFest is Morgan's regular correspondence with Regenia Perry. Taken as a whole, these letters reveal—not coincidentally, I would argue—an artist ably negotiating her finances and determining her production. The earliest letter is dated November 22, 1971, approximately a year after the two women met in New Orleans for the first time.³³⁸ The latest letter is dated September 1973. There are also several undated letters and enclosures of small slips of paper containing scripture passages, poems by the artist, or song lyrics written in the artist's hand. Though this remarkable collection represents only Morgan's side of these written exchanges, the letters point to the ways in which Morgan valued her artworks and actively controlled aspects of their dissemination even when Borenstein was actively dealing in her work. These letters indicate that Morgan regularly sent artworks through the post to Perry, totaling at least 46 objects, and possibly many more.³³⁹

In the same letter of August 1972, Morgan asks Perry to send five twenty-dollar bills “at one payment of \$100 that [is] my price wholesale with you” for an unspecified number of artworks. And while her correspondence indicates that Morgan regarded Perry as a co-worker in her evangelism, it also demonstrates the artist's cognizance that she was clandestinely working with another dealer. She begins one letter by saying how she doesn't “no about the large some of finance from Mr. Borenstein cause he buy the pictures from me I sell's [*sic*] them to him for so much and so much.”³⁴⁰ Perhaps knowingly withholding one set of market prices, she goes on to

³³⁷ Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, “American Folk Art and the Great Migration,” *American Art* 14:2 (Summer 2000), 37-39.

³³⁸ Perry has written elsewhere that she first met the artist in 1970 during one of her visits to Louisiana, through the introduction of Borenstein. See “Acknowledgments” in *What It Is: Black American Folk Art from the Collection of Regenia Perry* (Richmond, VA: Anderson Gallery at Virginia Commonwealth University, October 6-27, 1982) and Fagaly interview with Perry, July 10, 1996.

³³⁹ The exact number of artworks that Morgan sent to Perry is not known; a checklist from an exhibition of Perry's collection of folk art is the source for this figure though the number is probably higher. *What It Is: Black American Folk Art from the Collection of Regenia Perry*.

³⁴⁰ Interviews conducted thus far have not confirmed Borenstein's role, or that of others, in facilitating the sale of Morgan's art at the Heritage Fair. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence concerning Borenstein's capitalist-driven personality and his dealings with other artists—from whom he would buy outright, rather than sell through consignment—suggest that Borenstein or an associate would have handled the sales in Morgan's stead. For other

discuss pricing for her charters—\$50 for large ones, \$30 or 35 for smaller ones before promising to make two Jerusalem pictures for Perry by Christmas.³⁴¹

Morgan's investment in the market for souls prompted—and in fact, necessitated—entrance into the commercial market for the main purpose of broadcasting her religious message to audiences beyond her local purview. Yet the market also presented the potential problem of alienating her message from the medium: herself. Even if Morgan designated God as the owner of the message, as God's chosen vessel, Morgan was a medium or co-author of the work of missionizing. Hers was the name appearing on the JazzFest program and hers was the body appearing on the fairgrounds. Morgan often submitted her agency to God, signing her writings and artworks as "The Lamb's Bride," "Sister Gertrude Morgan missionary," or "Everlasting Gospel Teacher," subordinating titles that gesture towards an alternate authority beyond herself. More explicitly, she once wrote, "This is God's wife writing he's holding my hands and bringing the words fourth [*sic*]." ³⁴² In these formulations, the speaker holds a tenuous position as a surrogate or ventriloquist for God's voice on the one hand, and a self-possessed, authoritative speaker on the other. The shifting ground of shared speakerly authority and ownership of the message produces a situation in which the *frame* of speech takes on increasing significance in determining the character of her work as either God-serving or self-aggrandizing. In her live performances at the Heritage Fair, her artworks cumulatively functioned as an expressive witness to her connection with her two husbands—the fruits of her devotional labor that refer to that founding utterance of "touching words" that had called her into service in the first place.

Morgan understood the representational and devotional necessity to balance both her own voice and her Lord's voice when her artworks, writings, and tracts circulated beyond the live performance setting. This awareness accounts in part for the ubiquity of self-portraiture throughout her body of visual work and the frequency of gospel lyrics she includes that contextualize herself as pious [figs. 158-162]. ³⁴³ As a primary example, take the group of artworks Perry acquired through her correspondence and frequent visits to the artist's home in

profiles on Larry Borenstein, see author interview with Andy Antippas, July 31, 2013; Sancton, *Song For My Fathers*, 60-61; Tom Bethell, "Profile: Larry Borenstein," *Vieux Carré Courier*, February 9-15, 1973, 5-7; and Luba Glade, "The Landlord of Royal Street," *Figaro*, December 6, 1978, newspaper clipping from the Bruce Brice Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University.

³⁴¹ Letter from Morgan to Perry, December 4, 1972, #1.15. Gitter-Yelen Collection, New Orleans.

³⁴² Letter from Morgan to Perry, December 20, 1971, #1.2. Gitter-Yelen Collection, New Orleans.

³⁴³ This assertion brackets the biblical scenes that she depicted, as I continue to assess (maybe impossibly?) her known output. ³⁴⁴ Perry's collection not only possesses the most verifiable provenance of the largest number of Morgan's works, it was produced and sent with the explicit expectation that they would be sold and "pass[ed] out over in that part of the world that would be interested to hear me." Letter from Morgan to Perry, August 9, 1972, #1.9. Gitter-Yelen Collection, New Orleans. Based on the exhibition checklist for *What It Is: Black American Folk Art from the Collection of Regenia Perry* held at the Anderson Gallery of Virginia Commonwealth University, October 6-27, 1982, Perry owned 46 Morgan artworks that she received directly from the artist. The number is likely higher, considering that Perry would sell from this inventory to friends and interested parties. Interview with Perry, May 2-3, 2014.

the early 1970s [figs. 163-164].³⁴⁴ In their display on the Anderson Gallery walls, one is struck by the omnipresence of the white-dressed artist in various guises: as an itinerant street preacher carrying an umbrella or sometimes a guitar, preaching, seated on a chair, seated on a couch with Christ, or under the benediction of Christ. Like surrogates for the artist's sanctified body, these painted self-portraits proceed to arenas where the artist could not go herself. In examples such as figures 162 and 165, Morgan supplies her painted self-portrait with written speech that tells us, "I'm pressing on the upward way" and "Lord I'm doing all the good I can I am your missionary worker." Lest we mistake her for anything other than the Bride of Christ (like an artist?), Morgan carefully attaches written speech to self-portraits to complete the surrogacy that she wanted to construct.

In this intent to create material surrogates for her sanctified body, Morgan's production by hand was crucial. It was an avowal of the ever-present spirit to which her hand had moved in response to His divine calling. Maintaining their contiguity with the spirit through material expression in a way her vocal performances did not require, the patterns of production within Morgan's visual practice were thus innovations within the orality of her customary evangelism. Morgan's aim to create a substitute body (the vessel for the gospel) in her artwork should thus prompt us to reconsider the sheer repetition of her themes, iconography, and speech not in evaluative terms of "quaintness" or "naiveté", but as her insistence on retaining marks of her authorship upon the objects that she put in circulation. Morgan's sanctified presence resides visually in self-portraiture in as much as it does performatively in their material facture and transmission—for in their making, Morgan put her faith in the Holy Spirit to effect the power of the gospel message as they traveled in the market far beyond her control.

This marriage of faith and painting, and of faith in painting, merge in what is perhaps the most compelling and transcendent motif of her entire oeuvre, *Jesus is my Air Plane*. Here, Morgan's shared agency with God is most explicitly acknowledged [figs. 166-167]. In this scene, our eyes skip across the red paint dotting a cityscape that stretches across the foreground. Just right of center, a ship is docked at the bank of a waterway; this is the Everlasting Gospel ship that conveyed the faithful to the heavenly afterlife, Morgan's personalized reworking of the gospel hymn, the "Old Ship of Zion." But in this painting, Morgan has already disembarked, having presumably walked along the "milky white way" to the tune of the 1940s gospel radio hit of the same name, across green pastures and toward a host of brown- and pink-faced angels. For Morgan, these sonic rhythms and melodies advance towards the final conveyance: the airplane that bursts forth from the New Jerusalem in the sky. It carries the artist who is recognizable by

³⁴⁴ Perry's collection not only possesses the most verifiable provenance of the largest number of Morgan's works, it was produced and sent with the explicit expectation that they would be sold and "pass[ed] out over in that part of the world that would be interested to hear me." Letter from Morgan to Perry, August 9, 1972, #1.9. Gitter-Yelen Collection, New Orleans. Based on the exhibition checklist for *What It Is: Black American Folk Art from the Collection of Regenia Perry* held at the Anderson Gallery of Virginia Commonwealth University, October 6-27, 1982, Perry owned 46 Morgan artworks that she received directly from the artist. The number is likely higher, considering that Perry would sell from this inventory to friends and interested parties. Interview with Perry, May 2-3, 2014.

her defining attributes, a white dress and cap, with Jesus seated next to or behind her depending on how one reads Morgan's use of perspective. They sail into a cloud of Morgan's handwritten script at which point we arrive at a religious exegesis of the picture: "Jesus is my air / Plane. you hold the world in your hand. You guide me through the land...I / say Jesus is my air / Plane we're striving for the kingdom land. come / Join our band let's make / it in that Kingdom land." Repeating the version of the song recorded by Chicago gospel singer Mother McCollum in 1929, Morgan's Jesus is an omnipotent and ever reliable vehicle for transporting her to her heavenly dwelling.³⁴⁵ Yet whereas McCollum's rendition is a dispassionate foretelling of the sublime terror accompanying the end of times ("One of these mornings, four o' clock / This old world is gonna reel and rock / Reeling and rocking you can't hide or fear / Jesus is coming in his aeroplane"), Morgan's appeal to the viewer ("come join our band") minimizes any discomfiting truths about salvation and damnation. Rather, she focuses on the joy of ascending with her Savior.

As I have suggested throughout this chapter, Morgan's creative work in vocal performance, writing, and visual art encompassed her agency that moved in response to her external circumstances defined by her earthly material life. Formative agents shaping these external aspects of her lived experience were Larry Borenstein and Allan Jaffe who supported her art, brought it (and her) to public attention, all the while providing in part for her needs. In this way, Morgan's personal ascent as an artist was set aloft, we could say, in tandem with the resources of these two men.

Yet it is clear that Morgan would not have necessarily talked about her career as an artist in these terms; the only "two men" credited with the developments in her life were Big Dada and Christ, her heavenly groom. These divine entities were enablers and partners, the "airplane" in as much as they were co-passengers.³⁴⁶ In turn, Morgan pursued her artistic work in deference to

³⁴⁵ Mother McCollum, "Jesus Is My Air-O-Plane," recorded 1930, Vocalion 1616, 78 rpm. It is likely that Mother McCollum's recorded version is a popular version related to "The Heavenly Aeroplane," a 1928 hymn copyrighted by Thoro Harris and printed in *Gospel Quintet Songs* (Chicago, 1930) and available at "Hymnary.org" accessed July 1, 2014, <http://www.hymnary.org/hymnal/GQS1930?page=1>. Another resonant example is a field recording taken by Roscoe E. Lewis of the Elks Quartette, ca. 1937-1940, located at the American Folklife Center, Library of Congress and available on *Field Recordings—Volume 12, Virginia and South Carolina, 1936-1940*, Document Recordings DOCD-5614, compact disc.

³⁴⁶ Interestingly, the memoir of World War II U.S. Air Force officer Colonel Robert L. Scott adopts the airplane metaphor for his career as a fighter pilot. Entitled *God Is My Co-Pilot* and first published in 1943, Scott's story was made into a Hollywood film with the same name, released just two years later. Although considered to be an anti-Japanese propaganda film, it nonetheless mobilizes the trope of flight to the same deracinating ends as Morgan's autobiography. For both the military officer and Morgan, the protagonist's individual empowerment, patriotic loyalties, and conquest over enemies are the result of acknowledging the companionship of God. Aimee Semple McPherson's immensely popular sermon entitled "The Heavenly Aeroplane" is a likelier source for Morgan's paintings (via the popular hymn that Mother McCollum, among others, recorded). Nevertheless, the film, sermon, and painting all share in a twentieth-century modernity inhabited by warfare, innovations in aviation, and confidence in the heroic individual. I thank Elizabeth Cropper for sharing this title with me. Robert L. Scott, *God Is My Co-Pilot* (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons), 1943; *God is My Co-Pilot*, directed by Robert Florey (1945; United

their calling, yet in terms she couched as independent of any other relationship—which is to say that Morgan saw artistic authorship always as a shared enterprise. Especially during the early 1970s, when her performances at JazzFest seem to have accelerated her artistic career, Morgan had every reason to conclude that this enterprise was succeeding. Artworks were starting to move through the market like airplanes in flight, with Larry Borenstein and Regenia Perry facilitating the Lord’s work, at the same time that collectors from outside of New Orleans began to seek her out (as the series of photographic portraits attest).

This gradually expanding perception of her artwork’s dispersion is also registered in *Jesus is My Air Plane*. In the sloping curve of transparent green paint, Morgan reports: “A close study of all the Passage Relating to the kingdom of God will show that it is Regarded Both as a present possession and as a future inheritance.” The platform of heritage that embraced her street work, recordings, and art gave Morgan opportunities to reap possession by way of her spiritual labors. Thus empowered, Morgan was able to work for the reward that she knew she deserved and was working to claim. Yet to the extent that the memory of Morgan’s life persists in local exhibitions on New Orleans history, art auctions, and scholarly writing such as this dissertation, they also index the commutable operations of the market upon which Morgan’s labor depended. By virtue of their circulation and eventual concentration in folk and self-taught art collections, we have come to know such artwork as “art with a capital ‘A,’” the eighteenth-century Enlightenment construct that defines the pinnacle of cultural achievement as a purely abstracted, disinterested experience of form.³⁴⁷ Yet the story of Morgan’s artistic development in the context of JazzFest belies such a conception at every turn.

“I no the lord will make a way”³⁴⁸

In March of 1974, Morgan stopped painting, reportedly commanded by God in another revelation to cease making paintings. Some have speculated that failing eyesight was one reason for this cessation, citing the looseness of paint strokes in her later works as evidence of the loss of physical control that comes commonly with aging.³⁴⁹ Yet for a sanctified woman who was reluctant to accept worldly recognition for her work, the pressure to entertain visitors, photographers, and road-tripping folk art collectors might have proved more difficult than desirable (recall that Morgan turned to painting in response to God’s command for her to rest after nearly 30 years of missionary work).³⁵⁰ Based on existing oral histories, Morgan stopped painting and instead concentrated on her poetry until her death on July 8, 1980 at the age of 80.

States: Warner Brothers Pictures, colorized version 1992 by Turner Entertainment), VHS videocassette. For McPherson, see “The Heavenly Aeroplane,” *The Bridal Call*, 21-22, 32-33 and fn. 26.

³⁴⁷ For a critical account of the formation of the contemporary folk art market, see chapter 4 in Ardery, 174-226 and especially 180, 189-190, 287.

³⁴⁸ Inscription from *Self-Portrait*, c. 1970-75. Gitter-Yelen Collection, New Orleans.

³⁴⁹ Fagaly, 26.

³⁵⁰ In 1971, she declined a prize given by the Baton Rouge Art League stating that God had instructed her not to accept such an honor for herself nor worship any “graven image” (the silver trophy was described in the award letter as “engraved”). Fagaly 24.

Upon receiving this news, Larry Borenstein was not too sure “how this is going to work out for [Morgan] and the Lord but it affects me about the same way as the gasoline shortage affects traveling salesmen...I will probably only exhibit the balance of her paintings as loans to institutions which will pay a fee for such exhibits.”³⁵¹ The tools of Morgan’s ministry had become pure commodities; and yet their very status as commodities meant that her artwork could reach audiences that she could not have predicted. Borenstein likely continued to sell her artworks as opportunities arose, but Morgan’s place within his business purview was small in comparison with his dealings in pre-Columbian artifacts, work by other New Orleans artists, and investments in French Quarter real estate.³⁵² Despite the hyperbole expressed to Craig above, Borenstein was a consummate entrepreneur and likely took this cut-off in supply in stride. When Craig, a collector based out of Chicago, made Borenstein an offer for his inventory of Morgan’s work shortly after the artist announced her “retirement,” he agreed to the sale.³⁵³ As for Allan Jaffe, Borenstein’s business partner, the musicians that formed the Preservation Hall Jazz Band had been his primary focus throughout his lifetime; thus the termination of Morgan’s artistic output likely had few repercussions for him financially.

Ceasing to paint meant the end of a prominent source of financial means for Morgan, who was already living in extremely austere and impoverished conditions, without a refrigerator, air conditioning, or many furnishings. Regenia Perry, who continued to make regular visits to New Orleans from Richmond, Virginia, sensed Morgan’s need and brought her to the welfare office to enroll her in social security and food stamp programs sometime in the late 1970s.³⁵⁴ Meanwhile, Perry continued to mobilize Morgan’s work in both sales and scholarship. A rare example of an African American collector of African American folk art, Perry became a major voice in the 1980s and 1990s in positioning living African American folk artists, such as Nellie Mae Rowe and Sam Doyle, within identifiably African traditions.³⁵⁵ The implications of this approach will be addressed in more detail at the dissertation’s end.

When Borenstein informed Morgan that Uli Beier, an anthropologist at the University of Papua New Guinea, had expressed interest in exhibiting some of her work in the Pacific islands, she replied, “God works in mysterious ways.”³⁵⁶ In this remark, we can discern Morgan’s surprise and wonder over just how far her work had traveled.³⁵⁷ During the artist’s lifetime,

³⁵¹ Larry Borenstein, letter to Susann E. Craig, March 12, 1974. Quoted in Fagaly, 26.

³⁵² Luba Glade, “The Landlord of Royal Street” and Sacha Borenstein Clay Collection, email to author, June 25, 2014.

³⁵³ Fagaly, 26.

³⁵⁴ Perry interview with Fagaly, July 10, 1996, electronic document shared with author.

³⁵⁵ Perry’s key writings on the subject are “Black American Folk Art” in *Black Folk Art In America, 1930-1980* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi for the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC), 1982, 25-36; “African Art and African-American Folk Art: A Stylistic and Spiritual Kinship” in *Black Art—Ancestral Legacy: The African Impulse in African-American Art*, exh cat. (Dallas, TX: Dallas Museum of Art, 1989), 35-52; and “Contemporary African American Folk Art: An Overview,” *International Review of African American Art* 11:1 (1993): 4-29.

³⁵⁶ Larry Borenstein, letter to William Fagaly, November 3, 1970. Quoted in Fagaly, 73, fn. 68.

³⁵⁷ For a discussion on twenty-first century interest in Morgan’s music and art, see Emily Clark.

popular poet Rod McKuen published his collection of Morgan drawings and paintings in a compilation of bible verses entitled, *God's Greatest Hits* in 1970 [figs. 168-170].³⁵⁸ In this volume, Morgan's artworks bear little correlation to the selected scriptures; instead, they represent a dreamy, utopian innocence to complement the anodyne spirituality proposed by the Christian proverbs. The book's wildly changing typographic styles sentimentalize the directness of Morgan's art, making her untutored artworks appear like precious antidotes for an audience in need of therapeutic soothing.

In contrast to the McKuen (eulogized as "King of Kitsch"), photographer Lee Friedlander has more recently included Morgan in two books that contextualize her within larger histories of American music. Appearing in the section labeled "gospel" in *American Musicians* (1998), the intensity of Morgan's spiritual gaze seems to be of most interest to Friedlander, whose most affecting portrait captures her direct gaze, as if to tame the power of her formidable spirituality for one moment [fig. 171].³⁵⁹ *Playing for the Benefit of the Band: New Orleans Music Culture* (2013)—which Friedlander dedicated to Larry Borenstein as "the most interesting man I've known"—is a cumulative portrait of the city's musicians and sites that capture its musical spirit.³⁶⁰ Like *The Jazz People of New Orleans* (1992), Friedlander's most recent publication contains pictures taken in the city as early as 1957 through 1982.³⁶¹ In these photo books, the presence of the musicians—in their homes, with their loved ones, at work—and paraders lend a center of gravity that is dispersed in Friedlander's other street photographs of cars or monuments [figs. 172-176]. They are dignified and exuberant, resting and processing. In these more recent publications, Friedlander crafts an aggregate image of a picturesque collectivity defined by place and experience, of a "folk" who endure despite the built environment and larger urban culture that seems to have turned a blind eye. Yet he was not the first to construct such a preservationist montage of New Orleans' spirited popular culture.³⁶² Noel Rockmore and Bruce Brice, to whom I now turn, did so in the 1960s and 1970s in parallel with the momentum leading up to JazzFest and the Heritage Fair, and each enlisted Morgan specifically in the creation of their artistic visions.

³⁵⁸ *God's Greatest Hits*, selected by Wade Alexander with drawings by Sister Gertrude Morgan from the Private Collection of Rod McKuen (Los Angeles, CA and New York: Stanyan Books and Random House), 1970. Like *Let's Make a Record*, several editions of the book have been personally inscribed and painted by Morgan. Whether these were done at the request of buyers, Borenstein, or McKuen is unknown.

³⁵⁹ Lee Friedlander, *American Musicians* (New York: D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, Inc.), 1998.

³⁶⁰ Lee Friedlander, *Playing for the Benefit of the Band* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 2013.

³⁶¹ Lee Friedlander, *The Jazz People of New Orleans* (New York: Pantheon Books), 1992.

³⁶² Photographers Michael P. Smith, Syndy Byrd, and Judy Cooper were key figures in picturing black New Orleans from a preservationist perspective. Their presence is diminished in this study for the reason that they did not seem to have photographed Morgan personally, that is, in spaces that were not the public, sprawling environment of JazzFest.

Chapter 3

Always for Pleasure: Sister Gertrude Morgan, Bruce Brice, and Possessing the “Artistic” Self

What do we mean when we say an artist is “self-taught”? An often unnamed qualification is embedded in the concept, a qualification that posits an ideal of rigorous, “serious,” or formal training within institutionalized curricula and knowledge against notions of amateurism, dilettantism, or informal dabbling in domestic crafts. Not surprisingly, recent critical commentaries have pointed to the elusive meanings that this phrase has attempted to encompass.³⁶³ More specifically, these authors explain how the qualifier has gained currency as the latest of a string of labels enlisted to temper the “term warfare” related to the work produced by artists without formal academic training.³⁶⁴ I use the word temper, because these writers similarly acknowledge the inadequacy of classificatory terms such as “self-taught” and its cognates—“folk,” “naïve,” “modern primitives,” “vernacular,” “visionary,” and most visibly, “outsider”—to describe the work of artists creating at the margins of a mainstream (however that periphery is named or defined).

In the twentieth century, self-taught artists as a group have functioned as the means to revise, reinvigorate, or re-imagine art historical narratives. Bernard L. Herman, in writing about vernacular photography, acutely observes the rhetorical operations of naming practices relegated to the margins of art: “expansive gestures will always be limited by the constraints of making sense.”³⁶⁵ Put another way, scholars are always implicated in the interpretation of objects and advancement of their own critical needs, because their considerations are entangled in the investments of discourses that call them into visibility. As authenticators of a particular definition of art, self-taught artists are called upon “not so much as modernist fellow travelers but as vouchsafes” for the creative independence and individualism that lie at the heart of the modernist project.³⁶⁶ Sidney Janis’s *They Taught Themselves* (1942) and Otto Kallir’s promotion of Grandma Moses beginning in 1940 at his Galerie St. Etienne (a business taken up later by granddaughter Jane) are touchstones for this discourse that sought to valorize the creativity of

³⁶³ Lynne Cooke, “Orthodoxies Undermined,” in Ann Percy with Cara Zimmerman, *Great and Mighty Things”: Outsider Art from the Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz Collection* (Philadelphia and New Haven: Philadelphia Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press, 2013) and Katherine Jentleson, “Cracks in the Consensus: Outsider Artists and Art World Ruptures,” in Thomas Lax, *When the Stars Begin to Fall: Imagination and the American South*, exh. cat. (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2014).

³⁶⁴ For example, see Percy and Zimmerman, x-xi and Didi Barrett, *Muffled Voices: Folk Artists in Contemporary America*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of American Folk Art at the PaineWebber Art Gallery, 1986).

³⁶⁵ Bernard L. Herman, “Vernacular Trouble: Exclusive Practices on the Margins of an Inclusive Art,” in *In the Vernacular: Photography of the Everyday*, Ross Barrett et al. (Boston: Boston University Art Gallery and University of Washington Press, 2008), 33.

³⁶⁶ Colin Rhodes in Bernard L. Herman and Colin Rhodes, “Canons, Collections, and the Contemporary Turn in Outsider Art: A Conversation,” in Percy, 247.

non-academically trained artists. As Jane Kallir has written, “The nascent field of self-taught art in America reflected a number of disparate and to some extent conflicting ideals....The field was seen as the quintessential expression of ‘the people,’ embodying such American values as individualism and native ingenuity....[I]t was and is an anti-elitist genre promoted by an elite.”³⁶⁷ For many, notably coming from outside the discipline of art history, such paradoxes have been criticized for the relations of power that self-taught and its neo-primitivizing cognates sustain.³⁶⁸ Indeed, a scholar recently chastised my casual use of “self-taught” as shorthand for this body of work, pointing to the ways that it operates principally as a marketing label to sequester such art in a state of perpetual marginalization. To claim neutrality for a term like “self-taught” only continues to occlude the role of the artistic center that selectively enfranchises certain individuals at the periphery.³⁶⁹ For this hostile interlocutor, a baby-boomer, the celebration of the “self-taught” moniker reeked too familiarly of her generation’s rebellious tendencies, and failed to describe the art they advocated.

Yet there are others who are less cynical in the face of this fraught history. Academics and museum curators embraced the term “self-taught” in the 1990s as a less freighted, more politically correct label for art that had once carried the names “contemporary folk” and “outsider.”³⁷⁰ This move signaled the promise, as cultural studies scholar Charles Russell put it, for “more expansive models of art which can describe, analyze, and judge aesthetic behavior across cultural frameworks.”³⁷¹ Claims exaggerating an artist’s spontaneous genius, creative isolation, and authenticity unadulterated by commerce, he argued, would no longer do. Instead, the challenge was to consider “self-taught” at face value, as a compound phrase that paired individual selfhood with the turn towards cultural frameworks at the crossroads of creativity. In this spirit of honoring the concept, we would do well to move beyond the marginalizing history of “self-taught” and towards a more finely tuned sense of what the compound phrase infers. Brooke Davis Anderson has summarized it succinctly: What is the self-taught artist’s MFA

³⁶⁷ Jane Kallir, *65th Anniversary Exhibition, Part II—Self-Taught Artists*, exh. cat. (New York: Galerie St. Etienne, 2005), n.p., quoted in Herman and Rhodes, in Percy, 247.

³⁶⁸ For example, see Julia Ardery, *The Temptation: Edgar Tolson and the Genesis of Twentieth-Century Folk Art* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) and Jenifer Borum, “Bill Traylor and the Construction of Outsider Objectivity” in Carol Crown and Charles Russell, eds., *Sacred and Profane: Voice and Vision in Southern Self-Taught Art* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2007): 238-259.

³⁶⁹ The conversation took place with an eminent anthropologist at the 2015 College Art Association Annual Meeting in New York City.

³⁷⁰ Two exhibitions, both from 1993, represent significant efforts to bring thematic unity to the notion of “self-taught” out from the category’s miscellany. See Tom Patterson, *ASHE: Improvisation & Recycling in African-American Visionary Art*, exh. cat. (Winston-Salem, NC: Diggs Gallery at Winston-Salem State University, 1993) and Alice Rae Yelen, *Passionate Visions of the American South: Self-Taught Artists from 1940 to the Present*, exh. cat. (New Orleans and Jackson, MS: New Orleans Museum of Art in association with the University Press of Mississippi, 1993).

³⁷¹ Russell, 23.

equivalent? What is the basis of his/her learning?³⁷² Or, according to Roger Cardinal: How does mastery of certain media relate to mastery of certain expressive intents? How are the facts of an artist's life transposed in the "imaginative crucible of art"?³⁷³ These questions not only ask how a variety of aesthetic literacies at play in negotiating artists' personal worlds; they imply the need for art historians to reckon with the classed routes by which artists receive their training.³⁷⁴ Moreover, these questions raise additional ones concerning the import of art made in relation to other forms of art both historically and synchronically—and more pointedly, to how any comparative study throws into relief the terms with which art historians write their histories. Therefore, we can better understand the axiom that Katherine Jentleson brings to light when she writes, "[S]cholars and curators who are interested in where self-taught artists stand in relation to the canons of modern and contemporary art—myself included—can agree that no label is neutral and whatever descriptor we choose has as much to do with ourselves as it does with the artists it is used to identify."³⁷⁵

Terminology aside, several extended and provocative academic investigations have proceeded, among them the American Folk Art Museum's 2007 retrospective of Martin Ramirez; Edward Puchner's study of the role of African American religion in the art of Minnie Evans, William Edmondson, Horace Pippin, and Elijah Pierce; and Mechal Sobel's iconological readings of Bill Traylor in light of Jim Crow, personal tragedy, and African conjure.³⁷⁶ All of this bodes well for the field. "A more sophisticated and rigorous framework for the study of outsider art brought about by increasing levels of information, more probing biographical research, and a more streamlined market structure," writes Lynne Cooke, "has set it on a course congruent with that of current artistic practice and theory."³⁷⁷ Recognizing the ways in which artistic outliers have been positioned in *parallel* with the contemporary mainstream, Cooke raises the suggestive point that "nonetheless, select outsiders are from time to time transformed into insiders, parallels are deflected into parallaxes."³⁷⁸

This chapter explores one such interpretative parallax involving artists Sister Gertrude Morgan, Bruce Brice, and to a lesser degree, Noel Rockmore, to probe the dimensions of the

³⁷² Paraphrased from Brooke Davis Anderson, "Self-Taught Artists in Museums and the Mainstream" panel with William Fagaly and Teresa Parker Farris held at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, New Orleans, January 10, 2015 in concert with *Prospect 3* Contemporary Art Biennial.

³⁷³ Roger Cardinal, "The Self in Self-Taught Art," in Russell, 79-80.

³⁷⁴ This position accords with those of several contributors in Russell's anthology, such as Sharon Patton, Randall Morris, and Maude Southwell Wahlman. Grey Gundaker's critical historical account is also instructive. See "Becoming Art: Life Spans, Biographies, and the Shelp Collection" in *Testimony: Vernacular Art of the African-American South, The Ronald and June Shelp Collection*, Kinshasha Conwill et al. (New York: Harry N. Abrams in association with Exhibitions International and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, 2001): 42-53.

³⁷⁵ Jentleson, 106.

³⁷⁶ Another dissertation-in-progress by Katherine Jentleson, who will start as the Merrie and Dan Boone Curator of Folk and Self-Taught Art at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta September 2015, is yet another positive sign of the field's continuing stewardship and study.

³⁷⁷ Lynne Cooke, "Orthodoxies Undermined," in Percy, 210.

³⁷⁸ Cooke, 210.

“self-taught artist” as a cultural construct. Not only did both male artists take up Morgan as a subject in their work, their diverging representations of and relationships with the artist exemplify two different ways in which the term “self-taught” could carry meaning in the post-Civil Rights years. That is to say, within a long history of social art history, I am interested in how “self-taught” as a term of difference was both applied to and adopted by artists in the process of negotiating their position within the field of their valuation—this “art world” of galleries, museums, collectors, critics, academia, and the market. In the case of Rockmore and Brice, such differences are defined by a composite of racial identity (Rockmore as Anglo-American, Brice as African American), region (New York/San Francisco, New Orleans), and training. In using their relationship with Morgan as a measure of the signifying capacity of “self-taught,” I affirm the truism of recent scholarship: “Studying ‘them’ really means studying us.”³⁷⁹

I approach the issue of inter-subjectivity and differential relationship structured by the “self-taught artist” in two parts. The first section centers upon Morgan’s painterly practice. While acknowledging that Morgan’s turn to visual forms was less common in Pentecostalism than testifying or prayer, certain values of her religious sanctification remained constant even as she realized and adapted them to new circumstances. To be a self-taught artist thus need not (or cannot) describe a condition of enduring outsider-ness. Rather, it describes a process that most everyday makers undergo: a process of responding to, or collaborating with, a situation by bringing one’s values and desires into aesthetic fruition in the absence of choices formalized by institutions. The process of self-teaching is also distanced from other non-academic arts, such as craft. Whereas craft carries associations with handiwork, workshop practices, and artistic education formed within apprenticeships, the aesthetic process for the autodidact tends to unfold extemporaneously—within and “against the impediments of contingency” like “one’s lack of finesse, one’s obdurate materials, the interruptions and perhaps mockeries of one’s neighbors.”³⁸⁰

This reframing of Morgan’s artistic practice reorients earlier considerations of her paintings as “tools of her ministry.”³⁸¹ There cannot be any doubt, as some of the first newspaper articles and exhibition reviews have rhapsodized, that Morgan employed her paintings as a medium for her gospel message.³⁸² But between the fetishization of religio-racial identity on the one hand, and a conservative position that religious folk art works are “reflections of faith” on the other, questions related to the role of aesthetics to shape both religious and visual thought

³⁷⁹ Kenneth L. Ames, 256 as quoted in Jentleson, 106.

³⁸⁰ Roger Cardinal in Russell, 71. On the distinctions between work and labor, see chapter 1 in Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

³⁸¹ William A. Fagaly, 2004.

³⁸² For example: “Retired Street Preacher: Gaining Fame as Naïve Artist,” *Sunday Advocate* (Baton Rouge, LA), July 2, 1972, 3-F; Sandi Donnelly, “She’s Painting to Speak the Gospel in a New Form,” *The Times-Picayune*, December 12, 1972, Section 2 page 2.

become lost.³⁸³ Neither approach sufficiently addresses the questions that drive this first section: what did Morgan think about painting? How did she develop her practice within the imperatives of religious belief? In this chapter's opening analysis, the mournful nostalgia with which Rockmore imbues his portraits of Morgan helps cast light upon the allusive sensory nature of religious experience.

The second part is an extended study of Bruce Brice, who not only exhibited with Morgan as a "folk artist" in the early 1970s, but also built a professional career as an autodidact. Whatever contradictions this self-consciousness might have posed within the walls of elite museums of high art—where lack of formal training was commonly linked to a folk identity, and thus naiveté about one's art making—were resolved within the cultural politics of Black Power and Black Arts movements. The trajectory of Brice's career will illuminate the artistic strategies he used to negotiate the sometimes overlapping, sometimes contradictory values of "folk art" and "black art" designations. Ultimately, I argue for the kinship between Morgan and Brice through the analogous role that spirituality and pleasure had in motivating their creative process. This chapter expressly puts pressure on the label "self-taught" as it has been inherited from twentieth-century modernist genealogies. I explore here the concept's defining components—the sites and communities of learning, artistic development, and process—within the norms of artistic professionalization that determine their value.

PART 1: Textures of Revelation

Sister Gertrude Morgan's calling to paint compelled her to undertake a different kind of spiritual activity unlike preaching and singing. Even though her commitment to sanctified piety remained constant, art's particular visual and material gratification offered something different from the performance-based contexts in which she was accustomed to enacting. At the same time, her calling also seems to have ushered in a period of solitude and contemplation in the years after her revelation of marriage to Christ in 1957. She had lost Cora Williams who died in 1955, and she separated from her long-time partner in the orphanage at Flake Avenue, Margaret Parker, in the years shortly following. An elderly Jennie Johnson, with whom Morgan boarded at 5444 N. Dorgenois Street, would pass away a few years later, leaving Morgan as the sole resident of that house in the Lower Ninth Ward [fig. 177].³⁸⁴ As Morgan reveled in her spiritual marriage with Christ, her earthbound social relationships seem to have diminished, leaving her without a close kinship, friendship, or work-related network and ample time to paint. How would she integrate painting into her life's new circumstances?

³⁸³ For an older example of the functionalism apart from stylistic analysis that I reference here, see Kurt C. Dewhurst, Betty MacDowell, and Marsha MacDowell, *Religious Folk Art: Reflections of Faith* (New York: E.P. Dutton in association with the Museum of American Folk Art), 1983.

³⁸⁴ No death certificate is available for Jennie Johnson, but Fagaly suggests that she passed away shortly after Hurricane Betsy ca. 1965. Fagaly, 97 and Louisiana Vital Records Registry.

My efforts to de-romanticize and complicate the view of Sister Gertrude Morgan as a creative visionary (a “genius” in loftier rhetoric) are somewhat complicated by the fact that the artist tended to represent herself as one [fig. 178]. Reclining languorously with her feet resting on a pillowy stool, Morgan’s self-portrait in *Sister Gertrude in Her Prayer Room* welcomes viewers into the space she has pre-arranged. The theme of sight is explicitly invoked in the two pictures within the picture, positioned to the right, replicas of two signs that hung in her prayer room. The first is exclusively text. It emphasizes the presence of Christ as “the unseen host at every meal the silent listener to every conversation.” Below this sign is Morgan’s version of the “All-Seeing Eye,” the ancient symbol of providential knowledge and omniscience. The lyrics surrounding the eye intone, “all along on the road to the soul’s true aboad [*sic*] there’s an eye watching you / every step that you take this great eye is awake there’s an eye watching you / as you make life’s great fight keep the path way in sight.”

This folk hymn might very well frame the story suggested in the set of paintings hanging above Morgan’s seated portrait. Together, they comprise a mini-autobiography of the missionary’s particular “pathway” in sight. An image of Morgan as holy troubadour in the upper left corner, poised with her guitar, cues us to the romance of herself as a young girl (the purple dress and cap as well as peach-colored tights evoke youthful propriety) with Christ in the white robes. From that life-giving touch between their hands, we are led to the happy ending: a vision of a trio of heads with eyes alight with white flecks of paint, snugly tucked in behind Morgan’s sketch of the New Jerusalem building.

This trio of painted eyes is striking; their piercing impact seems disproportionate to their small size. Our eyes scan across this stippling of painted touches, and their small brightness against Morgan’s dark brown face reverberate with the four other sets of eyes above and below. Because our vision darts from face to face, we never truly escape from the artist’s multiple gazes; rather, Morgan accentuates her spiritual sight in these self-portraits with the materiality of paint to awaken ours. Though she does not appear as an artist in this painting, her persona lies at the crux of its meaning, production, and inspired imagination.

But there is more. What does one make of the two rectangular forms stationed in the near-center of the composition? Recalling his visits to Morgan’s home, curator William Fagaly suggests the mustard-colored shape is a bookcase. Comparisons with photographic portraits of the artist suggest that this shape could be her front door, complete with screen panes outlined in pencil. If so, it stands in at the conceptual threshold of the artwork where the viewer enters into the front room of her house—that semi-public space of her shotgun-type house. Here, the “All-Seeing Eye” and accompanying sign hang on whitewashed walls, and where white folding chairs welcome any worshippers into her weekly services [figs. 179-180]. Significantly, a shotgun house was a domestic form typical of New Orleans’ working-class neighborhoods so named for its narrow, linear one-room-wide plan, strictly aligned doorways, and gable-fronted façade [figs. 181-184].³⁸⁵ The minimal privacy structured by this plan (there are no hallways to manage traffic

³⁸⁵ Jay Edwards summarizes the scholarship documenting the shotgun as a house type, helpfully laying out the diverging theories about its cultural origins and evolution in New Orleans and the political implications for post-

between rooms) is fully exploited here: when the vacant rectangle—positioned just slightly higher from the bottom edge—is considered in tandem with this “front door,” what initially appears like odd compositional dividers functions as the viewer’s portal that leads deeper into the mystic space of her prayer room. The blankness of this “portal” intensifies the perception of absence, of desire, that shapes the mystic’s experience.³⁸⁶

Sister Gertrude in Her Prayer Room was intended to be a hospitable picture. Vertical lines penciled on either side of the painting—one to the left, two on the right that have been painted over with a brown wash—meet the lateral violet form above to suggest a receding, proscenium-like space where Morgan stages herself before a row of four empty chairs. These two ends of the composition, along with the brown vented radiator and four-legged table, acknowledge Morgan’s interest in creating a deep space for volumetric bodies to occupy: hers and potentially ours. She even provides a visual welcome mat in the thin purple band below the row of chairs. Matching the one beneath the artist’s seat, this color of humility, repentance, and royalty signifies the posture which she would desire us to hold as we enter, as well as her expectation that the spiritual hand that she references above might touch us too.

The intensity of individual experience, direct connection with a spiritual Other, and artistic responsiveness are characteristics of Morgan’s spiritual sight that precisely impressed Noel Rockmore as signs of Morgan’s creative authenticity. These traits resonated with his personal story, as well; for although Rockmore’s career as a painter was firmly enmeshed with the gallery and museum system (if antagonistically so), it was built upon a largely self-taught foundation. Born twenty-eight years later than Morgan on December 28, 1928 in New York City, both of Rockmore’s parents were professional artists. His mother, Gladys Davis Rockmore, had studied at the Art Institute of Chicago in the 1910s before embarking on a career as a successful painter and advertising artist.³⁸⁷ Floyd Davis, his father, was a regular illustrator for *Life Magazine* throughout WWII and later the *Saturday Evening Post*.³⁸⁸ Noel, who was a prodigy on the violin, turned to painting during a long convalescence from polio at the age of seven. While extant biographies provide varying accounts of his training, they all agree that Rockmore had received some art education throughout high school and at the Art Students League for several

Katrina rebuilding inherent to these competing architectural histories. Based on extant photographs, four rooms comprised the structure of the Everlasting Gospel Mission: three rooms running straight back in the lot and one attached room to the side, completing an L-shaped plan. “Shotgun: The Most Contested House in America,” *Buildings and Landscapes* 16:1 (Spring 2009): 62-96.

³⁸⁶ De Certeau, 81-2 and chapter 1 of this dissertation, page 28. In a departure from my interpretation, Fagaly sees the white shape as the front door. Conversation with the author, July 17, 2015.

³⁸⁷ Paula E. Calvin and Deborah A. Deacon, *American Women Artists in Wartime, 1776-2010* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2011), 112-113. “She is considered one of America’s best painters,” according to *Life*, who reproduced several of her paintings in the issue from April 19, 1943, 44-46.

³⁸⁸ Calvin and Deacon, 112.

months before giving up formal classes to study by himself, “without teachers and students hovering around.”³⁸⁹

An announcement for a one-man show at Greer Gallery from 1962 mentions that Rockmore is “largely self-taught.”³⁹⁰ Yet unlike Morgan, Rockmore’s auto-didacticism was always framed as the origin of a vastly developed and professionalized career. In the context of Greer Gallery, Rockmore’s self-taught background is buried beneath a list of exhibitions, fellowships, and prizes provided as evidence of his professional status. Readers are made aware of Rockmore’s inclusion in exhibitions at the Whitney Museum and Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, a Tiffany Foundation Fellowship, and three prizes at the National Academy among others.³⁹¹ Additional regional awards buttressed his career that remained staunchly figurative throughout the 1950s and onward.³⁹² His letters and body of work reveal an artist fighting against his own obsolescence as the popularity of Abstract Expressionism rose to prominence in New York City, edging out the artist’s relevance as it absented figuration from the canvas.

Rockmore’s attraction to Sister Gertrude Morgan, then, is not completely surprising. For not only did Morgan’s untrained status reflect back upon Rockmore’s very own self-determination (despite an upbringing steeped in professional artists), but her religious persona also provided an inspiration to nourish the figurative and surrealist lineages in which he worked early in his professional career [figs. 185-186]. As an artist and subject, Morgan’s art offered this New York transplant something new, deeply felt, and mystical to which he could relate. In *Sister Gertrude Morgan (Eye of God)*, the connection between God’s spiritual sight and Morgan’s mind is linked in Rockmore’s portrait from around the 1970s [figs. 187-188]. Between this massive eye and our/Rockmore’s gaze, Morgan’s body nearly de-materializes as if to become a channel for otherworldly inspiration. As our attention moves from this eye to the cap upon Morgan’s head—which matches the form and color of the eye save the black pupil—her solidity dissipates into sweeping black strokes and mere shapes, such that her foot and stool become outlines that lack the sensitive modelling of her sleeve, bosom, and face. Rockmore illustrates the ascension from elemental form and design to “GOD,” with Morgan’s artwork that appears to have been cut, pasted, and varnished onto the canvas situated in between. Containing the

³⁸⁹ “Loneliness in Numbers: Davis Show Reflects Personal View of Fraternal Orders,” *Life* (August 12, 1957), 74-77; Lake Douglas, “Noel Rockmore Holds Unique Place in Pantheon of New Orleans Artists,” *Lagniappe, Times-Picayune* (November 13, 1998), 16, reproduced on “Rockmore: RightwayWrongway Enterprises,” accessed May 4, 2015, <http://www.rightwaywrongway.com/index.php?name=Sections&req=viewarticle&artid=29&page=1>. This website is maintained by the Marvin Family and contains the most concentrated personal and archival information on Rockmore available. Shirley Marvin was one of Rockmore’s most dedicated patrons during the artist’s lifetime.

³⁹⁰ “Noel Rockmore, Young American Painter, To Show Recent Canvases,” Greer Gallery exhibition announcement, May 1962, reproduced on “Rockmore: RightwayWrongway Enterprises,” accessed May 4, 2015, <http://www.rightwaywrongway.com/index.php?name=Sections&req=viewarticle&artid=27&page=1>.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*

³⁹² For the most comprehensive overview of Rockmore’s career, see Gail Feigenbaum, *Noel Rockmore: Fantasies and Realities* (New Orleans: New Orleans Museum of Art, 1998).

warmest hues among the painting's cool slate grey tones, this clipping dramatizes the vividness Rockmore extolled in a letter written to one of his patrons:

The real direction [of my painting] is a pure intellect - vitality applied to Folk Roots like Sister Gertrude or festivals or early jazz forms - the point is that **Art by itself is not merely an exercise but it must be attached to a deep revelatory imagery to move** and contemporary art is totally jerking itself off -
Sister Gertrude is REAL in a world of PLASTIC³⁹³

Rockmore's realism was defined by a romantic desire for unadulterated sources of creative expression, and as the excerpt above presumes, these often were couched in terms of the hand-crafted versus the industrially-made, the organic versus "plastic." (Ironically, one of his best-known portrait series relied on mechanical reproduction, as I will discuss shortly.) In addition to this portrait of Morgan, his series of nearly 300 polymer and 100 oil paintings of Preservation Hall jazz musicians shares in this longing for creative purity. Many of these works were executed quickly during live sessions, while others were completed during afternoon sittings to meet the quotas Rockmore likely negotiated with Larry Borenstein by the week.³⁹⁴ A melancholic nostalgia thoroughly pervades many of these paintings; drooping eyes, slumped shoulders, deep wrinkles, dissolving bodies, and blank stares weather his subjects under the strokes of his brush [figs. 189-195]. His paintings mourn creativity at its most fugitive: "These men are not creative anymore...their day has been had...the opportunity to paint these men was an opportunity literally to interpret something that no longer exists. And yet it's still around."³⁹⁵ Its stark absence is further exaggerated in the black and white reproductions of the final catalogue, which was understood as the main context for these artworks. The certainty of the paintings' final grayscale appearance therefore likely informed Rockmore's process, a certainty that would lead him to remark that "strength, loneliness, and loss" survive the printing process.³⁹⁶

Rockmore was acutely aware of his own perceived obsolescence within the New York art world. He struggled to gain firm footing in the New York art scene throughout the 1960s and

³⁹³ Emphasis original in letter to Shirley Marvin from Rockmore, 1 May 1970, accessed May 4, 2014, <http://www.rightwaywrongway.com/index.php?name=Sections&req=viewarticle&artid=94&page=1>.

³⁹⁴ Precise terms of this commission are unknown.

³⁹⁵ "Interview with Noel Rockmore, and excerpts of Bunk Johnson radio interview, George Lewis recording, and Wooden Joe Nicholas," William Russell Oral History Collection Series, MSS530, William Russell Jazz Collection, The Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection (WRC, THNOC). Because certain portions of this recording correspond verbatim with Rockmore's interview published with the catalogue of Preservation Hall Portrait paintings, this oral history seems to have been recorded for the publication of Larry Borenstein, *Preservation Hall Portraits*, (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1968).

³⁹⁶ "It's harder for black and white to be inaccurate for the simple reason that there's less to it. And it has the advantage of, in terms of reproducing my work, work that usually reproduces well in black and white because of the design factor...This contrast of one area against another, between light and dark, in other words, tends to reproduce very very strong in black and white." Undated interview with Noel Rockmore, WRC, THNOC, MSS530.3.55.

1970s (when he would have been in his thirties and forties), and several tumultuous relationships with women and alcohol did not neutralize any ensuing insecurities.³⁹⁷ Nevertheless, he maintained his aesthetic position resolutely. Reflecting on the Preservation Hall Portraits, Rockmore frankly understood their ultimate value:

I still don't think, in the very best of those paintings...that this time in NYC, dominated as it is by Pop and Op and multifarious fads, would go over too well. I think we're going through a phony intellectual fear craze in this country and in this world right now and this is a natural development in a period which is getting so completely dominated, to almost every detail of our living, by push-button sorts of things, the dangers of even air-conditioning.³⁹⁸

Yet Sister Gertrude Morgan was above this “phony intellectual fear craze;” she lived without air conditioning. She might have also been otherworldly, but not in the obsolete way that Rockmore viewed the elderly black musicians he portrayed at Preservation Hall. She was “REAL.” But what made her so? Rockmore’s portrait suggests her authenticity radiated from body to mind. He lavishly describes Morgan’s embodied solidity with high-keyed whites and carefully blended grays; he also employs blue undertones with brown shadows and creamy highlights to model the fleshliness of her head that are so unlike the rough strokes he uses to render the Preservation Hall musicians. These musicians never quite cohere into solid masses. In contrast, Morgan’s intense piety, signaled by the word “GOD” painted in Rockmore’s portrait of the Bride of Christ, and the creativity it inspired, that sparked the younger man’s attraction to this elderly black woman.

Comparing Rockmore’s painted portrait to a series of photographs he took at the Everlasting Gospel Mission adds to our understanding of his enchantment with Morgan. We know little of the circumstances of these visits, how they were initiated, the extent to which Rockmore intended to collect source images for his painting, or how well acquainted they were until this point, except that he made two visits within one week.³⁹⁹ All the same, he seems to have left 5444 North Dorgenois further enamored with Gertrude Morgan’s piety. “She mostly quietly sang to her self [*sic*] about how she loved Jesus—a magic afternoon,” he wrote following his May 18 visit.

³⁹⁷ Rockmore was desperate to establish himself outside of New Orleans, “a completely hopeless, visually fascinating, backwater.” “New Orleans and Its Art,” Noel Rockmore interview with Patrick Kelly, *Vieux Carré Courier*, February 26, 1971. In a letter dated April 16, 1974, he writes to Shirley Marvin, “But pray that Bryant [Gallery in New Orleans] shapes up a bit - it is a good deal for me in certain ways but I will never make it big till a fine top N.Y. gallery takes me.” Accessed January 15, 2014, <http://www.rightwaywrongway.com/index.php?name=Sections&req=viewarticle&artid=100&page=1>.

³⁹⁸ Interview with Noel Rockmore, WRC, THNOC.

³⁹⁹ Given that his gallery relationship with Borenstein started around 1962, Rockmore would have surely known about Morgan before these photographs were taken.

The most composed photographs he took during his visit evince some of the “revelatory” vitality he experienced in Morgan’s presence.⁴⁰⁰ These show Morgan painting at home, preparing her brushes, and mixing paints [fig. 196]. The afternoon light entering the doorway of the rear-most room (facing a northwesterly direction) casts a blue-tinted light across the entire scene. The camera, however, registers these reflections with dramatic contrast. In the photograph on the lower left of the album page, for example, the whites—from her cap, dress, tablecloths, hose, shoes, and white paint—appear to gleam from within the otherwise shadowy atmosphere and illuminate each crease with subtlety [fig. 197]. Among these areas of reflected light, however, are some of the most intriguing areas of the photograph: areas of Morgan’s exposed body in which her dark-hued skin absorbs the light, which then develops into *overexposed* masses of darkness on the print. Around these areas, Morgan’s painting, dress, cap, and surroundings emerge as the created thing and the studio of creation. Here is the revelation before Rockmore’s eyes.

In addition to serving as source photographs or *aide memoires*, an image like this one concretized Rockmore’s interest in Morgan as a subject for painting. We know he prioritized design over coloration: “There is an emotional appeal to color—a psychological impact. It has no other importance to *me* in a painting. I think the important things are drawing, how you articulate an area, and how you design the masses. Those are the things that make a painting last after color has perhaps yellowed with time.”⁴⁰¹ These photographs illustrate the very challenge of articulating lights and darks. That Morgan’s very religious and moral being was structured by these formal extremes made her an even more compelling subject for an artist hungering for a spiritual, authentic inspiration.

In fact, the visual challenges that Morgan posed to portraiture were compounded by the symbolic significance that she held for Rockmore, a conviction he relays when he says, “Art by itself is not merely an exercise but it must be attached to a deep revelatory imagery.”⁴⁰² Rockmore’s mission as a painter was to capture “a completely unseen world of dream structures...it is somewhat complex.”⁴⁰³ The archive is too incomplete to know if or how Rockmore elaborated upon this topic, but a painted sketch entitled “The Last Visit” clearly construes Morgan as an even more intensive, oneiric muse than in the photographs—though the artistic process is still crucial here [fig. 198]. No longer a seated painter communing with the “All-Seeing Eye” (as in his painted portrait) or a form of reflected and absorbed lights (as in his photographs), this Morgan is comprised of more basic materials: paper, ink, and watercolor. A

⁴⁰⁰ In the extant photo album from Rockmore’s studio, a preponderance are of Morgan, either holding her paintings in her front yard, performing at the 1970 Jazz Festival, teaching at a local church, or painting in the Everlasting Gospel Mission. Private Collection.

⁴⁰¹ “Rockmore On the Preservation Hall Portraits: A Conversation with Bill Russell” in *Preservation Hall Portraits*, [7]. Like Borenstein’s essay, this section is unpaginated. I use my own numbering, which is in brackets.

⁴⁰² See footnote 393.

⁴⁰³ “Letter to dated March 4, 1967 to Shirley (BRLA) from Rockmore (33W67.NYC) Regarding Franchi-Potamkin Deal,” accessed January 15, 2014, <http://www.rightwaywrongway.com/index.php?name=Sections&req=viewarticle&artid=79&page=1>.

body, cap, and incredibly attenuated shoes are outlined in thin black ink within which the white paper is summoned as both positive and negative space. A similar oscillation takes place in the mass of purplish-brown-red wash, where the pigments have pooled and gathered in the paper's buckled surface, creating a range of opaque and translucent color. The accident of this mottling seems to be the point of this sketch, for it is reinforced by the group of blue, red, and orange watercolor transformed into birds by beaks and eyes drawn in pen. Rockmore's poem sets these gestures in their originating context with written verse:

The last visit to Sister Gertrude Morgan on May 27 1970 at Dorgenois St. / A dream preceded the visit / a dream of warning a dream of silence of hope but alone / alone in the Blue White Room forever the Room of forgotten troubles / of flowers of purity and danger . . .

Two European paintings stand out as key precedents for the primitivist genealogy for Rockmore's sketch in both form and sentiments: Henri Rousseau's *Sleeping Gypsy* of 1897 and Paul Gauguin's *Spirit of the Dead Watching* from 1892 [figs. 199-201].⁴⁰⁴ As an artist acutely aware of the position vis-à-vis "the Establishment" and art history, Rockmore would not have been ignorant of the kind of naiveté and fantasy attached to these canonical works, nor of the role of depicting dark bodies to signal primal emotion. That he portrayed Morgan as recumbent in his painted sketches is evidence of this awareness and his regard for Morgan as so striking a subject for his art (he painted her at least four other times and filling a sketchbook with life drawings of her from JazzFest). Though the *frisson* in these modernist paintings (the lion, the specter) is absent in this sketch, his poem sustains the sense of "purity and danger": the documentary details of her "studio" (he even notes that she ate vanilla wafers the last time they painted together!) are transmuted here to the "Blue White Room" of "forgotten troubles" that unmistakably refers to Morgan's Everlasting Gospel Mission [fig. 202]. To be a social outsider and a non-formally trained artist like Morgan was to occupy the space of primal dreams, a basis not too far removed from the sanctified world of Revelation that Morgan did inhabit—and a dream world upon which Rockmore was fixated. Yet if his visionary aspirations relied upon representational surrogates, and were always tinged with mortality, Morgan's visionary art attained its spiritual elevation out of her own "revelatory imagery" and her own formal vocabulary within which the effects of "troubles" were rendered moot.

Prophetic Flashes: Dots

As the Bride of Christ and missionary charged with the Everlasting Gospel, Morgan had many reasons to turn to the book of Revelation for artistic subjects. Verses 19:7-8 foretold her forthcoming marriage to Christ, and verse 14:6 told her to preach the gospel message to those around her. As we have already seen, Morgan created "Revelation Charters" as teaching aids for her public street ministry, which were large banner-like paintings in which key moments of the

⁴⁰⁴ I am grateful to conversations with my colleague Alexandra Courtois de Vicose for developing this discussion on Rockmore.

apocalyptic text were transcribed and illustrated [fig. 123]. In other ways as well, Revelation's vivid imagery was the basis for delivering urgent warnings that further lent themselves to pictorial forms. As one of the richest sources for a visual biblical imagination ("Look" and "Behold" are repeated refrains), Revelation's themes turn upon acts of spiritual seeing.

Painted around 1967, *The Throne of God*, which takes Revelation 4 as its textual basis, illustrates the theme of spiritual sight in three ways [fig. 203]. First, it shows St. John the Revelator, author of this New Testament book and portrayed in the lower left, pointing towards the scene hovering above the dark blue band, which is the "sea of glass." He looks through a door, which discloses the majestic sight of God enthroned, the rainbow, twenty-four elders, and seven burning lamps as the passage goes on to describe. Second, Morgan's inscription of the chapter's first verse at the upper left of this painting explains the scene as the one God intends to "shew" him. We can make out her writing beneath the blue paint:

After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.

In accordance with the remainder of St. John's text, Morgan portrays four beasts in the lower portion of the painting to complete the scene of uninhibited worship. This is in accordance with Revelation 4's remaining verses (that Morgan does not transcribe):

The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying:

"Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!"

And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁵ Revelation 4:1, 8-11.

Revelation's four beasts—with their innumerable eyes—symbolize their recognition of God and their inclusion marks the third way that spiritual sight is invoked here. Morgan is faithful to render the numerous eyes with the technique we saw earlier in *Sister Gertrude in Her Prayer Room*: one touch of black paint accented with smaller, well-rounded dollops of white paint [figs. 204-205]. The text tells us that these wondrous beasts were created for the pleasure of God and their praises ring out endlessly through the “day and night.”

Painting as Work, Painting as Rest

Morgan's piety and painting, from their earliest notice, have been regarded as quaint naïve practices—“naïve” as in unconscious motion performed without intention. Yet I want to suggest otherwise. When Morgan sat down to paint Revelation, she was not merely reproducing the text literally. Rather, these repetitive (“decorative”) aspects of her paintings belonged to a kinesthetic, sensory practice through which Morgan could induce the spiritual sight that was the prompt for and the purpose of her art. Within this chain of inspiration and action, Morgan painted not just for God's pleasure, but for hers as well.

We know anecdotally from Lee Friedlander that she began painting as a command from God, and yet she rarely wrote directly about her attitudes toward painting as a creative activity. *This is a mystery work* is one of the few artworks that references making paintings, albeit somewhat obliquely [fig. 96]. The scene shows the artist sitting upright in her bed, legs extended, and surrounded by spotted white rectangles that lay upon larger fields of dark orange and sea blue. A more densely spotted square of red and tangerine paint is behind her, perhaps a pillow. The background signals, for the most part, the basic furnishing and fixtures of a standard bedroom: a window with drapes, a single light bulb and dangling string, a chest of drawers, and a couple of fringed area rugs. Whether the selective coloring of other parts of her bedroom—the white end table and green bowl—accorded with her domestic interior is not something we can determine with certainty. Only Harriet Blum's few photographs from around 1973-74 provide views of any kind of a bed [fig. 206], and even there, the bare metal frame bears little resemblance to the commodious, divan-like furniture that is the focal point in Morgan's painting. In other areas, furniture is not made more elaborate but is minimized. The set of stacked, open shelving she used to store her array of white apparel is simplified to its verticality and bare compartments [fig. 1]. Mimetic accuracy does not seem to be the point here; instead we get a sense of how Morgan recognized painting for all of its transformative capacities to re-imagine the material world around her.

Words written in the upper right contemplates this idea. Starting to the immediate right of the green bowl, her text informs viewers, “This is a mystery work God told me to go get up in the middle of that bed and rest. And now I'll do so much and so much of my work at a time and when I get tired [I] just lean on back and rest.” Squeezed between her written lines is a quotation from 1 Corinthians 15:51 that supplies the scriptural insight to her report: “Behold, I show you a mystery we shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed.” “Sleep” in this context refers to a

state of metaphysical slumber from which the saved will be rescued at the moment of Christ's Second Coming. Considered side by side, "rest" and "sleep" appear to refer to two different things. God's command to Morgan to "go get up in the middle of that bed and rest" sets "resting" as a responsive action and necessary stage that precedes spiritual transformation, whereas "sleep" (what we commonly accept as resting) describes a state of spiritual dullness. In Morgan's usage, "rest" and "sleep" describe two divergent paths: one that ascends out of earthly life on the hand, and one that remains bound to it. The alertness with which Morgan paints her wide-eyed expression conveys which path for which she was bound.

Matthew 11:28-30, a quotation she cited and spoke on at least four different occasions, secures this re-signification of "rest" as a spiritually active process.⁴⁰⁶ In this portion of teaching, Christ urges that the antidote for world-weariness is for individuals to assume the cause of Christian devotion: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me...and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."⁴⁰⁷ In this formulation, rejuvenation is framed in terms of psychological concentration and spiritual devotion, if not also physical and cognitive exertion.⁴⁰⁸ To take on a light yoke means reorienting work as rest and rest as work.

Although Morgan does not explicitly identify painting as "my work" in *This is a mystery work* [fig. 96], the colorful image she paints seems to contextualize artistic labor within God's command for her to rest. The red-bordered shape nearest her lap recalls edges of the bibles she owned and the sources for her missionary messages. Invoking literate practices of transcription, recall of Scripture, and poetic composition, this rendering of the Bible likely refers to those activities that constituted the spiritual work. After all, much of her preaching and musical performance (her "street work") was almost exclusively comprised of biblical themes.

But what about the eight rectangles dotted with tangerine paint? Can these spotted fields, at one time blank surfaces for Morgan's brush, also be considered as part of this "mystery work" and "my work"? We know that Morgan could, and sometimes did, re-create her paintings within paintings (see *Sister Gertrude in Her Prayer Room*, fig. 178). Yet these hot orange spots reject such specificity. Instead, they seem to stand in as signs of their maker's touch—the one who *marks* and looks out from their midst and at the viewer with an unflinching gaze. Therefore, they are not unlike the ornamental marks discussed earlier as appearing in her text-rich self-portraits. In these earlier examples, I argued that these marks were important not simply because they were visual fillers, but because they heighten the visual tension among the opticality, visibility, and legibility of Morgan's written words that they adorn. These perceptual oscillations point to a vital sense of perception that shimmers with life as lived as a vessel for the Spirit.

⁴⁰⁶ For example, see *REV. 8 Woe Woe Woe* (Collection of Stephen D. Brink), *Let Us All Run to Jesus He's the One* (fan construction, Gitter-Yelen Collection), *The Righteous and the Wicked Prov. 15.28* (New Orleans Museum of Art), *Ephesians 1:1.2.3.4.5.6[...]* (New Orleans Museum of Art).

⁴⁰⁷ King James Translation.

⁴⁰⁸ The compatibility between these seemingly contrasting ideas also occurs when Morgan exhorts listeners to do "God's work" on the Sabbath, the day of rest, in the April 26, 1959 recording at the Associated Artist's Gallery. See appendix for chapter 2.

I want to propose that Morgan related this shimmering sensation of her visual art to the “mystery work” of spiritual transformation that is the theme of this picture. The sensory processes of visual perception in the act of making—instigated by painting’s conversion of abstracted marks to representational forms—played a significant part of experiencing the doctrine of spiritual change as proposed in 1 Corinthians 15:51: “We shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed.” Not unlike the dots, Morgan’s painterly marks could signify a range of things, from paintings in general, a pot of flowers, or a flock of angels, depending upon compositional design [fig. 207-208]. They could also transform the image of her own body from context to context. On the chance that visitors to the Everlasting Gospel Mission gave her copies of the photographs they had taken, Morgan seems to have adapted her seated posture in these photographs—whether painting or receiving visitors—to portray herself happily as the conductor of one of her weekly services [figs. 135, 209-210].

The particular conversion that Morgan references in 1 Corinthians 15:51 is a bodily resurrection that will transpire, according to subsequent verses, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.”⁴⁰⁹ The metaphor of an instantaneous sensation—a flash of light or sudden sound—to invoke transcendence into divine glory resonates with other well-documented examples of African American art.⁴¹⁰ Florence Gibson and Reverend Kornegay, for example, incorporated mirrors and polished hubcaps into their yard work to provide a sensory presence of honored deceased ancestors [figs. 211-212]. The massive collection of foil-covered objects assembled by James Hampton reflects, literally and poetically, the glory of heaven’s light. Named the *Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly*, winged furniture, glittering crowns, and wrapped light bulbs evoke a descending vision of the overwhelming brightness Hampton believed the coming heaven to possess [figs. 213-214].

In summarizing the philosophical bent of these artworks, Judith McWillie and Grey Gundaker write that the effects of “flash” can have multiple allusions to water, crossing over in the spirit, shimmer, brightness, and transformation into glorious bodies—many of which are active in Hampton’s display. They further propose that these sensory invocations of light and movement are related to “a special kind of purposefulness whose tangible results not only reflect well on a person’s success but actually flash out the possibility of a better world like a

⁴⁰⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:52.

⁴¹⁰ The religious material culture of the African Diaspora has been dynamically written about in Robert Farris Thompson’s 1983 study, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984 edition). Yet in mentioning Thompson’s influential work, I do not wish to define or speculate upon the Africanisms in Morgan’s art, even though visual correspondences can be made (e.g., one could propose a comparison of Morgan’s significant use of white with Kongo-Angolan burial practices, or her architectural designs with the abstract, syncopated patterns in Mande textiles). I do not intend to establish “transatlantic parallels and resources as ends in themselves or as singular items of historical interest (‘Africanisms’),” to quote Grey Gundaker and Judith McWillie. Rather, my aim is to draw upon Thompson’s aesthetic vocabulary and draw upon Gundaker and McWillie’s lexicon for the “metalanguage [of materials and actions] not reducible to speech or writing with which to comment on the human condition and take responsibility for directing its course.” Grey Gundaker and Judith McWillie, *No Space Hidden: The Spirit of African-American Yard Work* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 12.

beacon.”⁴¹¹ Also known colloquially as “getting in my glory” or “got a glory,” capturing the sensation of light is a primary objective for well-known artists who seek to portray revelation.⁴¹² In Morgan’s case, painting provided the material capacity to perceive the correlation between spiritual (in)sight and the flickering application of dabs of paint. Artistic labor, sacred endeavor, and their rewards here coincide.

The Sense of Sensing: Color and Pattern

To recall, Morgan’s Holiness-Pentecostal belief was oriented around rituals and practices aimed at bringing the believer ever closer to the heavenly afterlife. But it also held that heaven could be sensed prior to the Second Coming through revelatory experiences like prophetic visions, spirit possessions, ecstatic singing and dancing, or direct communication with God. In this temporal configuration in which the Coming Kingdom was already present in earthly life but not fully realized, painting became an expressive medium through which the touch of the Spirit could be mediated through sight.

Touch is a sense that implies the closure of distance; it presumes proximity and nearness between distinct entities. It also implies the movement that precedes contact. Morgan described the experience of her revelations as a function of spiritual touching, and in *CANTY*, for example, the motility of writing channeled some of this sensory experience. In what follows, I explore how Morgan manipulated colors and patterns in her New Jerusalem pictures and similarly relished in eliciting the sensation of nearness and movement through visual means. Her pictures, in other words, seek to translate this sensation of being close to—reaching—an alternative spiritual reality. Daniel Heller-Roazen’s archaeology of touch characterizes the elemental status of touch as “the sense of sensing, the mere feeling that something at all is felt.”⁴¹³

How might Morgan have learned to depict a sensation like spiritual touching, the sense of sensing? What visual vocabulary did she build upon or gravitate towards that she thought expressed this aspect of her divine encounters? One suggestive source is a picture posted on the wall of the rearmost room, which is a game board for the *Journeys of St. Paul* of 1968, whose box cover also hangs directly behind Morgan in these Jules Cahn photographs [fig. 215-217].⁴¹⁴ The object itself consists of a meandering line akin to a strand of blue beads, delineating St. Paul’s first-century missionary voyages from Damascus to Rome, laid upon a ground of bright orange and white and capped by an equally bright band of green [fig. 218]. Hanging on

⁴¹¹Gundaker and McWillie, 184.

⁴¹²J.B. Murry, Bessie Harvey, and Minnie Evans, for example.

⁴¹³“The Primary Power” in Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch: Archaeology of Sensation* (New York: Zone Books, 2009), 34.

⁴¹⁴ Where Morgan acquired this game is unknown. One possible source could have been Logos Bookstore, a Christian retail shop and “one of the most successful stores in the French Quarter” on 614 Royal Street, or donated to her by the owner David Douglas Hardwick. This game was published by Avalon Hill. Robert Adler, Patricia Mitchell, and Henry Mitchell, “Doug Hardwick: Logos Bookstore,” *The Community Standard* 1:1 (November 1974), n.p., accessed August 7, 2014, <https://www.mitchellspublications.com/cs/1/bu/index.htm>; and “The Journeys of St. Paul” accessed 14 March 2014, <http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/5375/journeys-st-paul>.

Morgan's whitewashed walls, such an object could electrify one's field of vision with these high-keyed colors.

White (certainly upon Morgan's walls) is customarily encountered as a blank, negative ground upon which other forms are laid. On this game board, however, these white areas never quite stabilize with surrounding shapes into clear figure/ground and positive/negative spatial relationships. Viewers familiar with the geography of the western Mediterranean have conceptual anchors for understanding this design as a cartographic representation; that is, we recognize the Italian "boot," the dispersal of Greek Islands, or the lateral protrusion of present-day Turkey in ways that secure meanings of orange as "land" and white as "sea." Yet absent this culturally coded visual system, we might struggle to discern what is what. On account of the majority of the strand of blue circles strewn across the large, blank area meant to denote "the Mediterranean Sea", this white space reads as negative space and as ground. However, the areas without any overlaid blue—those denoting the Black, Aegean, and Adriatic Seas in particular—stand out as positive shapes surrounded by large areas of orange. Conversely, areas of orange protruding from the top, right, and lower edges of the board similarly vie for visual attention as forms versus blank ground. Between this game board's proportion of orange to white areas, the irregular placements of the blue circles, and the pure vibrancy of these contrasting colors, the visual experience of this image throws common-sense perceptions into confusion.

When placed in conversation with the two New Jerusalem paintings that appear in Cahn's photographs, we can begin to understand how Morgan incorporated some of these optical effects into the depictions of her future heavenly home. In the picture documented above Morgan's right shoulder (of which we see a compression of angels), the orange and white palette of the game board dominate [fig. 219]. Morgan has applied white not only to set the figures of the angelic host apart from the deeper orange ground, but also to offset the orange rectangular windows of the New Jerusalem building. White paint operates here as a ground against which small confetti-like windows float, creating a pattern that impresses with its gridded orderliness. We can further appreciate this technique when considering a partially completed painting that she displays for Cahn's camera [fig. 216]. In the finished form, areas of green and pink ground are the backdrop for angelic wings and robes that flicker alongside canary yellow and red accents [fig. 220]. In similar fashion, Morgan's window-door patterns set a viewer's eye in constant movement, along the varying thicknesses of the architectural lines created by the application of her brush.

Like the meandering strand of blue circles appearing on *Journeys of St. Paul* but to a more totalizing effect, the host of angels activates her composition's surface in a way that unifies its high-contrasting colors. Morgan's use of brick red for the architecture and the majority of angels' hair provides additional warmth throughout. Judicious use of forest green paint that runs in vertical and horizontal series—used for doors and windows, patches of grass, and the trousers of the entourage of elders inserted mainly on the compositions left side—and delicate touches of yellow dots amplify the composition's visual interest. The attention that it commands creates the sense of abundant company and verdant hospitality represented in the racially-integrated angelic host and multi-storied building.

Morgan's employment of patterned constructions is most visible in the different forms she gave her New Jerusalem buildings. They are comprised of basic units of domestic facades and arranged to impressive visual effect.⁴¹⁵ The simplest form consists of a single door and window, a pattern most concentrated in the middle and upper levels of the building at right [fig. 221-box A]. This schema defines the single-bay shotgun house-type, and Morgan's incorporation of transoms over doors and horizontal bars signaling the sash windows (sometimes two tiers) suggests that she turned to her environment for guidance on depicting architectural details, if not her own home [figs. 184, 222-223]. Other variations include a symmetrical façade common to creole cottages [figs. 221-box B, 224], while others have an additional covering and post [figs. 221-box C, 225]. Morgan sometimes placed a rocking chair and plants in these spaces in a hospitable touch to accentuate the galleries of the buildings' units [figs. 219, 226].

Such variations within simple formal sequences are taken to more intense levels of visual restlessness in a towering construction of the New Jerusalem [fig. 227]. Window-door patterns create rivalling symmetrical orders as the basic unit, window-door-window (WDW), grows into WDWWDWDW along each story. Morgan repeats the visual rhythm with enough regularity to be predictable in many areas, but cut off in others as to break the pattern. For example, looking at the orange and blue details of the middle row on level (c), the pattern mostly holds until we reach the final three blue doors, in which a WDW becomes DWDWDDW—a syncopated shift from half-beats to triple-beats, if one were to use a musical metaphor. That the majority of Morgan's doors and windows along each level of the building are colored with contrasting pairs of warm and cool tones only exaggerates the visual restlessness and instability. Where the hues are closer in shades, such as the orange-yellow features on level (a) or the blue-purple ones two stories below (b), their proximity to other contrasts located above and below sustain the checkering effect that nonetheless is spectacularly irregular throughout Morgan's building. Our only visual repose arrives at the cerulean rooftop capping the monumental structure and, most of all, at the couple in the lower right. Clothed in black and white, their complementarity in color (and gender) reinforce the union described in Revelation 21, whose first verse Morgan references on the front and whose words she transcribes verbatim through verse 11 on the reverse.

Another unfinished painting provides further insight into Morgan's sense of design in the rendering of angels that permeate the space around the buildings [fig. 228]. In the upper left, we can see that she painted a white U-shape for her angel's wings and a downward stroke to signify its robe (the clusters of angels along the left, bottom, and right margins occlude on account of their density). With this in mind, we can understand the arches of orange and black paint used for

⁴¹⁵ The "explanatory articulation" of design described by Ernst Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art*, The Wrightsman Lectures delivered under the auspices of the New York University Institute of Fine Arts (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 165-7.

angels as inverse U-shapes that interlock with the wings. The way in which their wingtips extend above their heads further accentuates this series of flipped symmetries [figs. 229-231].⁴¹⁶

The quality of the brushwork varies across her pictures, making it difficult to determine if she used this interlocking U-technique with frequency or consistency. In some instances, her strokes appear dry and textured, as in the von Reis's green hills New Jerusalem; in others, they are smooth and opaque, as in the clean-edged angels in the Jaffe's orange New Jerusalem. In others—like *Jesus is My Airplane, After these things I saw four angels*, and the Jaffe orange New Jerusalem—she would paint over a penciled Y-shaped outline before painting over the form with white [figs. 229-231]. Yet the point we can glean is that she *did* develop patterns and systems for painting this aspect of her New Jerusalem pictures. More schematic than earlier pencil-drawn copies of printed biblical illustrations [fig. 232-233] and repeated no fewer than forty-eight times in most instances (in accordance with the Revelation text), Morgan's angels were units that could be easily arranged for different visual effects. At the left of the Green Hills New Jerusalem, they seem to fly at cross-patterns, with the trio sweeping upwards as two others dive downwards, or in the upper left corner, where one seems to fly against the grain of two moving toward the right. These moments of intersection, slowing or pausing our visual movement, contrast with Morgan's other arrangements, in which a group of angels move in unison around the building in one glorious burst [fig. 234].

In her New Jerusalem landscapes, Morgan's colorful, densely packed, and fantastic imagery has been positioned within the Outsider Art discourse as *horror vacui*, as a manic fear of emptiness. Her mystic narrative suggests not *horror*, but its opposite: *amor infiniti*. The difference matters, because it marks out two discrete attitudes: the former an impulse to fill and neutralize emptiness, the latter a pursuit of what lies before. One disposition is reactive, the other proactive. Neither need be considered more "creative" than the other, yet their separation treads along different registers of meaning. Morgan's art performs for a love of the infinite as Ernst Gombrich conceded to the power of ornament when he wrote *The Sense of Order* in 1979.⁴¹⁷ Intending "to transmute redundancy into plenitude and ambiguity into mystery," Morgan's love of—and drive towards—the infinite translated into an abundant play of color, shapes, and gestures to capture the felt and visual sensations of heaven. At their most abstract and optically-dense forms, her art seems to be aimed at surmounting material constraints to obtain a visual experience of the Paradise that she believed was her destination.

I realize here that I come close to aligning Morgan with a "decorative" or "primitive" impulse of ornament, a move that risks divesting her visual intelligence, historical specificity, and skill by presuming the decorative to be a secondary, unconscious form of artistic production (Gombrich's alternative title to *The Sense of Order*, "The Unregarded Art," sums up the familiar dismissal of ornament as any kind of serious creative activity). Yet my aim is just the opposite. I wish to imbue Morgan's art with historical and religious meaning, which is founded upon the

⁴¹⁶ Ernst Gombrich identifies the yin-yang as the epitome of "dynamic symmetry" or the harmonious fitting of two asymmetrical halves "into a restful circle." Gombrich, 139-140.

⁴¹⁷ Gombrich, 82 and 116.

pleasure and gratification in producing artworks that fulfill her calling on both devotional and cognitive levels. These dynamics are most clearly demonstrated in her New Jerusalem pictures, whose lavish depictions portray key details of the prophetic arrival of the city as “a bride adorned for her husband.”⁴¹⁸ In this sense, composing New Jerusalem pictures was most likely a pleasurable task—not only in meditating and picturing her glorious future, but also in the artful repetition of patterns, forms, and colors that comprise each one. That paintings like these were made in the context of God’s command to “rest” further reinforced, I believe, the creative license of this particular calling. The bulk of this section has described some of the psychological and affective pleasures that this genre of her oeuvre permitted, pleasures that derived from developing a visual vocabulary for representing the apotheosis of her sanctified teleology.⁴¹⁹ By extension, the payoffs of such visual production were double: not only did she build mastery over a set of designs that left room for creative variability, but in so doing, she also could efficiently meet her desires to produce tools of evangelism that Borenstein’s commercial outlet made available to her.

One senses the clarity and focus that Morgan brought to this endeavor in a painted cardboard cutout, which reflects a meditation on her love for Christ and her expectation of entering God’s coming kingdom [fig. 235]. On this artwork’s verso, nearly ten references to love and the life hereafter guide our sense of what Morgan intended for us to see: the same visions of heaven that John the Revelator saw when he wrote, “After this I looked and behold a door opened unto me.”⁴²⁰ On the recto, the dabs of orange that dotted her “paintings” from *This is a mystery work* explode in formations of red and green, while black and white dots have been added to outline the plantlike forms she has rendered beneath. Morgan purposefully makes the vignette of the Bride and her Groom a visual respite—and by extension, they are the composition’s key. They are framed as the protagonists of a sanctified story that closes as they amble along their shimmering speckled path. Poet Christian Wiman writes, “Spiritual innocence is not naiveté. Quite the opposite. Spiritual innocence is a state of mind—or, if you prefer, a state of heart—in which the life of God, and a life in God, are not simply viable but the *sine qua non* of all knowledge and experience, not simply durable but everlasting.”⁴²¹ Morgan’s spiritual sight taught her as much, and her paintings became guides within this mysterious, ever-expanding terrain.

⁴¹⁸ Revelation 21:2.

⁴¹⁹ Gombrich distinguishes between two different kinds of attention elicited by representation and patterns of design or ornament. The first tends to be perceived through contemplation and the second through a broader kind of visual scanning. I argue that the power of Morgan’s visionary landscapes lies in the combination of both kinds of attention (or orders) that her images simultaneously activate. Gombrich, 116.

⁴²⁰ Revelation 4:1, inscribed on verso. See Fagaly, 21 for full transcription of the remaining verses.

⁴²¹ Christian Wiman, *My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2013), 64. This portion of Wiman’s memoir develops a larger thesis related to poetic language and the space within the poem that is opposed to the “deep lament” of “annihilating powers of age, death, romantic failure, industrial destruction” existing outside. The point of innocence for which he argues posits “no necessary contradiction between these two truths.” Wiman, 65.

PART 2: Bruce Brice and the Politics of Being Self-Taught

In the 1960s and 1970s, artists working in New York City—a place still holding sway as the center of the contemporary art world—were continuously reworking and redefining the boundaries of art, many in tandem with social activism around the Civil Rights and Feminist movements. Regional museums like the New Orleans Museum of Art initiated their own reevaluations, in part taking advantage of this moment of critical inquiry to democratize their own exhibition programs. Therefore, they cast their attention to local artists, making room for diverse and then-unconventional work. In this context, Sister Gertrude Morgan and African American painter Bruce Brice appeared together in three exhibitions from 1973 and 1975: “Louisiana Folk Paintings” that also included Clementine Hunter (Museum of American Folk Art, New York City, 1973); “Naïve Art in Louisiana: Clementine Hunter, Sister Gertrude Morgan, Bruce Brice, Dr. Marion Souchon” (New Orleans Museum of Art, 1973); and “Two New Orleans Folk Artists” (Dorothy Rosenthal Gallery, Chicago, 1975). Their titles clearly announce their geographical commonalities, but their press releases and catalogue entries suggest that the associations drawn between the artists as “folk” or “naïve” were far from obvious or consistent.⁴²² In fact, these labels functioned more as a catchall for a diverse group of artists, in which Brice was typically the odd one out. Morgan, Hunter, and Souchon, for example, could be grouped as self-taught artists who began to paint late in life—Hunter as a domestic at Melrose Plantation and Souchon as a surgeon in a New Orleans hospital.

Brice was forty-two years younger than Morgan, and was neither identifiably religious nor a street performer. Rather than profess a mission to paint biblical imagery, he was squarely concerned with local culture. Yet despite some essential differences, the seeming “authenticity” of Brice and Morgan as *self-taught* artists was the meaningful link and premise for their connection. “None of the four artists have received any formal artistic training,” the press release explained, “and their work is a very personal interpretation of environments which they know.”⁴²³ Being held in common by their distinctive individual artistry was the paradox of the imagined community that twentieth-century folk art, as a phenomenon defined in the 1960s, was founded upon.

To my knowledge, Morgan never paid homage to other artists; the only personalized artworks she created for personal friends were of the Borenstein and Jaffe families, her two local

⁴²² William Fagaly, who was enlisted to write the entries for “Louisiana Folk Paintings,” opposed the show’s title but was overruled by staff from the Museum of American Folk Art. This incident exemplifies in part the challenge these artists’ work posed to conventional categories.

⁴²³ “Sister Gertrude Morgan, Clementine Hunter, Bruce Brice, and the late Dr. Marion Souchon shown at the New Orleans Museum of Art,” Press Release, September 17, 1973. Bruce Brice Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University.

impresarios.⁴²⁴ In contrast, Brice made Sister Gertrude Morgan the centerpiece of one of his largest paintings of the early 1970s (excluding his murals) at forty-eight inches high by seventy inches wide [fig. 236].⁴²⁵ Brice's use of predominantly bright unmixed colors, graphic lines, and clearly blocked scenes gives *A Look at Sister Gertrude Morgan* (1972) an accessible cartoon-like simplicity that would seem to correlate with the notion of self-taught and folk art as an amateur practice. According to this developmental rubric, knowing that Brice likely looked at photographs for the left-most portraits of the Bride of Christ might reinforce our impression that this painting represents an inferior, less than masterful copy of another source [fig. 237-238]. This point of view, based solely on formal assessments, only affirms our sense of Brice's artistic deficiency.

Yet the gesture of the painting itself—to portray a fellow artist—begins to complicate assumptions about the presumed social isolation and naiveté of the self-taught artist. Entitled *A Look at Sister Gertrude Morgan*, Brice's artwork adopts a documentary perspective that positions himself as an outside ethnographic spectator. The painting's composite arrangement sets up several different "looks" through the vignettes of the elder artist's life that put her on display. Though Brice's composition does not dictate a strict narrative sequence, a diminutive Morgan standing in the doorway at the painting's upper left attracts our attention as a formal starting point for viewing. Brice has altered her white clapboard home to include a multicolored gable window reminiscent of a stained glass chapel, in which a lightly hatched lawn and gridded dirt pathway extends outwards and past the chain-link fence. From the window of the red car, a figure (possibly Brice himself) waves to us, reinforcing the invitation offered by the larger picture of Morgan in the foreground. "Come unto me true believers" reads the open pages of the book in her lap. The remaining frames provide us with the opportunity to get acquainted with the multitalented woman.

Morgan's sacred activities fill the remainder of the canvas: she combats two devils in the sky with sword and shield; she teaches a bench full of children about the coming New Jerusalem; at the upper right, she lays a hand on a spiritual seeker in need of healing as another man reads scripture; we see Morgan performing beneath a tent reminiscent of the early Heritage Fairs; and lastly, the artist portrays Morgan as the leading spiritual crossing guard alongside two other sanctified ladies. Here she appeals to a group of onlookers who are taking swigs from beer bottles, directing them to board the "Church of All."

Brice, however, "looks" and "shows" with insider knowledge, providing viewers with details recognizable to anyone intimately familiar with Morgan's persona.⁴²⁶ For example, those

⁴²⁴ These artworks still reside in their respective family collections.

⁴²⁵ According to an exhibition checklist from Brice's one-man show at the New Orleans Museum of Art held from August 11-September 10, 1972, only one other painting exceeded his rendering of Morgan in size. This painting is *Playground*, an acrylic on wood object, measuring 38 x 96 inches (current location unknown). Bruce Brice vertical file, New Orleans Public Library.

⁴²⁶ Long before the two artists exhibited together, they were friends. Brice worked on and off for Borenstein throughout the 1960s when Morgan was a regular Sunday performer. Morgan also performed in the galleries of the New Orleans Museum of Art during Brice's show in 1972.

interested in her paintings would immediately recognize the smaller copies of Morgan's two dadas, the airplane, the "All-Seeing Eye," and New Jerusalem paintings that Brice reproduces in the two interior scenes. Other New Orleanians enthusiastic about Jazz Fest would be able to place the tent, piano, and barrier as a reference to the early Congo Square Heritage Fairs. The depiction of Morgan's shotgun house, especially in its L-shaped plan, is another documentary detail that insiders would be able to identify as the artist's residence. Quite unlike Rockmore's interest in Sister Gertrude Morgan as a spiritually pure primitive and psychically adrift, Brice frames Morgan's spirituality as interconnected with a local community and its celebrated musical events—a "folk" character in her own right that embodied the unique characteristics of his New Orleans, an image of the city inflected by his experience as an African American.

The "folk" that describes *A Look at Sister Gertrude Morgan* is thus, as this short analysis demonstrates, a capacious term that can signify doubly: as a marker of artistic skill made legible through an untutored "self-taught" visual style, as well as the artist's proximity to a local culture. Just how these meanings were construed, as either terms of deficiency, curiosity, or social legitimacy, varied greatly during the 1970s. The remainder of this chapter explores Brice's knowing embrace and negotiation of this range of associations as he sought to mature his artistic practice in the years following the Civil Rights Movement and in relation to the radical ideologies of the Black Arts Movement.

From Street to Studio: Brice's Artistic Beginnings

I used to do little crayon drawings out of the newspaper. I remember doing a scene for my grandfather a long time ago on corrugated board. It used to hang over his mantelpiece. He was one of the ones saying, 'Keep it up. You gotta keep it up.' Of course, I had no idea that I would go this far on my own, working for myself.⁴²⁷

—Bruce Brice, 1974

From scrappy beginnings to exhibiting art full-time, Brice would seem to have needed his grandfather's advice in a city where there were few opportunities to receive formal art training as an African American.⁴²⁸ Instead, learning came when he took hold of opportunities to explore creative outlets. A major avenue for Brice's artistic development was the local puppet shows produced by artist and puppeteer Sidney Kittenger, who taught Brice how to operate marionettes [figs. 239-240].⁴²⁹ Starting around 1955 at the age of thirteen, Brice performed puppet shows for private parties and public events, many of which were supported by the New Orleans Recreation Division. As Brice recalled, the puppets "were more fascinating than the art I was seeing because

⁴²⁷ "Bruce R. Brice: The Today Show via Jackson Square," *The Community Standard* 1:2 (December 1974), 3. Bruce Brice Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University.

⁴²⁸ Confirm with Bill Fagaly.

⁴²⁹ "Bruce R. Brice: The Today Show via Jackson Square," 2.

there was something going on. I don't care if you dropped a few marionettes. It was always exciting making them...painting the faces and stuff. It put you in a little fantasy world. I used to go right into it easy. That's what I wanted to be at first—a puppeteer."⁴³⁰ These experiences deepened his conviction that art and entertainment could be combined to serve a community audience in ways that were gratifying personally, but also financially: "I made five dollars a minute. That's the most money I've ever made so quick!"⁴³¹

The economic challenges of a career in art would continue to be defining aspects of his career, as reflected by several of Brice's interview responses. In one instance, reporter Tom Voelker asked if the artist had "it made" following roughly six or seven years of steady exhibiting; Brice's reply is unequivocal: "Hell, no, I'm still paying the bills...I still have months when I don't know whether I'll sink or swim."⁴³² Reflecting upon a career nearly four decades long, he would say in 2013 that "[the money] would be there"—suggesting that making a living as an independent artist involved vigilance over how that living would come about.

Brice likely learned his earliest lessons about the business of art in Jackson Square, the outdoor plaza located at the center of the French Quarter. Larry Borenstein helped Brice acquire his permit at a cost of five dollars, and starting in late 1968, the artist was outdoors, painting five days a week for a little over a year.⁴³³ At the time, any idealism about joining a picturesque, creative community in an outdoor promenade would have been disabused quickly by a set of professional standards regulating artists' work.⁴³⁴ Richard D. Nick, who was an artist and chairman of the Jackson Square Artists Association Committee, explained the protocols this way in 1975:

After you buy your license from the city, you have to work on the fence sixty days to become eligible to draw for a spot. If an artist dies, leaves town, or doesn't work his spot sixteen days a month, the spot becomes available and the Committee has to post the spot three days in advance, telling what day and what time we will draw for that spot. All eligible artists put their names into a hat and we have a tourist pull a name out of it; whichever artist's name they pull out gets the spot after he shows his license to prove that he's been here sixty days....The

⁴³⁰ "Bruce R. Brice: The Today Show via Jackson Square," 2.

⁴³¹ "Bruce R. Brice: The Today Show via Jackson Square," 2.

⁴³² Tom Voelker, "The Primitive of St. Peter Street," *New Orleans* (August), undated clipping. Bruce Brice Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans.

⁴³³ "Bruce R. Brice: The Today Show Via Jackson Square," 3. Clipping in the Brice Papers and Interview with the artist, May 22, 2013.

⁴³⁴ As early as 1948, artists were showing their work along the square's iron fences as part of the French Quarter's *tout ensemble*, an image that city planning, commissions, and preservationist groups were actively cultivating as early as 1921. Rebecca Sheehan, *Between Representation and Practice: Contesting Public Space in New Orleans' Jackson Square*, (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 2006), 110. I am indebted to Rachel Lyons for pointing me to this source.

reason for this is so that the spots aren't held by people who just work on weekends. The fence is basically set up for full-time working artists.⁴³⁵

Though Nick's interview takes place five years after Brice's tenure in Jackson Square, it likely expresses the degree of organizational structure that was necessary and already in place to manage the number of artists competing to exhibit along the square's fences at the start of the 1970s. The beginning of the decade coincided with the conversion of the surrounding streets into a pedestrian mall that incidentally created more space in which artists could work and sell.⁴³⁶ It was also at that time that Brice, perhaps feeling the need to escape a now more financially competitive field, left the square and rented a private studio.⁴³⁷

An additional factor included the incursion of mechanically reproduced images into the market of Jackson Square. Despite the benefits of having a regular workspace and exposure to eager tourist consumers, for some artists, the pressures of the market to sell cheaply and in volume threatened the ideals of originality and artistic labor that they wished to maintain as professional artists. Nick's reflections on selling work in Jackson Square describes the problem, significantly in terms of photography mixing with more traditional forms of art:

It's not a question of this one photographer, but the question is what the second photographer is going to do or what the twenty-seventh photographer is going to be selling. If he sees this guy doing a picture of the moon rising over the St. Louis Cathedral and it sells well for \$15 or \$25, this twenty-seventh photographer will take a picture like that and run them off and sell them for a dollar apiece. We don't want—and nobody seems to understand this—reproductive art. We don't want somebody to come in here with silk screens and run off these things by the hundreds. Or etchings—etching is a form of art, but if a guy comes in here with etchings—to start with, I don't even know if they are his etchings.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁵ Robert C. Adler and Henry H. Mitchell, "D. Nick: Fireman, Family Man, Artists' Chairman," *The Community Standard* 1:4 (February 1975), accessed August 9, 2014, <https://www.mitchellspublications.com/cs/4/co/>.

⁴³⁶ Sheehan, 114. As Mark Souther has argued, this renovation was part of Mayor Mark Landrieu's initiative to remake Jackson Square from "a public space into a sanctioned carnival." This effort included a controversial proposal to stage a nightly *son-et-lumière* show to increase the French Quarter's tourist appeal. Souther, *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and the Transformation of the Crescent City* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State Press, 2006), 164-168.

⁴³⁷ "Bruce R. Brice: The Today Show Via Jackson Square," 3.

⁴³⁸ Adler and Mitchell. Rebecca Sheehan's research finds evidence of this debate between the sales of original or artistic reproductions reaching back to 1954. A statement by Councilman Schiro suggests that the dissent and arbitration arose from among the artists themselves: "The original plan was to provide color and atmosphere for tourists in the French Quarter who like to see artists at work and prefer to buy paintings from the water colorists, lithographers, and etchers who live in the neighborhood. We thought when we granted permission to use the fences—at no charge—the artists would be happy and the tourists would enjoy the spectacle and all would go well. But now that this dissension has risen, the artists will either have to get together to work it out, or we'll have to rule that the fences can't be used for display by anyone." *The States Item*, 4 August 1954, quoted in Sheehan, 117. Future

Walter Benjamin presaged this very predicament when he posited the dissolution of an artwork's "aura" from the onslaught of cheap, readily copied images in the age of mechanical reproduction. Nick's final musings for *The Community Standard's* local readership are bleak when he contemplates more serious artists can compete in such a market-driven system. His prognosis is grim: "I think for any painter that puts any time in his work, the prices out there will drag so low, it would be ridiculous to do a good painting. It would be a lot easier to have a picture printed by a commercial printer and sell it as an original painting. That's what would go on and I think that would ruin the Square."⁴³⁹ For Nick, even though authorship and quality can be somewhat controlled in this situation, the compromise is inevitable and degrading.

Few paintings exist from Brice's Jackson Square period, except for a small whimsical still life [fig. 241]. That notwithstanding, the ambition of works produced immediately following his departure from this tourist promenade suggest that he wanted to escape the predicament that Nick outlines for a less commercially-driven practice. The following sections will consider Brice's large-scale paintings and outdoor murals he produced in the 1970s as part of Brice's professionalization as an artist without formal training. I pay particular attention to how he navigated the categories of "folk" and "black" artist, positioning Brice as an artist for whom the gains and losses of identifying as "self-taught" held very different stakes within art worlds reckoning with gaps in reception based on racial segregation.⁴⁴⁰

Refusing the "Primitive": Brice's Collaborative Paintings with Noel Rockmore

Brice's formative aesthetic interests might have been defined by the playfulness of the puppet theater, live interaction, and the colorfulness of street life, but "primitive" was a term he patently refused: "People say—because I'm self-taught—my paintings are primitive. I don't want to hear that. A primitive is a person who won't or just can't grow beyond primitive expression. I'm changing and growing constantly. To me, this isn't primitive. It's the developing Bruce Brice style"—one that adheres to a sense of an interior individuality, and not a social concept of self-taught potential.⁴⁴¹ Brice's commitment to "[sticking] to my own ideas and work[ing] them out as I saw them" poses a self-possessed tenacity that remains insistently at odds with the article's title, "The Primitive of St. Peter Street." Though self-taught, he takes

archival work for city records of permits and oversight would be necessary to flesh out a fuller picture of the artists selling in Jackson Square during Brice's formative years working there. At present, the ethnographic research on Jackson Square artists working in 2004-2005 in chapter six in Sheehan's dissertation informs my understanding of artistic labor in this integral part of the city.

⁴³⁹ "D. Nick: Fireman, Family Man, Artists' Chairman."

⁴⁴⁰ I reconstruct my account from available artworks appearing on publicity materials, activities recorded on Brice's *curriculum vita* (Brice Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans), and politics derived from my first interview with the artist. Brice's recent death in September 2014 makes a definitive history impossible to assemble in detail, but future research will inquire after such information from his widow, Jacqueline Brice, and other of Brice's friends and associates.

⁴⁴¹ Tom Voelker, "The Primitive of St. Peter Street"

pains to convey his ambition to work and grow as any other artist would, without qualification, which makes the title of Voelker's interview all the more ill-fitting in its attempt to plainly label the artist with a term he refuses.

To be generous, perhaps Voelker was impressed by Brice's insistence on cultivating an ostensibly unadulterated creative practice: "I don't study other painters because I'm afraid I'd unconsciously borrow from them. People are always looking for something to copy. I say look in your own mind. There's something there."⁴⁴² Voelker's use of "primitive" may be his attempt to characterize Brice's purity of vision in idealized terms. Good intentions notwithstanding, Brice's protectiveness over his own artistic expression derives not from an essential trait of his self-taught innocence but of personal experience. Recall that Brice first began pursuing painting in Jackson Square, where the major issue was the threat of "reproductive art" on selling prices for hand-rendered artworks. In that earlier context, developing and guarding one's artistic originality were critical for justifying a living wage for professional artists. Brice understood too well the economic pressure to develop his practice by translating his vision and artistic interests into viable, distinct commodities for sale.

However, resisting the urge to copy other artists did not preclude Brice from forging relationships with other artists to further individuate his practice. In another interview with *The Today Show* in 1974 on the occasion of *Louisiana Folk Paintings* held at the Museum of American Folk Art, Brice recalls his first encounter with Noel Rockmore, while Brice was employed by Larry Borenstein as a framer: Rockmore "had just [painted] these real dead faces...these real jivey faces. I was depressed. It was like somebody who's been through a lot."⁴⁴³ Any number of Rockmore's Preservation Hall portraits or his French Quarter pictures would have been available for Brice to see at Borenstein's Associated Artists Gallery. Two faces that fit Brice's description are oil paintings of the jazz historian Bill Russell and Preservation Hall trombonist Jim Robinson, both seated as if time exerted its own gravitational pull on their bodies and clothes in ways that so depressed the younger artist [figs. 242-243].⁴⁴⁴ Yet Rockmore's formal range and resolute dedication to this art also catalyzed Brice's own approach to art-making: "Noel was doing something different, something creative. He was serious, real serious about his work and talking about art. He didn't play with art. Certain people have a job and you don't kid with a job because this is what you're making your money at. This is how he felt about art and this is the way it should be. Seeing his work inspired me to do more different things with painting—to loosen up."⁴⁴⁵ In this context, Rockmore's experience (he was fourteen years Brice's senior), professional status (he was working under contract with a local gallerist), and range of production must have impressed the younger artist as the norm after which he

⁴⁴² Tom Voelker, "The Primitive of St. Peter Street."

⁴⁴³ "Bruce R. Brice: The Today Show via Jackson Square," 3.

⁴⁴⁴ I am uncertain what Brice's use of "jivey" means in his statement. Of the definitions offered in online slang dictionaries, "exaggerated" or "unbelievable" seems to make the most sense in the context of the interview. For additional meanings of this black vernacular term, see <http://onlineslangdictionary.com/meaning-definition-of/jive>, accessed January 20, 2015.

⁴⁴⁵ "Bruce R. Brice: The Today Show via Jackson Square," 4.

should model his career. In the early 1970s, Rockmore's work ranged widely from watercolor drawings of local haunts, surreal dreamscapes, bodacious nudes, and city scenes that clearly communicated the kind of artistic experimentation that emerged from the passion Brice so admired [figs. 244-247].

A comparison of Rockmore's New Orleans work with Brice's *Buster's (Have Fun)* of 1970—which was inscribed “For Noel Rockmore from his good friend Bruce Brice” in the lower left corner—suggests that “loosening up” for the emerging artist came from dynamic artistic exchange (*not* the stylistic “borrowing” that Brice was scrupulous to avoid) [figs. 248-249]. Brice's canvas depicts the many components of New Orleans conviviality taking place in Buster Holmes' Restaurant located at 721 Burgundy Street. Rendered as the largest figure in the painting, Holmes spoons his famous red beans and rice onto a plate as a trail of parasol-waving paraders cascade around him. These are second liners, a local name for people who informally dance and cavort behind a brass band (the “first line”) parading through the city's streets. Yet more than mere dancers, they are *ambianceurs*, writes James Borders: “atmosphere setters, scene creators.”⁴⁴⁶ In Brice's painting, their spirit of festivity melds seamlessly with patrons positioned along an undulating yellow counter that winds along the canvas' left side. On the right, the Eureka Brass Band continues to play behind the mirrored bar, while an interracial group of patrons stare out towards the viewer as if to beckon him or her.

Brice's formal looseness in his composition also appears in Rockmore's sketches [figs. 244-245]. Though each artist's use of line is unique, they share a light and delicate sensibility: Rockmore's hand uses minimal, thin lines to articulate shirt sleeves and heads, while Brice employs black and white lines to outline shapes and convey patterns [fig. 250]. Brice's exaggerated scale (most evident in his portrayal of Buster Holmes) is similar to the way Rockmore magnifies the heads of some patrons, disregarding principles of perspective. Against the solid background of grass green, Brice's figures (many of them bust-length) float in a unified space that is neither an interior nor an exterior. This color choice further sets off the pink lozenge-shaped chairs and yellow table tops that guide our eye around each festive element. There are food, music, and friends here; notable are Allan Jaffe who plays the sousaphone and his raven-haired wife Sandra in the center with one of their sons in tow.

A surrealist disjuncture completes this amicable exchange between artists. Supporting Holmes' pot of rice is the torso of Larry Borenstein, identified by the large carnelian ring on his right hand. For Rockmore, who once deemed his relationship with the gallerist a “career nightmare,” the painting as a whole is a visual goad for the notoriously moody artist to drop his angst.⁴⁴⁷ “Have fun,” join the band, and “celebrate your sorrows away” is the message that Brice's figures seem to say.

⁴⁴⁶ James B. Borders IV, “New Orleans Negritude and the Second Line: Stankness, Stupidity and Doofus Overload in the Streets of the Big Easy” (unpublished manuscript), shared with the author April 14, 2015.

⁴⁴⁷ “1967-10-7 Letter o Shirley (BRLA) from Rockmore (33W67.NYC) – Preparations for the Ultimate Career Show,” accessed 17 March 2015, <http://www.rightwaywrongway.com/index.php?name=Sections&req=viewarticle&artid=86&page=1>.

Rockmore in Studio, a large painting created the next year in 1971, makes explicit their artistic camaraderie with a similar *joie de vivre* comprised of the easy comingling of French Quarter characters [fig. 251]. The horizontal lineup on the couch captures these extremes: Sister Gertrude Morgan head to toe in white with open bible in her lap conveys an elder's piety beside her cross-legged companions, a naked muse and the artist, Noel Rockmore, whose studio is the setting of this unlikely gathering. This trio seems to preside over the studio's mood that the paintings behind them also invoke. A small framed portrait of Bill Russell serenades the group with his violin at left; the dreamlike marine nocturne injects a cool fantasy that contrasts with the sultry exoticism of the silhouetted figures in red located to the right. The lackadaisical mood literally spills onto the darkened floor as two other nude models—their hair gratuitously undone—topple downward while a third, facedown on the striped mattress, reinforces the easy eroticism permeating this masculine haven. Joining this motley crew is a man who enters at the far right carrying a skull, the quintessential *memento mori*. This man is Tinker Bell, a local personality known for his flamboyant clothes and manner.⁴⁴⁸ The pall of mortality that this symbol would usually introduce does not permeate so thoroughly here. Instead, it is dwarfed by the élan of the scene as a whole: the pot of sprawling bell-flowers at the painting's far left, Morgan's spiritual purity unaffected by the models' nudity to the same degree that Brice's children in the painting happily wave to the beholder (his wife is the tawny-skinned, kneeling woman). To some of New Orleans' more conservative viewers of the 1970s, the picture's vitality also thrives on the way it flaunts its interracialism as a matter of nonchalance, as if to say, "When you're dead, you're gone. Long live the living!"⁴⁴⁹

This mantra is crucially transmitted through Brice's aesthetic, not only his subject matter.⁴⁵⁰ The assertive repetition of the floor tile—each one consisting of three yellow flowers with green stems, set against a black ground and red border—and rose-patterned upholstery function less as details of Rockmore's studio than as visual details multiplied to constitute a flat surface against which the nude figures are playfully arranged. Seen in relationship to the softer daubs of green on Rockmore's white pants, or the graphic clarity of the striped mattress and French doors, Brice's decorative attention in nearly all areas creates an overwhelming with surface pattern. In subject matter and style, *Rockmore in Studio* declares Brice's membership within this bohemian community in his own pictorial terms (the painting itself is large, measuring nearly six feet high and eight feet wide). This painting unites Brice's interest in a self-taught aesthetic with romantic tropes of an artist in his studio (including the female nudes) to pay homage to his fellow artist.

⁴⁴⁸ I am grateful to William Fagaly for assisting me with this identification, and to the website, "Eccentric New Orleans," for preserving reminiscences of the individuals that gave the French Quarter its distinct flavors, including the information on Tinker Bell. "Tinker Bell," accessed January 30, 2015, <http://www.eccentricneworleans.com/tinkerb主ell.htm>.

⁴⁴⁹ *Always For Pleasure* directed by Les Blank (1978; El Cerrito, CA: Flower Films, 2005), DVD.

⁴⁵⁰ On account of Bruce's recent passing, I have not been able to inquire after artists he admired or other artists whom he might have seen. Until I am able to initiate conversations with his family, I readily admit that portions of this argument may be insufficiently supported.

Rockmore in Studio was a huge success for Brice. On the occasion of the Artists of the Southeast & Texas Biennial held at the Isaac Delgado Museum of Art (now the New Orleans Museum of Art) from April to June 1971, Walter Hopps, then-director of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, named it the winner of the show and it was among the artworks recommended by this innovating contemporary curator for purchase by the museum. NOMA trustees purchased it anonymously for \$1,200 in June 1971, as the museum did not have sufficient funds at the time.⁴⁵¹

Rockmore in Studio was a pioneering purchase for NOMA, not least because it was executed by a local young black artist. Its purchase positioned also NOMA within a history of collecting and exhibiting art that resonated with a “modern primitive” aesthetic—most notably with the formal simplicity and multiply-patterned surfaces of Morris Hirshfield [figs. 252-253]. Starting from Hirshfield’s inclusion in the exhibition *Unknown American Painters* in 1939 and his one-man show in 1943, both at the Museum of Modern Art, this Polish immigrant and slipper manufacturer was a key figure among a group dubbed “modern primitives” for the ways they were seen to epitomize “the most democratic level” of Western culture. Their work was understood as imminently relatable in the way it offered a “straightforward, innocent, and convincing vision of the common man,” and creative freedom. By the early 1970s when Brice composed *Rockmore in Studio*, the formal traits of non-academically trained painting—as exemplified by Hirshfield—had been enfolded into the field of twentieth-century folk art, and especially in the vision of collector Herbert Waide Hemphill, Jr. Founder of the Museum of American Folk Art in 1961, Hemphill (along with co-author Julia Weissman) revived the “modern primitive” trope for a post-WWII United States. In short, even if Brice did not self-consciously fashion his style after Hirshfield’s modern primitivist style, his art was rewarded based on how his self-taught background and style resonated with the contemporary network of galleries, dealers, museums, and publications interested in contemporary examples of modern primitivism.

The NOMA purchase seems to have galvanized his reputation as an artist nationally, for in the wake of this award, Brice had subsequent shows outside of Louisiana in Memphis, Richmond, and Chicago. A gallery announcement from spring of 1972 displays work of whimsy and reverie that speaks to Brice’s artistic direction following his biennial recognition [fig. 254]. We see at left a flight of gulls sailing above Vieux Carré rooftops at sunset; and an afternoon on the beach, where sandcastles, a beach ball, a puppy, starfish, an inflatable horse, and other trifles of summer are scattered to complete the playful view in the center. Two figures above and below these paintings—a reclining man and a standing nude—beckon viewers into their fanciful worlds. At the far right, a dark-skinned nude woman smiles at the viewer from behind vines of greenery that form a loose screen. Above her, an African American man (resembling the artist) savors the first bite of the watermelon slice propped up in his hands.

⁴⁵¹ The trustees were Arthur Davis, Sunny Norman, Muriel Francis, and Shirley Kaufmann. William Fagaly, e-mail message to author, January 27, 2015.

The presumed audience in the context of the Orleans Gallery, located at 527 Royal Street in the heart of a tourist-dense French Quarter, is implicitly racially white, which makes this assembly of paintings in the photograph so intriguing. Amid the rooftop cityscape and the idyllic beaches, the black nude's sensuality is underlined by the power connoted by her wide Afro, an unmistakable reference to Black Power and perhaps its most visible female actor, Angela Davis who was placed on the FBI's most wanted list in 1970.⁴⁵² Yet any militant threat gets stripped away literally with her clothes, leaving her as vulnerable as the delicate lace of flora surrounding her. A similar diffusion seems apologetically included in his self-portrait. Chickens—ever associated with rural farms—frame the image of the artist, his large knife jammed upright on the table as an inert tool and not a brutal weapon. With the gallery's consumer demographic in mind, we could surmise that Brice calibrated his pictures to appeal to potential buyers with a playful beach scene, a svelte enticing nude, or a comical portrait of the artist chomping on fruit.

Pictures like the Afro'ed black nude and self-portrait, I want to suggest, register the tight line Brice navigated as a black artist in New Orleans tied to a largely white-driven and managed economic system (JazzFest). On the one hand, with *Rockmore in Studio*, Brice stepped into an art world system of predominantly white-run museums and galleries as a “modern primitive.” On the other, he simultaneously pursued the aims of a black aesthetic through community-based artworks, especially in the form of murals and posters. As he pursued each of these discrete paths, we will see how recognition from the folk and self-taught art world ultimately proved limiting, yet economically essential, in ways that were defining for his career.

Nostalgia in *Louisiana Folk Paintings of 1973*

Brice's appearance with Clementine Hunter and Sister Gertrude Morgan in the *Louisiana Folk Paintings* exhibition held at the Museum of American Folk Art from September 17 to November 4, 1973 in New York City, makes obvious Brice's uneasy fit within the self-taught and folk art persona of the 1970s. A closer reading of the show's modest catalogue, authored by William Fagaly, reveals that a certain kind of nostalgia, rather than any shared artistic interest, joins these artists.⁴⁵³

As a kind of desire that seeks to bridge the gap between an object and its origin, the nostalgia that I have in mind is the product of narrative. Following Susan Stewart's analysis of this particular longing, nostalgia, as we commonly understand it, arises out of two contradictory assumptions. First, nostalgia assumes that narratives of personal experience offer greater authenticity than other kinds of stories. Second and paradoxically, nostalgia takes comfort in the personal insights and transcendence that the narrative conventions offer. Thus, nostalgic

⁴⁵² Reference on Black Panthers, adoption of the Afro as sign of black power and militancy. “Rethinking the Black Power Movement,” Komozi Woodward for *Africana Age: African & African Diasporan Transformations in the 20th Century*, A Project of the Schomburg-Mellon Humanities Summer Institute, accessed February 23, 2015, <http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africanaage/essay-black-power.html>.

⁴⁵³ At the time of writing the catalogue, Fagaly felt disdain and opposition to the show's title, sensing that it was an easy “out” for the New York Museum. Interview with William Fagaly, June 13, 2013.

reconstruction through narratives denies the present. Instead, “the past takes on an authenticity of being, an authenticity which, ironically, it can achieve only through narrative.”⁴⁵⁴ As a consequence of this denial, nostalgia also resists history in its effort to construct “an impossibly pure context of lived experience at a place of origin.” By envisioning a different future from this constructed past—towards what Stewart dubs a “future-past”—nostalgia’s utopia is a prelapsarian one, “where lived and mediated experience are one, where authenticity and transcendence are both present and everywhere.” In sum, nostalgia generates a version of an idealized past that asserts a locatable, intimately known “absolute presence,” even as it can only emerge as a consequence of a felt loss or absence of the very object it describes.⁴⁵⁵

Louisiana Folk Paintings’ three artist biographies are laced with nostalgia.

Metaphorically, they offer miniaturized versions of the artists’ life stories from birth to present and, in Brice’s case, the fabricated nature of nostalgic narrative is more perceptible than in the other two. The first biography begins, “Clementine Hunter was born about 1882 on Hidden Hill Plantation...in the Faulknerian world of the rural South.” Its tale-like opening already betrays the social and geographic distance separating Hunter’s milieu from that of the presumed audience. Her artistic origin story continues, portraying her as a quaint plantation figure and unlikely painter, whose impulse to paint was catalyzed by the “Paris-born landscape architect, historian, and gentleman” Francois Mignon.⁴⁵⁶ Statements such as “Picking cotton is easier than marking pictures” and “The good Lord puts pictures in my head, so I reckon He means for me to paint them” are included as authenticators of her provincialism and novelty. In a similar way, Morgan’s deferral of artistic authorship to a supernatural being suggests her naiveté resonant with the innocence characterized by Stewart in her formulation of nostalgia: “Sister Gertrude...emphasizes that it is from Jesus that she constantly receives guidance and encouragement. He is her advisor and counselor and, like Clementine, she says it is He who must be credited for her talent.” “Sister Gertrude” and “Clementine,” likened in these descriptions, are further rendered intimate and companionable by the use of their first names. In these nostalgic portraits, Hunter and Morgan are notable for their unmediated relationship with their God.

These biographies further inhabit an undisturbed prelapsarian world through the writer’s emphasis on the “simple honesty and directness of the life of the Negro servant on a Louisiana plantation.” Baptisms, weddings, church-going, and cotton picking are among the cyclical, everyday activities of plantation life, without the incursion of modern anomie. When the violent outcome of a “Cane River Saturday night honky tonk brawl” is mentioned, the text focuses on Hunter’s “childlike fantasy and creativeness” and the humorous “comic exaggerations” with

⁴⁵⁴ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, and the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 23.

⁴⁵⁵ Stewart, 24.

⁴⁵⁶ Recent scholarship has brought to light that François Mignon was neither a native Frenchman nor a consultant to Versailles as he purported to be to those at Melrose Plantation, but was born Frank VerNooy Mineah in Cortland, New York to a middle-class family. The details of this fabricated life story are recounted in Art Shiver and Tom Whitehead, *Clementine Hunter: Her Life and Art* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 33-45.

which she treats subjects that “she recollects from her past,” thereby softening or abating any discomfort we as viewers might have about the potential destructiveness of the event. By nesting Hunter’s private world within the “simple honesty” of the artist, the catalogue sets Hunter apart from contemporaneous politics. In similarly compacted terms, the writer contextualizes Gertrude Morgan’s paintings with a few broad strokes: the recurring futuristic iconography of the New Jerusalem, her locale in the Lower Ninth Ward (“a Black suburban ghetto”), her work at the orphanage, her bridal revelations, her white dress, and her evangelistic performances.

Each of these biographies do not exceed one typewritten page, making this miniaturizing effect all the more pronounced: the catalogue texts labor to distill, contain, and make familiar these black Southern artists to New York City museum-going audiences. Framed in idyllic and endearing terms, Hunter and Morgan’s “folk paintings” function as sentimental souvenirs of a distant time and rural place—the very kind of objects made to “speak the language of longing” within the discourse on folk art.⁴⁵⁷ Stewart’s insights are again relevant for understanding how nostalgic narrative that pare artists lives into emblems of authenticity: “Because of its connection to biography and its place in constituting the notion of the individual life, the memento [a type of souvenir] becomes emblematic of the worth of that life and of the self’s capacity to generate worthiness.”⁴⁵⁸ What more irrefutable aspect of worth could supersede the claims of direct divine inspiration asserted in Hunter and Morgan’s biographies? Taken together, these unassuming entries and the creative lives they reference epitomize the double operations of social containment and discovery characteristic of Outsider art narratives.⁴⁵⁹

Brice’s entry begins conventionally, focusing on his interest in New Orleans’ festival culture, especially black parading traditions: the Zulu parade, jazz funerals, and the elaborate beaded and sequined costumes created by Mardi Gras Indians, one part of a network of working-class African American organizations best known for their colorful street presence.⁴⁶⁰ Like Hunter and Morgan’s capsule biographies, a handful of colorful details about Brice bring the artist’s personality up close. We learn of his childhood in the French Quarter “hambon[ing] it” while shining shoes, a short stint as a puppeteer giving shows in the halls of black housing projects, and his work as a “sidewalk artist” in Jackson Square. As with Hunter and Morgan, these details connote a carefree hobo-like existence that infuses his early life with romantic ease according with “Brice’s gentle and affable manner.”⁴⁶¹ Later in the text, we learn of Brice’s

⁴⁵⁷ Stewart, *On Longing*, 135. For more on the souvenir, see 132-151.

⁴⁵⁸ Stewart, *On Longing*, 139.

⁴⁵⁹ Cara Zimmerman Campbell, “Formulaic Narrative in Outsider Art: The Containment of Martin Ramirez and the Classification of Thornton Dial.” (M.A. Thesis, University of Delaware, 2009).

⁴⁶⁰ For in-depth discussions on the history of Mardi Gras Indians, see Rachel Breunlin and Ronald M. Lewis, *The House of Dance and Feathers: A Museum by Ronald M. Lewis*, The Neighborhood Story Project (New Orleans, LA: University of New Orleans Press); Roach, “One Blood,” chapter 5 in *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 33-72; and “Performing Africa in New Orleans,” special issue of *African Arts*, 46:2 (Summer 2013).

⁴⁶¹ *Louisiana Folk Paintings*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of American Folk Art, September 17-November 4, 1973).

penchant for populating his pictures with friends and local establishments, creating images of authentic particularities of time and place.

Yet in several significant respects, Brice's narrative does not conform to the utopian biographies of the two older artists. It draws attention to Brice's friendship (not "Bruce's") with Noel Rockmore, whose encouragement led him to submit *Rockmore in Studio* for NOMA's biennial prize and whose role as an older mentor implies a professional gravity (*contra* Mignon's patronizing influence on Hunter). Combined with Brice's youth (he was nearly two generations younger than Morgan and three than Hunter), his engagement with a professionalizing art world pointed to developing *oeuvre* that was to be realized. In these ways, his story escaped easy narrating into folk painting's utopian, static constructions of its quaint makers. Moreover, prelapsarian innocence, in Brice's case, is tainted by his generational awareness of "the prevailing problems of ghetto crime, drugs, and racial injustice" that the Civil Rights Movement, the prior decades' multiple assassinations, and New Orleans' own Black Arts Movement had made unavoidable for persons of his age.

The text ends Brice's biography on this suspended note. Though one senses the ease with which Fagaly positions Brice within the boundaries of folk painting's whimsy and temporal distance, the artist's politics are not so seamlessly incorporated. Though "Brice's description of the contemporary Black experience in New Orleans is for the most part positive," the text almost apologetically admits "[Brice's] moral opposition to racial injustice." He is working on a mural that "documents the uprooting of the stable old Black neighborhood of Treme...to make way for a vast Cultural Center." Additionally, we are informed that Brice's subjects "lack a sense of urgency and militancy." Unlike the ease with which Hunter and Morgan's narratives invite nostalgic enclosure, Brice's political engagements (no matter how uncontroversial or inoffensive) render permeable the boundaries of his narrative because they connect him to his present. Brice may be called a "folk painter," but he surely fits uncomfortably within its timeless "outsider" formulation.

This excursus into the terms of Brice's position within the elite art world is meant to suggest just some of the interpretative difficulties that Brice faced as a "folk" or "primitive" artist. Brice, as we have seen, strategically avoided speaking directly about his own work in these terms (his 1972 résumé instead uses the term "indigenous").⁴⁶² To identify himself as a "folk artist" would not only compromise the lack of self-consciousness that is part of its romance and novelty, but it would also subordinate his practice to artistic hierarchies. His silence on the subject explains in part Brice's rejection of the "primitive" assignation in Tom Voelker's interview. Rather than accede to this problematic moniker, Brice instead would continually insist that "my work speaks for itself."⁴⁶³ This decision in effect would leave issues of labeling and aesthetic judgment up to the viewer, and by extension, her own assumptions about the criteria for

⁴⁶² "Bruce Brice – Resumé," Bruce Brice Vertical File, New Orleans Public Library.

⁴⁶³ Voelker and announcement for his one-man show at NOMA, August 11-September 10, 1972, Bruce Brice Vertical File, New Orleans Public Library. Brice repeated this position to me during our interview in 2013.

judging the quality of African American art.⁴⁶⁴ To grasp more fully the strategic politics of Brice's silence on his "folk" practice, we need to situate his early practice of the 1970s more fully within the Black Arts Movement that was active nationally and locally. This was a decade when artists on the social margins were reformulating new definitions of art. Exploring this concurrent stream of Brice's practice following his biennial prize at NOMA will lay out the pressures for a racial aesthetic, economic self-determination, and community engagement to which Brice's auto-didacticism was acutely sensitive.

"Brice, American Artist": Between Black Radicalism and Professionalization⁴⁶⁵

In the artist's papers at the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, an unidentified clipping bears some of Brice's earliest and most explicit remarks that are addressed to an African American readership.⁴⁶⁶ This short column, published sometime in the middle of 1976, features the artist "rap[ping] about himself and the general public." Brice argues that "we, as a people" are creative and "should create jobs by marketing our natural talents," in effect following the lead of figures like Louis Armstrong, Jimi Hendrix, John Coltrane, and Martin Luther King, Jr. to "become a part of Black pride and heritage."⁴⁶⁷ The artist's personal response to his own recommendation follows:

I could not be satisfied with one room, a can of beer and a newspaper. I would like to live comfortable, that's to say the sky is the limit. A person should not let anyone stop them from doing what they feel to be constructive. When a person tells you that you can't do something, what they mean is that they don't want you to know any-more [*sic*] than you do already. Which may lead to you trying to direct instead of being directed. But all I'm trying to say is respect yourself—inside and outside.⁴⁶⁸

Granting the casualness of the interview and limited word count for Brice's remarks, two aspects of these comments are still particularly intriguing. The first relates to the way in which

⁴⁶⁴As Katherine Jentleson has argued, the category of "outsider art" (and its cognates) "should be understood as a set of cracks that reveal major paradigm shifts and institutional reformation in both the art world and society more generally...the "name-calling of marginality of often an expression of art world rupture...reveal[ing] status quos in flux." Jentleson, 108.

⁴⁶⁵ Bernadine B. Proctor, *Black Art in Louisiana* (Lafayette, LA: The Center for Louisiana Studies at the University of Southern Louisiana, 1989), 28-9.

⁴⁶⁶ "Inside—Outside: By Brice." Unidentified and undated clipping, Bruce Brice Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University. Based on the reference to the Continental Walk for Disarmament [and] Social Justice, this column was likely published in the middle of 1976, when the march proceeded through New Orleans from its California starting point. Historical information gathered from the Continental Walk for Disarmament and Social Justice Records, 1975-1978, located in the Swarthmore College Peace Collection, accessed March 5, 2015, <http://www.swarthmore.edu/Library/peace/DG100-150/dg135cwdsj.htm>.

⁴⁶⁷ "Inside—Outside: By Brice."

⁴⁶⁸ "Inside—Outside: By Brice."

Brice does not prescribe specific actions, but rather describes a disposition towards oneself and the world that leaves a course of action open and undetermined. The second relates to the moderate tone of his statements that waver between desiring a “comfortable” life, impoverished asceticism, and inertia (“one room, a can of beer and a newspaper”) while also curtailing a potential confrontation with an oppressor (“a person [who] tells you that you can’t do something”) with a significant retraction: “*but* all I’m trying to say is respect yourself.” Brice’s call for “respect” reflects a careful calibration of desire and action mediated across a threshold of selves, both individual and social, “inside and outside.”

Hopefully the degree to which Brice’s statements are measured will become clearer when understood in relationship to the separatist pressures exerted by the discourse of the 1970s radical black aesthetic. In many ways, Brice’s aspirational philosophy quoted above resonates strongly with John O’Neal’s reflections on the Free Southern Theater, the most active Black Arts organization in New Orleans in formal operation from 1967 to 1971: “How could we remain true to ourselves and our own concerns as artists and at the same time remain true to our developing recognition of political responsibility?”⁴⁶⁹ Clearly, Brice was not the only black artist grappling with this very question. This section explores the specifics of this negotiation, understanding Brice’s artistic choices in relationship to local tenor of race relations particular to New Orleans. In doing so, I hope to illuminate how his art could function dually to fulfill the nostalgic expectations of viewers interested in “folk painting” while also speaking to those with local knowledge in a way that affirmed black culture by depicting black New Orleans traditions.

As the cultural arm most often associated with the radical politics of Black Power, the Black Arts movement was necessarily regionally focused and de-centered. Nevertheless, as the work of Lisa Gail Collins and James Smethurst shows, several common threads bound together the grassroots activism in the Northeast, South, Midwest, and West Coast.⁴⁷⁰ Foremost among them was the belief that African Americans were a nation entitled to self-determination, or else risked remaining an oppressed and exploited class of (non-) citizens in the United States.⁴⁷¹ While Smethurst acknowledges earlier manifestations of black nationalism in the work of Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association and the New Negro Movement during the Harlem Renaissance, never before had such energy been marshalled nationally—and with such urgency—to position art, poetry, and theater as a means for attaining the movement’s goals. These goals included not only political self-determination, but also the

⁴⁶⁹ John O’Neal, “Motion in the Ocean: Some Political Dimensions of the Free Southern Theater,” in Thomas C. Dent, Richard Schechner, and Gilbert Moses, *The Free Southern Theater by the Free Southern Theater: A Documentary of the South’s Radical Black Theater with journals, letters, poetry and essays written by those who built it* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969), 115.

⁴⁷⁰ The following summarizes key points in Lisa Gail Collins, “The Art of Transformation: Parallels in the Blacks Arts and Feminist Art Movements,” in Lisa Gail Collins and Margo Natalie Crawford, *New Thoughts on the Blacks Art Movement* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008): 273-296 and James Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

⁴⁷¹ Smethurst, 15.

empowerment and liberation of blacks in economic, psychological, and cultural terms. The mandate was voiced forcefully by Malcolm X on June 28, 1964: “Our culture and our history are as old as man himself and yet we know almost nothing of it. We must recapture our heritage and our identity if we are ever to liberate ourselves from the bonds of white supremacy.”⁴⁷² With Malcolm X’s assassination on February 21, 1965, the movement was galvanized to action. Among the figures most strongly associated with the late 1960s black cultural revolution were LeRoi Jones and Larry Neal in New York, Hoyt Fuller and members of AfriCOBRA (African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists) in Chicago, Maulana Ron Karenga in Los Angeles, and Thomas Dent and Kalamu ya Salaam in New Orleans (among others to be discussed).⁴⁷³

Larry Neal’s 1968 manifesto entitled “The Black Arts Movement” exemplifies the movement’s militant and uncompromising aims for cultural recuperation and repossession. His targets were the “needs and aspirations of Black America” that required a “radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic” because “it is impossible to construct anything meaningful within its decaying structure.”⁴⁷⁴ Because of the “poison of ‘individual experience,’” the artistic careerism that it implied, and the “anti-human” sensibility deemed to be at its core, Neal’s statement emphatically declared:

The motive behind the Black aesthetic is the destruction of the white thing, the destruction of white ideas, and white ways of looking at the world. The new aesthetic is mostly predicated on an Ethics which asks the question: whose vision of the world is finally more meaningful, ours or the white oppressors’? What is truth? Or more precisely, whose truth shall we express, that of the oppressed or of the oppressors?⁴⁷⁵

Only through such radical commitment to creating a separatist representational space, alternative mode of collectivity, and new visual vocabulary could black writers, artists, poets, and performers unify and mobilize black Americans through consciousness raising and political action.⁴⁷⁶

Rising to this call, Jeff K. Donaldson of AfriCOBRA laid out explicit terms through which black visual artists could put forth “those visual qualities that are more expressive of our

⁴⁷² “Statement of Basic Aims and Objectives of the Organization of Afro-American Unity,” in *New Black Voices: An Anthology of Contemporary Afro-American Literature*, ed. Abraham Chapman (New York: Penguin, 1972), 563; quoted in Collins, 275.

⁴⁷³ Collins, 275.

⁴⁷⁴ Larry Neal, “The Black Arts Movement,” in *A Sourcebook of African American Performance: Plays, People, Movements*, ed. Annemarie Bean (London: Routledge, 1999), 55.

⁴⁷⁵ Neal, 56.

⁴⁷⁶ “[Black Arts] proposes a separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconology.” Larry Neal, “The Black Arts Movement,” 55.

people/art.”⁴⁷⁷ Writing in 1970, Donaldson’s manifesto for the Chicago-based collective listed six characteristics of images that would push the movement’s nationalist goals forward: “expressive awesomeness,” “symmetry that is free, [allowing for] repetition and change,” mimesis that occupies the space between the abstract and the concrete, organic forms, “superreal color” used without “rules and regulations,” and above all, “shine”—that eye-catching surface quality of “a just-washed ’Fro, of spit-shined shoes, of de-ashed elbows and knees and noses.”⁴⁷⁸ As many of these prescriptions imply, depicting the black figure and racially encoding “black” physiognomies were a central part of developing the Black aesthetic vocabulary.

Donaldson’s watercolor *Wives of Shango* (1969), Barbara Jones-Hogu’s print *Relate to Your Heritage* (1971), and Wadsworth Jarrell’s screenprint *Revolutionary* (1972) respectively capture the cool swagger, visionary figuration, and sonic and coloristic intensity of AfriCOBRA’s ideological and visual principles [figs. 255-257]. Each takes the young black female figure and undercuts any kind of photographic realism with manipulations of color and form. Donaldson’s unites the three wives of the king of the Yoruba pantheon, the great warrior god, in a shimmering mottle of mauve, yellow, and purple wash. Armed with bandoliers slung at their hips and machine guns on their shoulders, they confront and elude viewers at once, with the flanking women’s deflected stares parting the way for the central woman’s direct gaze. Regal shades of purple and black contour the females in Hogu-Jones’s print. Red, mint green, and purple lettering tells viewers to “RELATE TO OUR HERITAGE.” Such signs of heritage appear in the orange Ankh worn as a headband on the rightmost female figure (an ancestral sign of ancient Egypt) and the head wrap and facial tattoos of Afro-Caribbean and African tribal culture. These letters graphically pool in and around equally organic forms, whose visual impact is intensified by vibrating, high contrast colors. This psychedelic image thus melds the text with the objects of their lesson. Lastly, Jarrell’s portrait employs alternating warm and cool hues to magnify the reverberating revolutionary voice of his Afro’ed figure, who recalls the young Angela Davis. “Black Revolution,” “Resist,” “SEIZE TIME,” “BLACK,” and “BEAUTIFUL” emanate from the figure’s head, transforming her Afro into a textual halo that radiates forth a revolutionary consciousness. In 1968, poet Haki Madhubuti proposed “black light” as a

⁴⁷⁷ Jeff K. Donaldson, “AfriCOBRA Manifesto? Ten in Search of a Nation,” *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* (June 2012), 80.

⁴⁷⁸ Jeff K. Donaldson, “Ten in Search of a Nation,” 81. Iterations of the AfriCOBRA aesthetic were written by other members of the collective. For one additional example, see Barbara Jones-Hogu, “The History, Philosophy, and Aesthetics of AfriCOBRA,” originally published in *Afri-Cobra HI* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts at Amherst, 1973), revised by the author, Chicago 2008 and republished at <http://areachicago.org/the-history-philosophy-and-aesthetics-of-africobra/>, accessed March 6, 2015. Krista Thompson discusses “shine” as a “surfacist practice”, meaning the “concentration on the materiality or visual texture of objects within or of the picture plane.” She connects “shine” to the visual economy of hip-hop that emblemize a hypervisible and commoditized black culture. “The Sound of Light: Reflections on Art History and the Visual Culture of Hip-Hop,” *The Art Bulletin* 91:4 (December 2009), 487. Thompson’s book-length study on the same topic was published just as this dissertation was reaching completion, and will be an additional source for informing the visual strategies that Donaldson describes. See Krista A. Thompson, *Shine: The Visual Economy of Light in African Diasporic Aesthetic Practice* (Durham: Duke University Press), 2015.

metaphor that sought to reverse the signifying emptiness of blackness vis-à-vis dominant associations of whiteness (in chromatic and racial senses) with light and enlightened knowledge. Posited as “an imagined resolution of an imagined contradiction,” black light summarizes well the explosion of colors employed by these artists in reimagining the black figure animated with psychic and social selves.⁴⁷⁹ That these latter two images are prints further speak to desire for Black artists to reach a mass audience with their mythic visions of blackness. “This is ‘poster art,’” writes Donaldson. “The images are designed with the idea of mass production. An image that is valuable because it is an original or is unique is not art—it is economics, and we are not economists. We want everybody to have some.”⁴⁸⁰

It is difficult to discern how or when Brice began to reckon with the rhetoric of Black Power and the Black Arts movements and integrate those purposefully into his artistic practice. By the time he had left Jackson Square and committed himself fully to painting as a full-time professional in 1970, it seems that Brice, hostile to mass production, sought the very “economics” of gallery support that Donaldson rejected. Yet Brice’s choice did not exclude other artistic paths more patently associated with the Black Arts movement. One could point to any number of events that would have made its militant message difficult to avoid for an African American artist in either the national press or black American press: rioting in Watts, Detroit, and Newark in 1965 and 1967; the founding of the Black Panther Party in 1966; the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Senegal that same year; or the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. The Free Southern Theater (FST), the main proponent of black radical ideas in New Orleans, established their operations in the French Quarter in 1964 at the same time that Brice was doing odd jobs for Borenstein.⁴⁸¹ The FST held local performances, poetry readings, and theater workshops throughout the city up until its dissolution in 1971. During these same years, FST director Thomas Dent and Kalamu ya Salaam (Val Ferdinand), both local New Orleanians, started the literary journal *Nkombo* and renamed the FST as BLKARTSOUTH to signal the organization’s identity as the southern representatives of the movement to the national network.⁴⁸² Dent also organized the Afro-American Festival at Dillard University in 1969, inviting notables like LeRoi Jones, bebop percussionist Max Roach, and singer-activist Abby Lincoln.⁴⁸³ In short, even though we do not know if or how Brice allied himself with these

⁴⁷⁹ Originally in Haki Madhubuto’s *The Negro*, 1968. Discussed in Margo Natalie Crawford, “Black Light on the Wall of Respect: The Chicago Black Arts Movement” in Collins and Crawford, 29.

⁴⁸⁰ Donaldson, 81. Outside of Chicago, African American artists approached the question of blackness and a Black Aesthetic in a variety of ways—and often with greater nuance—that fall outside the scope of this study. I focus on AfriCOBRA as the most ideologically developed group of visual artists attempting to forge a singular Black Aesthetic.

⁴⁸¹ For a history of the founding and activities of the FST, see Dent, Schechner, et al. and Smethurst.

⁴⁸² Catherine Michna, “We Are Black Mind Jockeys: Tom Dent, the Free Southern Theater, and the Search for a Second-Line Literary Aesthetic in New Orleans,” originally published in the *Journal for Ethnic American Literature*, 1 (July 2011) and accessed March 2, 2014 at <https://catherinemichna.wordpress.com/we-are-black-mind-jockeys/>. Dent’s father was President of Dillard University.

⁴⁸³ Michna.

figures, as a young black artist embarking on his career, it would have been difficult to neglect. Moreover, resistance to mass production need not exclude an interest in reaching mass audiences.

Brice's 1971 murals painted in black neighborhoods are the strongest visual evidence of his engagement with the politics of race.⁴⁸⁴ Each site was freighted with social urgency. Brice executed one set of murals on at least two buildings on St. Philip Street in Tremé, historically home to the largest population of *gens de couleur* and consequently, a center for brass band marching traditions [fig. 258].⁴⁸⁵ The first, smaller mural contains three scenes celebrating local music history. A portrait of the Superior Orchestra (most likely enlarged from a photograph from the 1910s) and Big Jim Robinson on trombone occupy the upper portion of the brick siding [figs. 259-260]. Below, a parade fills the city streets. Striped parasols of the second line and a red heart bob throughout this exuberant scene. The second portrays the displacement of local black residents during the construction of a new cultural center, later named the Mahalia Jackson Performing Arts Center (the irony of this naming was not lost on local blacks). Starting from the far left [fig. 261-263], the mural begins with a scene of the Eureka Brass Band performing in Congo Square—an image directly referencing the first Heritage Fair of the New Orleans Jazz Festival just a year earlier. Yet as the scene progresses to the right, one witnesses the ensuing upheaval: a disembodied police officer stationed between American and Confederate flags directs the black crowd with three cartoonish arms. The group advancing on foot is led by the Presbyterian pastor-turned-hippie-activist Mike Stark, recognizable by his red beard, staff, and colorful robe, who shepherds the members of the black community along their exodus by car and horse-drawn cart. Despite the oncoming demolition occurring above them, their forcible uprooting is met with the undaunted poignant optimism of a jazz funeral procession. Roses are littered across a crowd with upraised arms. Tellingly, residents ride the horse-drawn cart typically reserved for the casket as they bid farewell to their lives in the Tremé and make their way elsewhere. Is this an image of celebration or grief? In the “Bruce Brice style,” it is both.

For the residents of the Desire Street Housing Projects, where Brice completed his second mural, the artist's sympathies were less equivocal [figs. 264-265]. The mural is no longer extant, but a partial view from a photograph shows that it commemorates the September 15, 1970

⁴⁸⁴ Dates for Brice's murals appear inconsistently throughout the archive, dated sometimes as late as 1977. For the most accurate dates, I have based my information on photographs and dated newspaper clippings that mention Brice's murals as completed.

⁴⁸⁵ Over the course of my research, I encountered a photograph of another Brice painting of Mardi Gras Indians on the exterior of the dormer windows at 1206 St. Philip Street, a double-story creole dwelling. Photograph by Anthony Fine, taken March 7, 2013, accessed September 4, 2014, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/huntergather/8648080765/in/photolist-2sP8vn-ebcF7M-8bScKi-7dyysb>. Located across the street from 1127 St. Philip Street, the site of Brice's larger murals, this extant photograph suggests that Brice's mural practice was broader than initially known. That he painted in this part of town is not surprising, as it was known among jazz preservationists to be a creative hub for sanctified music, brass bands, and Mardi Gras Indians. See, for example, Alma Freeman, “Revisiting St. Philip Church of God in Christ,” *Jazz Archivist* volume XVIII (2004): 10-19.

showdown between the Black Panther Party, who had established their political base on Piety Street near the housing development, and the New Orleans Police Department, who arrived with a “war wagon” to evict them.⁴⁸⁶ During this tense confrontation, the police shot one man who was unaffiliated with the party. As depicted in Brice’s mural, a troop of armed and helmeted white policemen advances upon a group of black men (those armed with bandoliers and guns are Black Panthers), women, and children, who were Desire residents who formed a barrier against the police from entering the housing project.⁴⁸⁷ Positioned in between is the standing figure of a black man, representing the single fatality from this confrontation, with his arms restrained by two white officers. At the far left, chained and unclothed black bodies assemble behind a tree, at whose roots lay the artist’s inscription: “To my Brothers [and Sisters?] (in the Desire [...]) By Bro. Bruce Brice 11/16/71.”

Brice’s solidarity as expressed in the Desire Street murals extended beyond its local context, functioning as a reference to the first major mural project of the Black Arts movement, the *Wall of Respect* in Chicago of 1967 [figs. 266-267]. While murals had long been a tool for artists in the twentieth century to address populist constructs such as “the people” or working-class collectivities, mural painting acquired new relevance for artists allied with the Black Arts movement who sought to embody collective engagement, not merely produce visual culture for Black pride. Thus, more than a dozen artists and writers associated with the Organization of Black American Culture collaborated with local gang leaders from Chicago’s “south side” to produce this “guerilla mural” without permits or external financial backing.⁴⁸⁸ It featured a roll call of notable black musicians, athletes, statesmen, and poets that was integrated with text: poems and sentiments from neighbors. Despite its short life—the *Wall of Respect* was created during one intense summer month in 1967 and razed in 1971 when its building suffered a fire—the mural became an inspiration and site for poetry readings, dance performances, neighborhood meetings. Featured nationally in *Ebony* to great acclaim, the *Wall of Respect* became a visual symbol of Black liberation and collective creativity that spawned similar projects throughout the United States.⁴⁸⁹ Brice’s Tremé and Desire Street murals were political statements. By exposing social injustices and urging spiritual and psychic perseverance for his African American “folk,”

⁴⁸⁶ Detailed accounts of the Black Panther Party in New Orleans can be found in Orissa Arend, *Showdown in Desire: the Black Panthers Take a Stand in New Orleans* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2009) and chapter 3 in Leonard N. Moore, *Black Rage in New Orleans: Police Brutality and African American Activism from World War II to Hurricane Katrina* (Baton Rouge; Louisiana State University Press, 2010).

⁴⁸⁷ Alan W. Barnett, *Community Murals: The People’s Art* (Philadelphia: Art Alliance Press, 1984), 105. Barnett reports that this mural was “about a young tenant who had been left to bleed to death by the police after they shot him,” while in the next scene, “White slave traders brutaliz[e] Africans who take their revenge.”

⁴⁸⁸ Jeff Donaldson, “The Rise, Fall, and Legacy of the Wall of Respect Movement,” *International Review of African American Art*, 15:1 (1998), 22. OBAC was the predecessor to AfriCOBRA.

⁴⁸⁹ “Literally thousands,” estimates Smethurst, 213. “Wall of Respect” *Ebony* 23:2 (December 1967): 48-50.

his murals would crucially serve to legitimate his professional status in the eyes of fellow artists and critics.⁴⁹⁰

“My work speaks for itself,” states the announcement for his 1972 one-man show at NOMA. As terse as an artist’s statement can be, this declaration belies the two kinds of audiences to which Brice directed his work without having to state a position himself. For example, during his 1974 interview on *The Today Show*, his Tremé mural is mentioned in the context of his artistic influences rather than as a socio-political commentary. In it, he reports that the idea for a Tremé mural came at the suggestion of Allan Jaffe, Borenstein’s business partner, an active jazz preservationist, and a real estate investor who owned two buildings that were threatened with demolition. Brice remarks, “Allan came to me and told me the story of what was happening in that area, and asked if I would like to do a mural. He furnished the paint and the wall and that’s how it came about....I didn’t think it would be as dynamite as it turned out to be. They have tour buses passing there when I was doing it—no way!”⁴⁹¹ For a national audience, Brice expresses enthusiasm over this first mural that is inflected with the personal surprise one would expect from a folk/self-taught artist. As we saw earlier, only when the mural’s socio-political content is mentioned in the 1974 *Louisiana Folk Paintings* catalogue does the spell of nostalgia disperse.⁴⁹² By contrast, it is virtually erased in Brice’s modest biography. The mural’s politicized content as well as its location in one of the poorest ghettos in New Orleans likely put it beyond the pale of fine art and popular media coverage.⁴⁹³ If the Desire Street mural spoke too transparently about volatile race relations, his Tremé mural—the jazz funeral procession marking the loss of the neighborhood—spoke to the present but retained enough visual and thematic buoyancy capable of dispelling the controversial charge that might indict those bankrolling the bulldozers.

I have mentioned the murals’ reception only to stress that courting racial controversy by painting politically confrontational subjects did not advance Brice’s career in as straightforward a manner as I think he would have wanted; instead, being vocal about race and racism had the potential to jeopardize his reputation as an artist appealing to white and black consumers alike. Brice would have well understood—and thus intuited—this need for careful negotiation with respect to his personal development as an artist. His career was built upon reciprocal, not confrontational, relationships and friendships with whites in the French Quarter: Borenstein and

⁴⁹⁰ “Inside—Outside: By Brice.” Though this clipping’s source is unidentified in the archive, I take these “artists and critics” to be African American given the source of this statement, though this may also include white liberal artists and critics who were judging Brice by the seriousness and scope of his artistic ambitions.

⁴⁹¹ “Bruce R. Brice: The Today Show via Jackson Square,” 3.

⁴⁹² The vertical mural is listed at 1127 St. Philip Street on the 1972 NOMA exhibition announcement. The address for the longer, horizontal mural has been located as Cabrini Park by William Fagaly.

⁴⁹³ I make this inference based on historical precedent. Even before the 1970 stand-off, the Desire Housing Project was taken up by the FST in a nationally televised poetry performance, “Ghetto of Desire.” Local officials successfully blacked out its broadcast on CBS in 1966 for fear of inciting local riots akin to those in Watts, suggesting how this public housing project was a contested political and symbolic site for black New Orleanians—Brice included. Dent, Schechner, and Moses, 72.

Fagaly helped Brice get his permit to show in Jackson Square, Noel Rockmore encouraged his painting, and Allan Jaffe facilitated his first mural projects, including a third mural at the Cabrini Playground. These relationships could not constitute the kind of “guerilla” beginnings that birthed The Wall of Respect. Moreover, even if Brice wanted to pursue more radical practices, in New Orleans such opposition was being tested in theater and literary circles, not in the visual arts.

What Brice knew by virtue of being a native New Orleanian, the FST learned over the course of their work in the city from 1965 to 1971. Early members of the FST attributed part of their early difficulties to the “national backlash against black cultural activity which took a separatist, Black Pride direction.” Yet much of the resistance to the theater group stemmed from the city’s large black middle class and creoles of color, who, as Gilbert Moses and Tom Dent observed, “hop[ed] that the [Free Southern Theater], with its radical ideas, would simply fade away, or go back where it came from.”⁴⁹⁴ Reverend Milton Upton, chairman of the FST’s board of directors in 1969 and pastor of a New Orleans church, understood this intersection of race and class when he explained, “[The black community in New Orleans] is not willing to get involved in too much controversy....The support we have tried to get for the theater has been a hit-and-miss kind of thing.”⁴⁹⁵ It was not a simple matter of working-class blacks never seeing “legitimate theater,” but the fact that middle-class blacks were not willing to support community theater. “Give them something special, tell them they are something special, treat them special, and they will respond. Otherwise, they couldn’t care less what happens.”⁴⁹⁶

For all of Upton’s sensitivity to the overlay of race with class, naiveté was ironically the reason for the political passivity he perceived. According to him, the local black community has been “sheltered a long time,” thus “need[ing] the kind of thing FST is doing to make him aware that we, black people, have made a significant contribution...to the culture of this country.”⁴⁹⁷ Yet we might point to his neglect of the complexity of New Orleans’ multicultural colonial diasporic history when it came to naming any sort of unified black identity. Such diversity ranged from “French- and Haitian-identifying Afro-Creoles to Black American Baptists to Afro-Latinos and Latinas” mingling with white Anglos, Jews, and Catholics.⁴⁹⁸ Perhaps for this reason, Black Arts in New Orleans, of all the urban hubs for the Black Arts Movement, rejected a single racial aesthetic theory. After a few years of importing black theater from outside the city, the FST astutely reoriented their performances around raising the consciousness of the residents’ social and cultural *interdependence* amid the panoply of racial, linguistic, class, and religious identifications.⁴⁹⁹ Consequently, metaphors of jazz band performance and *Nkombo* (the Swahili

⁴⁹⁴ Tom Dent and Jerry W. Ward, “After the Free Southern Theater: A Dialogue (1987)” in *A Sourcebook of African-American Performance*, ed. Annemarie Bean, 121 and Dent, Schechner, and Moses, 67-8.

⁴⁹⁵ Dent, Schechner, and Moses, 226, 228.

⁴⁹⁶ Dent, Schechner, and Moses, 229.

⁴⁹⁷ Dent, Schechner, and Moses, 226, 228.

⁴⁹⁸ Michna.

⁴⁹⁹ Michna.

word for “gumbo”) would become central models for achieving a participatory aesthetic that would stress the collective identity or “taste” without losing a sense of individual voices.⁵⁰⁰

What the FST would come to realize, Brice knew from personal experience: the binary terms that Black Power and Black Arts movements assigned to their political world—black and white, oppression and dominance, and authentic “blackness” versus a false racial consciousness—were difficult to assert in New Orleans. Rather, the eventual artistic path that Brice would choose was *a* Black aesthetic founded upon a participatory one similar to that of the FST. He addressed all viewers across the racial and geographical divide. Yet the vital difference was the artist’s reticence concerning his intentions. The noncontroversial nature of his festival pictures was not due to Brice’s unwillingness to defend racial pride—or worse, because of his naiveté. Rather, Brice’s depictions of New Orleans’ black expressive traditions exploited their appeal as celebratory images that could be legible across the spectrum of racial subjectivities. In emphasizing the pleasure of black festival cultures, Brice voiced his politics softly in ways that did not venture into polarizing social territory. His politics were ultimately were about “respect[ing] yourself—inside and outside.”⁵⁰¹

Always for Pleasure

The ambivalence that I am arguing for were most animated (in their latency) in Brice’s celebratory paintings of New Orleans festival life. His poster published in the “Heritage” issue of the *Vieux Carré Courier* newspaper from April 18-24, 1974 is a pertinent example.⁵⁰² (Recall that posters were simultaneously hailed by AfriCOBRA—“This is poster art”—and lamented by Richard Nick of Jackson Square—“We don’t want...reproductive art.”) For this project, Brice reproduced a painting to coincide with the weekly’s coverage of the fifth New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival taking place that week [fig. 268].⁵⁰³

This poster was a miniature conceptual map of the Heritage Fair in all of its jubilant variety. The second-line parade led by the Olympia Brass Band that cuts diagonally across the picture organizes the scene. A line of African American festival-goers pump their umbrellas and wave kerchiefs in all directions (one second-liner bends backwards with impressive flexibility) [fig. 269]. They are no doubt dancing to the tune of the musicians before them, who are led by the Grand Marshall in the lower left of the poster. He is identifiable by his black suit, sash, decorative fan, and dove poised on his shoulder. A Cajun band plays and Mardi Gras Indians “spar” in the foreground as part of their (non-fatal) musical and dance performances. Brice has captured these quintessentially New Orleans figures in their full regalia composed of body-length headdresses, ornamented apron-like costumes, color-coordinated accessories. For real-life

⁵⁰⁰ Michna.

⁵⁰¹ “Inside—Outside: By Brice.”

⁵⁰² This poster is dramatically different from the posters Noel Rockmore designed for the first posters for JazzFest in 1970.

⁵⁰³ This poster also commemorated the newspaper’s first foray into color lithography. The credit line printed in the newspaper reads, “From the Collection of David Rubenstein.” The painting is signed and dated in the upper left.

maskers, these accoutrements would be painstakingly beaded by hand over the course of a year and worn only for special occasions such as Mardi Gras, St. Joseph's Eve, "Super Sunday," and in this touristic stage, JazzFest.⁵⁰⁴ A steel drum player, sanctified singers in all-white clothing, a blues pianist, and a band fill in the upper portions of the poster. For even the first-time tourist who might be attending the Heritage Fair, the large "F" shape upon which the second-line parade advances playfully references the "fair," "fairgrounds," and "festival," while horses and jockeys locate the event at New Orleans' racing grounds. Unlike his more painterly work from just a year earlier [fig. 270], Brice's use of a bird's eye view permits a commanding view of these incidents, all of which he graphically enlivens with diverse visual textures. Stippling and feathered lines evoke hard pavement against soft grass, while scumbled marks give parasol trimmings their ruffled look. Polka-dot patterns, cross-hatched plaids, and radiant lines of Indian headdresses lend additional textural interest and accentuate the picture's sensory diversity.

In its formal directness and depiction of community festivity, and on account of its popular form, Brice's poster speaks with the kind of wide accessibility of especial concern for Black artists, who urgently felt the need for art to be immediately legible to as many viewers as possible. In the context of JazzFest, this audience included its primarily white tourists who were likely unfamiliar with the origins and rituals of black expressive forms such as the second line or Mardi Gras Indian performances. In this sense, Brice took on the role of a visual educator who provided a representative picture of local culture. This role is similar to what FST member John O'Neal described in 1968: "The Black artist, in order to communicate across that [racial] gap, becomes an *explainer*. He must interpret how his own experience relates to the 'human experience' of white people so they can understand it."⁵⁰⁵ At its most superficial, then, Brice's 1974 poster functions as an introduction to New Orleans black cultural life for audiences unfamiliar with the form and flow of these performance traditions.

Yet being an "explainer" had its liabilities, among them the risk of sacrificing one's vision as an artist when speaking from such a "divided consciousness." O'Neal continues to outline the problem, noting that the Black artist is

bound by a series of contradictions at the outset if his *intended* audience is white. Few have found the means to transcend those contradictions while remaining vital as artists and "successful" in established terms. The more seriously the Black artist tries to affect the white consciousness, the more explicative he must become. The more explicative he becomes, the less attention he gives to the essentials of his art. A kind of negative value field is established. Racism systematically verifies itself when the slave can only break free by imitating the master: by contradicting his own reality.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁴ For more information about Mardi Gras Indians, see Breulin and Lewis.

⁵⁰⁵ John O'Neal, "Motion in the Ocean," 116.

⁵⁰⁶ O'Neal, "Motion in the Ocean," 117.

The tension, as the FST experienced it, was trying to remaining rooted in one's experience as a black artist while adapting and translating those experiences for non-black audiences. Only after the artist located the truth of his or her experience could the foundation for true political action be laid, for "[if] I cut to the essence of my own truth there will lie a truth for all men [*sic*]." ⁵⁰⁷

Brice understood this necessity for a black artist to allegorize his or her own experience as a fundamental part of the freedom struggle, and it emerges in some of his artist statements. Speaking to Bernadine B. Proctor in 1982, he insists, "[My work] is me...it's original...I am not copying from anyone. The only influences are myself and my soul...I paint black people not because I am prejudiced but because they are part of my environment." ⁵⁰⁸ Elsewhere, he declares the primacy of his subjectivity in this way: "I'm just painting what I see." ⁵⁰⁹

For Brice, filling his vision with scenes of jazz funerals, second lines, and Mardi Gras Indians provided subject matter and an aesthetic that allowed him to avoid the risk of becoming too explicative—it allowed him to paint "authentically" for as many audiences as possible. As alluded to earlier in the case of his murals, Brice's disavowals of any racial agenda or artistic influence were a professional survival strategy to avoid alienating either segments of his white and black audiences. In the context of his reputation as a "folk painter," an insistence on self-taught originality was essential in staking his claim within the market. In the context of the Black Arts Movement, the imperative to be "original" and to develop a personal style was one of moral and racial responsibility. "The developing Bruce Brice style," to cite that strange Voelker interview again, emerged at the confluence of these racially circumscribed discourses. His festival scenes had the capacity to bridge them without contradiction. With such pictures, Brice could survive economically while producing images that honored cultural continuity, perseverance in the face of oppression, and vital the spiritual life practiced by his fellow black New Orleanians. ⁵¹⁰

The reconciliation—of a divided consciousness, of speaking to split audiences—made possible through these celebratory images was important in another crucial way. It allowed the artist to exercise creative freedom and psychic mobility, epitomizing the kind of artist Brice's self-taught process aspired to be: an artist who could take the relational and historical specificities of his environment and experience and incorporate them into a wholly personal vision. ⁵¹¹ If we return to the *Vieux Carré Courier* poster, we can discern ever so slightly how

⁵⁰⁷ O'Neal, "Motion in the Ocean," 120.

⁵⁰⁸ Proctor, *Black Art in Louisiana*, 28.

⁵⁰⁹ Voelker, "The Primitive of St. Peter Street," 100.

⁵¹⁰ Norman Lewis, an African American Abstract Expressionist painter working from the mid-1940s through the 1970s, has been a helpful case study in developing my thinking related to an artist's staunch reticence to admitting racial signification in his art. See essays by Ann Eden Gibson and Lowery Stokes-Sims in *Norman Lewis: Black Paintings, 1946-1977* (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 1998).

⁵¹¹ George Lewis's writing (no relation to the clarinetist discussed in chapter 2) on auto-didacticism and jazz practice in the Association for Advancement of Creative Musicians has shaped my thinking around the proceeding argument. "In this kind of pedagogy [auto-didacticism], control of the pace, approach, and nature of learning was up to the learner, in dialogue with whatever communities, traditions, histories, or genres he or she felt to be important

Brice's personal sight could expand into these liberatory realms. Sister Gertrude Morgan holds a tambourine and bible in hand as she sings beneath the Gospel Tent. In the lower right, the hippie figures refer to Alison Miner and Quint Davis, the two young organizers tapped by George Wein to gather talent for the Heritage Fairs. The masking Indians who "spar" can be further distinguished as Uptown Indians based on the pictorial work on their patches—possibly chiefs from the Creole Wild West or the Cheyenne Hunters.⁵¹² Lastly Allan Jaffe, the sole white musician on the sousaphone, plays with the Olympia Brass Band towards the front of the parade.

Perhaps the most critical figure of the ensemble is the disembodied head at the bottom edge, whose eyes peer outward towards the viewer. Though not a specific individual to my knowledge, his pose is too frontal and near-center to be incidental. His headdress rises up from the page like the sun; the stars and white disk decorating this headpiece suggests that he might be a Big Chief of a Mardi Gras Indian tribe or spiritual figurehead who invokes the "flash of the spirit."⁵¹³ As a priestly figure, he spotlights Africa as the homeland for the creolized practices that Brice depicts behind him. Consequently, his proximity to us as viewers reframes Brice's scene as an alternative to the historically white parading traditions associated with Mardi Gras and elite all-white carnival krewes. In the latter case, one only needs to refer to the history of the Mistick Krewe of Comus and its racist regulation of New Orleans' social order to comprehend the carnivalesque inversions of white carnival that "often violently abuses and demonizes the weaker, not stronger, social groups...in a process of displaced abjection."⁵¹⁴

As a counterpoint to dominant forms of Carnival masking, Joseph Roach has eloquently characterized the rituals around "masking Indian" as exemplary of "creolized intercultural" that resists forced assimilation within a narrative of colonial conquest.⁵¹⁵ They are "a rite of memory with spirit-world claims on the return of the ancestral dead," a practice of "self-fashioning revelation."⁵¹⁶ Annually, the Indians sew extravagantly beaded costumes and perform dances in annual street "battles" to determine which chief is the "prettiest." Roach has argued that these rituals are enacted so that their communities can "possess themselves again in the spirit of their ancestors, to possess again their memories, to possess again their communities."⁵¹⁷ From this

or attractive. This freedom could also shield the learner from the often quite directed insults and discouragements that were a normal part of African American participation in white-dominated, Eurocentric pedagogical processes." George Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 15. I thank James Merle Thomas for mentioning this book to me.

⁵¹² Uptown tribes typically bead and sew their costumes with pictures, rather than abstract designs. Rachel Breunlin and Ronald W. Lewis, *The House of Dance and Feathers: A Museum by Ronald W. Lewis* (New Orleans: Neighborhood Story Project, 2009), 84.

⁵¹³ Intentional citation of Robert Farris Thompson's immensely influential book of the same title.

⁵¹⁴ See Roach's analysis of "Carnival and the Law" in *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 239-281. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White 1986, 19 quoted in Todd P. Olson, "The Street Has Its Masters: Caravaggio and the Socially Marginal" in *Caravaggio: Realism, Rebellion, Reception*, Genvieve Warwick, ed. (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2006), 74.

⁵¹⁵ Roach, 182.

⁵¹⁶ Roach, 208, 198.

⁵¹⁷ Roach, 208-211.

perspective, Mardi Gras Indians are subtly acknowledged in Brice's poster, though the connection to black cultural and spiritual memory is foundational to all that occurs within it.⁵¹⁸

As a matter of visual representation, painting could only go so far as to make the embodied, transcendent experience of second-lining or masking Indian vivid. In its materiality and thingness, Brice's paintings similarly could not cultivate the participatory potential of theater that the FST emphasized in its performances, post-show discussions, and community workshops. This black radical arts group was committed to "gather and engage new communities of audiences in the city in the collaborative production of new African diasporic, counter-hegemonic, participatory art forms in the city-in-crisis."⁵¹⁹ Bruce Brice, by contrast, was content to let his paintings speak doubly "for themselves"; he wanted them to speak without declaring any overtly racialized meaning. Inasmuch as they could be construed as political, their political edge was enveloped in the personal choice to explore black spiritual content. The evasion coded in his phrase, "my paintings speak for themselves," ensured in some part his relationship to the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival organizers, even as he developed work and relationships with the black artistic community in other contexts.⁵²⁰ Along the way, he continued to produce celebratory images in the "Bruce Brice style" that would continue to be salable to a predictable market and support his career as a self-taught professional artist.

There were undeniable financial advantages of identifying as self-taught and going between the interests of art institutions and black radical politics, for equitable compensation for work was integral to achieving the economic equality that the Black Power and Black Arts movements envisioned as part of a transformed socio-political system. It helps explain, for example, why Brice would leave mural painting, what he called "charity work," for smaller canvases until resuming murals in the late 1980s and 1990s.⁵²¹ His concern for economic viability can be heard in the following statement, addressed to the African American community: "We, as a people, are creative and should create jobs by marketing our natural talents....to become a part of Black pride and heritage."⁵²² The emphasis on self-determination and economic independence likely informed his decision to manage his own gallery in the Benson Towers

⁵¹⁸ "A body possessed of its social memory—call it a 'spirit'—is a body in some sense possessed of itself." Roach, 209.

⁵¹⁹ Michna.

⁵²⁰ As Helen Regis as chronicled, it would not be until 1978 that the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival Foundation established Koindu, an independent performance and commercial space within the festival operated by the African and African American community. This shift was the result of the Afrikan American Jazz Festival Coalition's activism that pressed for structural change and economic equity for blacks within the context of the festival. Former FST member Kalamu ya Salaam and Marion Greenup Kelly, who was the first African American to join the JazzFest Festival Board in 1977, were just some of the individuals involved in this significant development. Helen Regis, "Producing Africa at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival," *African Arts* 46:2 (Summer 2013), 70-85.

⁵²¹ Barnett, 105. Examples of Brice's later mural work include a mural for the East New Orleans Public Library and the Louisiana State Museum. See *Times-Picayune* for 27 October 1988 and Bruce Eggler, "30 Artists Create Mural of Black Life," *Times-Picayune*, December 13, 1991, section B, page 1.

⁵²² "Inside—Outside: By Brice."

within the New Orleans Center shopping mall located on Loyola Avenue near the Superdome. There he sold his prints and original paintings from 1993 to 2005. Eventually, gallery's management became overwhelming, "[taking] about twelve years out of my life."⁵²³

Nevertheless, after 2005, Brice continued to paint, running a gallery from his home, and showing annually at JazzFest until his death in September 2014. Herein, I believe, lies the clearest kinship Brice has with Sister Gertrude Morgan, a self-taught artist of a different sort. Morgan was not only a fixture of New Orleans' local fabric. Her life exemplified single-minded devotion to painting. Like the *amor infiniti* that motivated Morgan's painting, Brice's devotion to art derives from a comparable ardor for the freedom his artistry releases: "When I'm painting, I'm lost. I don't even know what day it is. Why should I? I just sit there, working and talking to myself about what I'm doing."⁵²⁴ We gain further insight into this spiritual kinship in a painting reproduced on a press photo from a 1975 gallery flyer [fig. 271]. Although the reproduction is monochromatic, we can discern a Tree of Life at the center with a serpent coiled around it. To the left, a large figure in white—surely a depiction of Morgan—deploys her sanctified power to overcome the devil at her feet. The right side is difficult to discern, but the sense of spiritual renewal in the face of injustice is invoked by her angelic white clothing.

Bruce Brice's relationship with Sister Gertrude Morgan thus illuminates a concept of "self-taught" that diverges from the primitivist rubric staged by Noel Rockmore, the so-called insider. Brice's career casts Sister Gertrude Morgan not as a naïve but as a point of entry into the elder woman's indelible place within New Orleans' social fabric; such a position was the consequence of her sanctified practice—of which the formal visual language she developed was a part. *A Look at Sister Gertrude Morgan* [fig. 236] projects this sense of Morgan's unwavering presence in the community, showing the artist indoors and outdoors, teaching children, healing neighbors, battling the devil, and bellowing her songs. This painting celebrates Morgan's sanctified participatory aesthetic that her extended raised arms (occurring five times) set in motion that hails her audiences' responses. In Brice's view, Morgan's work as a painter is secondary to her role as a spiritual matron.

This persona appears more essential in *Rockmore in Studio* [fig. 251]. As we saw earlier, this strange and whimsical painting commemorated the bohemian lifestyle of the French Quarter that nurtured Brice's artistic interests, and Rockmore was a crucial encourager. Yet given Brice's subsequent perseverance in straddling both the market and his desire for a racially-conscious art, we might revisit this painting with a renewed awareness of Morgan's role in the composition showing the sacred and the profane in close quarters. Here, the Bride of Christ presides over a tawdry scene, but the juxtaposition between Morgan's holy dress and the scattered nudes is precisely what Brice employs to demonstrate the breadth of Morgan's social largesse that he believed her spirituality to possess. One could think of Morgan as a spiritual *ambianceur* for

⁵²³ Interview with the artist, 2013. Until further research can be conducted on the extent of Brice's spiritual paintings, many of which I have seen on display at JazzFest but have not photographed, the reader is asked for the benefit of the doubt that this theme was of special importance for Bruce Brice.

⁵²⁴ Voelker, 100.

Brice's New Orleans, in which her artistic and spiritual independence set the tone for an expressivity that was unencumbered by the expectations of the mainstream. Sister Gertrude Morgan became, for Brice, an exemplar of a resilient, jubilant black culture. In his pictures of the Big Easy's celebrated street life, he sought to connect with and extend its inclusivity and sense of self-possession [fig. 272].⁵²⁵ What Morgan extended to Brice was the sensation of continuity and kinship in a shared place.⁵²⁶

In *Zulu Mardi Gras* painted in 1976, details of his 1974 JazzFest poster attain even greater visual impact, here each pavement stone, headdress feather, umbrella rosette, and striped and dotted shirt are outlined. Pallbearers dressed in blue carry a coffin whose occupant we can see is now resting easy, his debts "all paid up" as the banner announces [fig. 273]. Music of the Tuxedo Brass Band, along with the cries of the single mourner, carries this person's spirit into the next life as the others burst forth with dancing and kerchief-waving. They are "cutting the body loose," affirming life of the dead through surges of catharsis. Intercepting this group is another tide of celebrants on the right side of the canvas, starting with a trio of parade floats with animal heads that spill downward—like the baubles thrown over their sides—toward another brass band and Mardi Gras Indians [figs. 274-275]. Though the figures seem to strike motionless poses, Brice arranges them with such density as to form one restless visual mass.

The New Orleans that Brice choose to recognize, honor, and celebrate seems so simply rendered in a work like *Zulu Mardi Gras*. Yet we would miss the heart of its message if we did not relate its "speech" to the key word in the title: Zulu. The spirit of Brice's Mardi Gras has a distinctly creolized inflection. Zulu names the historically black Mardi Gras krewe, started as an African American satire on white Carnival rituals of blackface minstrelsy; its stunning "semiotic cannibalism" occurred (and still occurs) yearly when African Americans inhabit the meanest black stereotypes of jungle kings and tribespeople in grotesque blackface.⁵²⁷ The Zulu parade is a Mardi Gras celebration at its most ribald, tactically disguised, and gratifyingly pleasurable pitch. Brice's painting takes this mantra at face value, it would seem, urging its viewers to "love always," as one small banner reads. Even so, it is vital to remember that Brice's call to celebratory participation was not a platitude but a professional conclusion, an artistic strategy he derived in part from Sister Gertrude Morgan's inspiration, and in part from his younger generation's commitment to racial pride.

⁵²⁵ A similar episode of artistic admiration of an "outsider artist" can be found in the Chicago Imagists' celebration of Joseph Yoakum in the 1960s. See Barbara E. Freeman, "Chicago Imagists and Outsider Art" (MFA thesis, Art History, University of Southern California, 1992).

⁵²⁶ The sense of connection and proximity that Brice is constructing relates to the idea as Sally Promey has argued in her study of the collapse of sacred and secular meaning in Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park: "Sensation offers and constitutes what [Christopher] Tilley has characterized as a 'communion, or coexistence, between body and thing.'" Sally Promey, "Spiritual Sensations and Material Transformations in Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park," in Promey, ed., *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice*, ed. Sally Promey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 628.

⁵²⁷ Felipe Smith, "Zulu Parade in New Orleans Carnival," *African Arts* 46:2 (Summer 2013), 28.

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When Bruce Brice died on Sunday, September 14, 2014, the obituary in the *Times-Picayune* pronounced, “Jazz Fest’s First Poster Designer Has Died.”⁵²⁸ For an individual who had spent a lifetime creating paintings, murals, posters, and prints, “designer” might not have been the preeminent way that the late artist would have wanted to be remembered. Not because it was not true, but because it belies the trajectory of a career in which the imprimatur of “artist” was an indisputable factor informing his professional decisions. The terrain of Brice’s artistic career was staked out by categorical labels, whether “folk”, “primitive”, “naïve”, or “black,” that press coverage during this lifetime would often circuitously undermine. Take, for example, this review of a 1981 exhibition that refers to Brice as a “self-taught folk artist”:

Brice’s childhood was surrounded by the excitement and danger of New Orleans’ city streets. Consequently he is not a naïve personality. His art is anything but naïve or folksy. The context is historic, laced with nostalgia. Yet, if labels must be applied, he accepts the term folk artist. But in definition, and judging by the whole range of subject matter, Brice is a people-painter.⁵²⁹

Folk painter? People painter? Black artist? This critic’s statement epitomizes the ways in which lacking academic training could mean several different things. For Brice, being “self-taught” permitted him to occupy each category with legitimacy at a register tuned differently to each category’s investments, whether level of artistic skill, identification with a racial group, or popularity of his paintings’ reception. Each usage signifies differently, yes, but more importantly signifies in relationship to the interests and social position of the one who utters the term.

In Brice’s valuation of the term, “self-taught” provided the symbolic traction for developing a personalized artistic language that spoke multiply to the high art world’s interest in “modern primitive” formalism and simultaneously to the experience of a local black community in its content. Identifying as “self-taught” thus fostered a great sense of pride in his achievements. In the spring of 2013, Brice stated frankly, “I’d rather die than stop being a creator.”⁵³⁰ Though unaware at the time of the cancer with which he was diagnosed just weeks before his death, Brice had been suffering from severe nerve pain in his back, undergoing surgery in 2009 and receiving subsequent spinal injections. Out of this bodily pain, I believe, his resolve to make pictures was further galvanized. In his latest artist statement, he had written, “When I culturally enhanced [*sic*] one’s knowledge than [*sic*] I know that my God-given talents

⁵²⁸ Doug MacCash, “Bruce Brice, Jazz Fest’s first poster designer has died, TV station reports,” *Times-Picayune* September 15, 2014, accessed September 15, 2014, http://www.nola.com/arts/index.ssf/2014/09/bruce_brice_jazz_fests_first_p.html.

⁵²⁹ Betje Howell, “To Bruce Brice, Art Should Be Fun,” Weekend Outlook pages of unidentified southern California newspaper dated Saturday, 5 September 1981, 6D. Folder 1, Bruce Brice Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University. The review refers to an exhibition held at the Fowler-Mills Gallery in Santa Monica, California, from August 27 through September 13, 1981.

⁵³⁰ Interview, May 22, 2013.

are at work...Whenever you see a Bruce Brice painting, you see people interacting, a social awareness, and a documentary of the past, the present, and fragments of the future.”⁵³¹ This sentiment represented the totalizing power that he believed his self-developed art to possess—to imagine, respond to, and incorporate the social life of the world around in search of profound artistic gratification. Borne out of a lifetime of persistence and learning, as well as adapting his practice for economic survival, Brice’s career as a “self-taught artist” consistently returned to his own measure of success based on a ceaseless capacity to create, and create again. He learned this lesson of dedication from the several homegrown artists, musicians, and performers that surrounded him in New Orleans, Sister Gertrude Morgan being, perhaps, one of the most singular and extraordinary.

⁵³¹ Bruce Brice Gallery, accessed January 16, 2015, <http://brucebrice.com/>.

Conclusion

Posthumous Conversions: Remembering and Exhibiting Sister Gertrude Morgan

Sister Gertrude Morgan passed away on July 8, 1980, peacefully in her sleep.⁵³² Just over two weeks later on July 24, approximately 21 mourners came to pay their respects at a service held at the stately House of Bultman funeral home. Its location in the historically white section of uptown New Orleans would have made it an unlikely location to memorialize an African American woman who lived in the Lower Ninth Ward. Yet, as we have seen with Morgan's participation at New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festivals, liberal politics and the patronage from a few, primarily white, interested parties could usher "folk" outsiders—defined by their social difference from those in the mainstream—into a popular cultural sphere. The final event of Morgan's life on earth was the product of such a dynamic. Regenia Perry reported that Larry Borenstein had persuaded Muriel Bultman Francis (an eminent New Orleans art collector, philanthropist, and owner of the funeral home) to host the event by appealing to her liberal sensibility. To honor one of "Louisiana's finest folk artists," the reasoning went, would reflect well on this venerable white institution.⁵³³ Apparently unreachable, Perry remained uninformed of Morgan's passing until months later when she received a returned letter in the mail marked "deceased."⁵³⁴

Of the twenty-one names registered in the guestbook, just over half represented relationships forged within the "collaborative symbolic venture" of folk art [figs. 276-277].⁵³⁵ Francis, along with Dr. and Mrs. R.J. Ryan (major collectors of Louisiana "folk" painter Clementine Hunter), likely came to honor Morgan in the capacity in which they knew (of) her: as a naïve folk painter, an object for their nostalgic desire. Still others, like Borenstein, his children, and Bill Russell, along with other friends of Preservation Hall, came to memorialize the final passing of this charismatic French Quarter figure who regularly passed through 726 St. Peter Street. For these people, Morgan's death likely signified the loss of a tie to New Orleans' "authentic" past they had worked so diligently to preserve, as much as it was a personal one. Morgan's death was proof of that "*Time is running out for us all*," as Borenstein had written in reference to Rockmore's ghostly Preservation Hall portraits.⁵³⁶ Such a sentiment would have turned morbid in most cases. Yet as the recorded sound of her gravelly voice and insistent tambourine was played during the service, the joy of the moment would not have been lost on this particular audience. "I've Got a New World in My View" is a song Morgan often sang; upon

⁵³² Fagaly, 26. For further details concerning the planning of the memorial service, see Fagaly 74, fn. 80-82.

⁵³³ Fagaly interview with Perry, July 10, 1996.

⁵³⁴ Fagaly interview with Perry, July 10, 1996.

⁵³⁵ Ardery, 284, 277. "An object of nostalgic desire, folk art satisfies fantasies of anchorage, tenderness, and control among those who by choice and social circumstance cannot find such satisfactions otherwise."

⁵³⁶ Borenstein, [6]. Emphasis original.

her earthly death, she was presumably now reunited with her Lord, the object of her life's affection, labor, and love.

Yet there are still others who were in attendance, like Mr. and Mrs. Willie Brown, an African American couple who knew Morgan from her days as a Flake Street missionary and regularly supplied the artist with groceries during her later years in life.⁵³⁷ Unlike those names already mentioned, the Browns represent two lesser known dimensions of Morgan's social circles. First, their unremarked-upon presence in the literature on Morgan reminds us of her position within an African American community differentiated by class, region, religious affiliations, occupations, generations, and colonial histories. Second, the Browns might stand in for the many people who knew Morgan before she accrued renown as an artist—those whose relationships with the artist were *not* mediated through a sound recording, a painting, or a photograph. A lone source reports that some neighbors felt she was a charlatan; a few of her “children”—those whom she looked after and recruited to her street ministry—did not maintain relationships with her in adulthood.⁵³⁸ Perhaps, as Fagaly has surmised, Morgan's eccentricities and extreme faith put her at a certain remove from all sectors of society.⁵³⁹ These scant details and conjectures reinforce the impression that Morgan was increasingly isolated from one community at the same time that memory of her was dictated by the white liberal community that celebrated her late in life.

It would take a creative feat of fiction writing—not a dissertation—to speculate about how Morgan managed her social relationships, whom she kept as close friends, or how she embraced her seeming isolation. But I want to insist on posing these questions because they force us to read against the grain of formulaic biographical narratives that structure the self-taught/outsider art field. Histories of twentieth-century and black folk art have insisted upon one type: the socially marginal maker who, ignorant of the contemporary art world and falling outside the pale of artistic influence, meets an art world insider who mediates his or her entrance into the mainstream. Rarely considered are sociological and individual reasons for such perceived isolation. To deem such inquiries unimportant or negligible is tacit acceptance of the primitivist attitude and uncritical stance of the elite structures that enable such difference in the first place.

Rather than accept or reinforce this construction of Morgan's isolation, this dissertation has sought to illuminate the socially mediated, culturally derived, and historically contingent aspects of her life. In chapter 1, I analyzed Morgan's autobiographical paintings and writings to grasp the theological and lived imperatives of sanctification. Especially crucial in this chapter was reconstructing Morgan's sense of camaraderie with other women that resulted in her conversion and sanctification, and enabled her social mobility and financial independence.

⁵³⁷ Fagaly interview, June 13, 2013. At the time of writing, six names in the guestbook have not been securely identified.

⁵³⁸ Fagaly, 18.

⁵³⁹ Fagaly, 67.

Sanctification also provided the rhetorical language and metaphor of marriage that destabilized the fixities of race's binary construction.

My narrative in chapter 2 detailed the ways in which Morgan's preaching and musical performances, and subsequently her art, gained visibility as objects of heritage for an implied white audience. It is easy to assume that African Americans functioned only as commodified forms of the "traditional" within the milieu of Preservation Hall, its predominantly white impresarios, and its white tourist market—rather than as authors of alternative heritage narratives or its strategic consumers. For this reason, I have concentrated on Morgan's engagement with the commercial market; I sought to bring into relief her agency that she exercised within this cultural environment, from dictating the prices of her art to encouraging the production of additional commodities for sale, such as records. I also showed how the market had a demonstrable impact on the size, variety, and compositions of her art. Yet there remain few sources that can shed light on how she imagined her market and the degree to which African American consumers were on in her mind. Would "unsaved" have sufficed as the most basic qualification for Morgan's target audience? Did she intuit the white predilection for her untutored aesthetic? What was her reception like among other African Americans? Before the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival dedicated Koindu as the exclusively all-black administered portion of the festival, how did African American festival-goers regard an artist like Morgan?

Chapter 3 suggested at least two ways in which Morgan's folk aesthetic garnered local interest that was crucially shaped by race. My analysis of the intertextuality of Morgan's work followed two threads. The first traced the engagement of Noel Rockmore, whose attitude towards Morgan's spirituality and expressive painting was—predictably, perhaps—primitivist. As a white artist fully inducted into the art world's expectations from an early age, Rockmore indulged his fascination with Morgan as a spiritually regenerative figure not only in his photographs of her, but also in the paintings that liken her to Henri Rousseau's dreamer. Like many modernists before him, Rockmore aligned himself with a "primitive" figure to explore his own creative power. Bruce Brice's career, by contrast, delineated a more vexed cultural terrain. As a non-academically-trained African American artist several generations younger than Morgan, Brice had to contend with "folk" and "self-taught" formulations that were construed differently by elite white and working-class African American audiences. My discussion of Brice brought to light the radical spirituality that placed black expressive traditions beyond the purview of white audiences during the 1970s. Whereas Rockmore's art channeled and decontextualized Morgan's spirituality to bolster his own art, Brice incorporated Morgan within the larger social fabric of New Orleans' African American street culture as a means to create his own racialized aesthetic rooted in local communities and black performance. Here, I demonstrated the range of symbolic purposes that Morgan's self-taught and religious background could offer to artists occupying different racial positions.

Although Bruce Brice and Sister Gertrude Morgan were shown together as "Louisiana Folk Painters" several times in the 1970s, by the 1980s, their careers would dramatically diverge in ways emblematic of art world shifts surrounding African American art and the position of

self-teaching. Brice would be excluded from the Corcoran Gallery of Art's 1982 seminal show, *Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980*, whereas Morgan's inclusion secured her enduring presence within the contemporary art world. This bifurcation speaks to the formative moment when one "black folk" aesthetic was defined and separated from all others; consequently, the exhibition has been regarded as groundbreaking if controversial in its propositions. Rather than weigh in with a final judgment, I am interested in using Morgan as a lens for specifying the show's achievements, as well as considering the tradeoffs in light of its curatorial aim to legitimize the status of self-taught production as art, rather than ethnographic material. How might we situate the exhibition's impact world and suggest future directions for dissolving the borders between the insider/outsider binary?

In White Cubes: Sister Gertrude Morgan in *Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980* at the Corcoran Gallery of Art

When *Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980* opened at the Corcoran Gallery of Art on January 15, 1982, Sister Gertrude Morgan's work was installed in its own gallery, whose white walls replicated the all-white interior of the Everlasting Gospel Mission [figs. 63, 179-180, 278]. Against these bare expanses, several of her paintings are recognizable even from the vantage point of the camera positioned in another room. Among the most visible are two Revelation Charters at the far left, seven painted fan constructions mounted within the doorframe, and two visionary scenes that appear immediately behind the near wall that protrudes from the photograph's right edge. In addition, several multiple- and single-figured works are double-hung throughout the gallery. For many reviewers, the effect of viewing forty-four of Morgan's works in this pristine space was transcendent; John Russell of *The New York Times* declared, "The Gertrude Morgan room at the Corcoran may well be the happiest enclosed space in the country."⁵⁴⁰

In describing the immersive, self-contained, and visually "ecstatic" environment, Russell could just as easily have been referring to the effects of the "white cube" as the curators' intention to recreate the interior of Morgan's home. This observation is not meant to misconstrue Russell's statement, but to consider yet another instance in which Morgan and the art world come together in uneven though mutually reinforcing ways.

The "white cube" installation at the Corcoran Gallery of Art spoke the curatorial language of high modernism and its emphasis on art's autonomy from lived experience. Brian O'Doherty described the peculiar effects of this display convention in a series of 1976 essays appearing in *Artforum*, which were then published collectively in 1986 as *Inside the White Cube*. For him, the "unshadowed, white, clean, artificial" space of the gallery "is devoted to the technology of esthetics. Works of art are mounted, hung, scattered for study. Their ungrubby surfaces are untouched by time and its vicissitudes. Art exists in a kind of eternity of

⁵⁴⁰ "A Remarkable Exhibition of Black Folk Art in America," *The New York Times*, February 14, 1982, D33.

display...there is no time.”⁵⁴¹ In this space, art is sequestered from the outside world, where the “presence before a work of art...means that we absent ourselves in favor of the Eye and Spectator.”⁵⁴² In this photograph of the Gertrude Morgan room, the camera fulfills this effect of isolated vision to the letter, substituting its lens for the disembodied viewer within an empty gallery room.⁵⁴³ Sequestered from history, artworks become objects for formal evaluation alone.

Short of occupying the gallery herself (an impossibility, as Morgan had passed away in 1980), Morgan intended for her paintings to evangelize in her stead; for this aim, she could not have asked for a more appropriate space. Against the Corcoran’s blank white walls, Morgan’s effusive cursive, painterly gestures, and vibrant colors clamor for the visitor’s attention. Free to “take on its own life,” Morgan’s visionary pictures and exhortations—such as those appearing on the upper Revelation Charter or *A Poem of My Calling*, which were both included in *Black Folk Art*—are given their full signifying intensity in this “magic chamber, a concentration of the mind” [figs. 279-280].⁵⁴⁴ If the white cube was designed to impart eternal value to the artworks hanging on its walls, Morgan’s art matched its intent. With her self-portraits as guides, her paintings specified sanctification as one aesthetic path towards Morgan’s goal of transcendence. In sum, her vibrant artworks commanded the evacuated space of the white gallery, matching modernism’s utopianism.⁵⁴⁵

Their ability to do so is owed in large part to Morgan’s understanding of her art as a commodity and as a packaged surrogate for her gospel message. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, a fundamental part of her artworks’ exchange value comprised not only the money she received for them (or charged for them, as we saw in her correspondence with Regenia Perry). It also lay in Morgan’s hope that her didactic writing could efficaciously incite a viewer to follow her exhortations—to sing and look up biblical scriptures. Her pictures thereby fulfilled the obligations of her calling as a missionary. Autonomously, they had to signify the form and content of her testimony from her embodied self as the Bride. And they had to travel. Facilitating this process was the rhetoric of black folk art that co-curators Jane Livingston and

⁵⁴¹ Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica and San Francisco, CA: The Lapis Press, 1986), 15.

⁵⁴² O’Doherty, 55.

⁵⁴³ “The Eye is the only inhabitant of the sanitized installation shot.” O’Doherty, 42. This photograph is the only view of the exhibition as it was installed at the Corcoran Gallery of Art (the Corcoran exhibition files did not contain installation photographs). At the time of writing, I have not yet sought out installation views from *Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980* as it was shown at other venues, which included the J.B. Speed Museum in Louisville, KY; the Brooklyn Museum of Art, NY; the Craft and Folk Art Museum, Los Angeles, CA; The Institute for the Arts, Rice University, Houston, TX; The Detroit Institute of Arts, MI; the Birmingham Museum of Art, AL; and the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, IL. A proposed European tour that included London, Dusseldorf, and Zurich never materialized. Corcoran Gallery of Art Exhibition Files, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

⁵⁴⁴ O’Doherty, 5, 80.

⁵⁴⁵ “The ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is ‘art.’ The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself.” O’Doherty, 14.

John Beardsley defined in this landmark exhibition.⁵⁴⁶ For them, “black folk art” was preeminently about gratuitous aesthetics that expressed an artist’s “whole-minded connectedness to the world, to emotional experience in the present moment.”⁵⁴⁷ The weight that black folk art placed on the artist’s expressive capacities strongly buttressed Morgan’s mission to testify about her sanctified life.

The ability for Morgan’s works to command the gallery space was also due in part to their capacity to re-signify the white cube’s emptiness as plenitude. In the handful of reviews that remarked upon Morgan’s gallery installation, words like “stark” or “bone-white” often appear as part of their descriptions.⁵⁴⁸ Critical emphasis on severity, barrenness, or a just-stripped surface proceeds from the modernist conception of the gallery as a space of emptiness and formal reduction.⁵⁴⁹ Yet as we have already seen elsewhere, in Morgan’s sanctified built environment, as with her own body and in her paintings, white related to an imaginative space which was always additive—not subtractive. If the pattern of reproducing the catalogue’s photographs of the artists within the exhibition space holds, then Guy Mendes’ full-length portrait of Morgan, seated in the Everlasting Gospel Mission, would have been hanging near her white-walled gallery space [fig. 281]. Mendes’ photograph captures the totalizing reach of Morgan’s application of white materials to her body and surroundings. His image gives us a view of her now familiar head-to-toe white garments, as well as her environment, including the whitewashed wall, baseboards, and chairs (one of which has been draped and padded with white sheets). White appears as the substance that coats her folding chairs with opaque color; or it is handled as the “stuff” that encloses her body in cotton or encases her feet with white buckled shoes. Indexing Morgan’s preoccupation with maintaining her sanctification, her prolific material engagement with things white was an altogether different conceptual understanding of this bright hue than that of the modernist art museum. With this in mind, the white walls of “the happiest enclosed space” could have described the felicitous coincidence of Morgan’s art within the space of the modernist gallery; white could function doubly as a replication of her environment and a validation of her paintings’ status as high art.

Therefore, even as we might have understood the history of Morgan’s art as one of mutual reinforcement with the rhetoric of black folk art and its modernist inflections, we should be utterly clear that her artistic practice diverges from these larger aesthetic ideologies. In the same way that the many textures of white appearing in the Everlasting Gospel Mission are unlike the smooth blank walls of the Corcoran Gallery of Art’s installation, Morgan’s sanctified aims did not align perfectly with those of the art world. Whereas the white cube was a place for art to

⁵⁴⁶ As I explain in this dissertation’s introduction, my use of the phrase “black folk art” adheres to the terms laid out by Livingston, which explicitly excludes craft.

⁵⁴⁷ Livingston, 16.

⁵⁴⁸ For “stark,” see Mary Schmidt Campbell, “Black Folk Art in America,” *Art Journal* 42:4 (December 1, 1982): 345–46; “bone-white” in Russell, D33.

⁵⁴⁹ In O’Doherty’s words, “high art vacuumed the picture plane.” O’Doherty, 36.

be seen and for bodies to dissolve, Morgan's home was meant for bodies to be transformed in the flesh—as the many photographs of her prayer room show.

Distinguishing between black folk art's modernism and Morgan's sanctification ramifies how we understand the financial implications of their convergence. Even if Morgan never talked about her paintings as “art,” she did understand them explicitly as commodities. Thus, her paintings were ideal complements to the institutions of art that were, and still are, entangled within an economic system. O'Doherty understood this reality from his position as a critic and artist. He argued that the white cube affected the ultimate transformation of the art object into a “product” with exchange value, allowing it to be

filtered through galleries, offered to collectors and public institutions, written about in magazines partially supported by the galleries, and drifting towards the academic apparatus that stabilizes ‘history’—certifying, much as banks do, the holding of its major repository, the museum. History in art is, ultimately, worth money.⁵⁵⁰

Essential to O'Doherty's argument is the way that the white cube (and the apparatus of modernism it served) obscures these real-world operations of exchange, circulation, and valorization. In the immediate context of *Black Folk Art in America*, anthropologist Nelson Graburn was one of the few reviewers to see through these “architectonics of transcendence” and detect the underlying economic and social realities that O'Doherty and Ardery lay bare.⁵⁵¹ Rather than rehearse tropes of discovery as most reviewers did, Graburn noted the seeming contradiction between folk art's ideological claim for its artists' cultural isolation and the fifty-four individual collectors and twenty-five museums and galleries who lent to the exhibition. By the time objects like Morgan's had reached the galleries of the Corcoran, they had been bought and collected, and by inclusion in this ground-breaking exhibition, were having “their prescient collections ‘authenticated’ and nationally circulated, which greatly increases the marketable and tax-deductible value.”⁵⁵²

Little evidence suggests that Morgan understood these operations in O'Doherty's institutionalized terms or specifically within the scope of an art museum as a final destination for her paintings. In this sense, Morgan fits the outsider characterization all too well. However, we need to remember that Morgan's sanctified belief was a totalizing worldview that sought to assimilate all aspects of the world into itself. To the degree that she aspired for her gospel message to circulate widely—as we saw in chapter 2, she longed to travel to California and

⁵⁵⁰ O'Doherty, 87.

⁵⁵¹ Simon Sheikh, “Positively White Cube Revisited,” accessed April 10, 2015, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/positively-white-cube-revisited>.

⁵⁵² Nelson Graburn, “Black Folk Art in America,” *Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 55 (April 1983), 5.

marveled when her artworks reached a university in Papua New Guinea—she desired to extend her mission beyond the geographical confines of New Orleans. This aspiration would have included the art museum and its commercial sibling, the art gallery. Morgan had direct experiences with both during her lifetime: first and more formatively the environment in Borenstein’s gallery where she first performed in the context of other artists’ work, and then at the New Orleans Museum of Art in 1973 during her group show with Clementine Hunter and Bruce Brice’s paintings [fig. 282]. In these spaces where framed paintings and drawings could garner the attention and cash of many, there can be little doubt that Morgan did *not* understand the social role of art to generate renown, public interest, and financial gain. Yet Morgan did not fully assimilate into the artistic mainstream, as a matter of her faith. To the extent that she did recognize and enjoy her late-blooming reputation as the artist and Bride of Christ, her sanctified belief prevented her from assuming sole credit: Jesus was her groom and her airplane, both partner and vehicle for her evangelism. He opened the doors to many of the nation’s museum galleries and private homes.



In Morgan’s art, the organizers of *Black Folk Art in America* had an exemplar of powerful religious orthodoxy that fit their conception of a black avant-garde folk artist. Though black folk art as a communally-defined aesthetic of racial identity framed Livingston and Beardsley’s definition, gone was the familiar notion of functionalism that had distinguished more conservative, anthropological definitions of folk art. With Brice’s exclusion, gone also was artwork with overt sentimental appeal. In its place, Livingston’s catalogue essay, “What It Is,” presented an argument for a populist sort of avant-garde aesthetic exemplified in “full-fledged gratuitous art objects, paintings and drawings and sculpture.”⁵⁵³ Black folk artists, she maintained, were “generally untutored yet masterfully adept, displaying a grasp of formal issues so consistent and so formidable that it can be neither unselfconscious nor accidentally achieved.”⁵⁵⁴

The universalism that these twenty African American artists allegedly offered was also profound, relating to “transcendent certainty of underlying abstract values.”⁵⁵⁵ Yet diverging from the elitism found within established modes of modernist formalism, Livingston asserted the egalitarian potential for “black folk” to speak widely through a “sensibility to which every one of us can relate on some level, whether out of the most basic or the most specialized capacity to appreciate visual form... [of] this astounding black American visual outpouring.”⁵⁵⁶ Framed in such terms, the possibility of such broad empathic accessibility and its never-before

⁵⁵³ Livingston, “What It Is,” 11.

⁵⁵⁴ Livingston, “What It Is,” 11.

⁵⁵⁵ Livingston, “What It Is,” 13.

⁵⁵⁶ Livingston, “What It Is,” 23.

acknowledged aesthetic presence in the museum world supplied black folk art its radical power—and these objectives framed the installation of the exhibition.

My aim in this conclusion is not to survey the host of problems, contradictions, and ambiguities of Livingston's essay; several others, like sociologist Eugene Metcalf, have written about modernism's focus on visual formalism as a perpetuation of debilitating racial stereotypes and social control of aesthetic naming.⁵⁵⁷ Here, I want to highlight Metcalf's charge that Livingston and Beardsley's modernism produced a "falsified context, created to satisfy a priori assumptions about folk art, its meaning, and its makers," and rejected "real historical context in favor of a decontextualized and vaguely expressed aesthetic."⁵⁵⁸ These exhibitions did not so much lack "real historical context," I would wager, as they placed too much faith in individual biography and photography's ability to capture documentary detail that they hoped could perform the kind of art historical redress and inclusion so forcefully stated in Livingston's essay. We have seen that for Morgan, photography's ability to reproduce her paintings coincided with her evangelistic aims. Yet for other artists in the exhibition, the capacity for photographs to bring artists' worlds in closer proximity to museum viewers was less direct and uneven.

Archival images from the Corcoran show are scarce, but we have photographs from its installation at the Brooklyn Museum. Examining these pictures can help us understand some of the challenges of placing the burden of historical presence squarely on photographic portraits [figs. 283-288]. In these gallery views, the three-dimensional artworks of William Edmondson, Leslie Payne, and Ulysses Davis are accompanied by photographic portraits with a longer descriptive label. We can safely assume that these panels relay biographical information (distilled from the catalogue's text) and outline how each individual came to make his art given the orientation of Livingston's curatorial essay. Interesting here is how the whole of an artist's life history is invoked with such proximity to the installation. This arrangement allows the documentary nature of the photographs and their anecdotal captions to vivify the space with the artist's presence. Arising from such visual and biographical details, the composite image of racial, age, and geographical distance invites the imagination of the viewer, black, white, or otherwise, to participate in the act of artistic discovery that the curators present.

For example, the assembly of pedestals bearing William Edmondson's limestone sculptures is dramatically lit, as if to restage before the viewer the revelatory vision that prompted Edmondson to begin sculpting (the moment when "Jesus...planted the seed of carving in me," as the catalogue entry mentions) [figs. 283-284].⁵⁵⁹ Hovering above his carving, *Preacher*, is a reproduction of Louise-Dahl Wolf's photograph of the artist. An intimately composed portrait, Dahl-Wolf's image mobilizes the rhetoric of close connection and empathy that Livingston has urged viewers to extend to these artists. Payne and Davis's panels, which are hung nearer to eye level, are visually more accessible in this way [figs. 285-288]; but

⁵⁵⁷ Eugene W. Metcalf, "Black Art, Folk Art, and Social Control," *Winterthur Portfolio* 18:4 (1983): 271–89.

⁵⁵⁸ Kenneth L. Ames in *Beyond Necessity: Art in the Folk Tradition* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 21, quoted in Metcalf, 281.

⁵⁵⁹ *Black Folk Art in America*, 88.

Edmondson's picture, I would argue, is not so far from the eye's reach. Rather, his visual elevation reinforces his metaphorical elevation as an artist through three additional visual cues: his three-quarter pose capped by a upturned gaze, the archaic form of his sculpture that this gaze traverses as he looks toward his divine inspiration, and the shift of focus from the crisp details of his denim overalls and work shirt toward the blurrier, upward section of the photograph as our gaze follows his. Instead of providing information about Edmondson's Tennessee upbringing or his Baptist doctrine, the museum installation spotlights his relationship to a source of creative inspiration.

In her review of the Corcoran installation, Mary Schmidt Campbell described the presentation as "intense, emotionally raw, unfamiliar yet seductive."⁵⁶⁰ The response for which Livingston desired was precisely the viewer's ability to perceive the creative process in its variable manifestations—and to recognize this capacity within black makers through an emotional, empathetic register in the galleries. For Livingston, the viewer's "convulsive recognition" of the creative act, coupled with a representation of the creator, was the minimum fundamental criteria for expanding the art historical canon.⁵⁶¹ The visual register was the path through which black folk artists were to gain acceptance.

Yet recognizing creativity or artistic ability does commensurate with recognizing social difference. Here is the risk of Livingston and Beardsley's proposal. It would tend to construe a felicitous confluence of matching all-white aesthetics as affirmation of shared cultural and aesthetic value. It exemplifies what Arthur C. Danto has called "the treachery...of visual samenesses" when self-taught/outsider art enters the mainstream.⁵⁶² According to Danto, visual affinities between objects of disparate histories tend to blind viewers to their differences and particularities. In the Corcoran show, the absence (or weak presence) of history was permitted in favor of a strategy of empathetic recognition of a human's ability to make things of aesthetic value. While the show was undeniably successful in creating visibility for this body of work, the limits of feeling and seeing with the artists in the exhibition can point us to alternative directions for positioning social recognition not as a matter of show-and-tell, but of dialogue and conversation.

⁵⁶⁰ Campbell, 345. Campbell also mentions the installations for James Hampton and Sister Gertrude Morgan in particular, for the ways that the curators sought to recreate the conditions of the artists' creative environments. She further comments: "In the most successful of the installations, the private territories, the personal spiritual and physical [*sic*] geographies that gave birth to these artifacts, were subtly evoked, and the cultural traditions of the communities that sustained these highly individual expressions were thus at least vaguely suggested, if not clearly defined."

⁵⁶¹ Livingston, "What It Is," 23.

⁵⁶² Danto further describes the issue as "the underdetermination of visual qualities by material means." Arthur C. Danto, "The End of Outsider Art," in Kinshasha Conwill et al., *Testimony: Vernacular Art of the African-American South: The Ronald and June Shelp Collection* (New York, N.Y.: H.N. Abrams in association with Exhibitions International and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, 2001), 36.

*“The Music Lives After the Instrument is Destroyed”*⁵⁶³

The title for this section borrows from the name of a sculpture by Lonnie Holley, an African American artist half a century younger than Sister Gertrude Morgan [fig. 289]. Despite the distance in age between these artists (the two had never met), Holley’s poetic assemblage points a way forward for future studies of Morgan’s art and how it, along with other self-taught/outsider art, might be integrated with the mainstream: that creative utterances live on beyond the lives of their makers in ways that can still speak and provoke. Morgan’s physical body at her death did not receive the same forceful impact registered on the tarnished, dented, and fragmented musical instruments Holley has chosen; nevertheless, physical vulnerability and her life’s end were facts that Morgan understood all the same. Sister Gertrude Morgan believed that she was an instrument of God for the time that she was living on earth, and her artworks were instruments of her ministry. Spreading the gospel message and witnessing to this gospel through the story of her life formed the core of her practice. In this way, as she prepared and released her writings, songs, and art into a market that welcomed them, she gave life to this message long after her physical life ended.

It may seem strange to consider Holley’s assemblage and Morgan’s paintings as complements. Holley’s found objects eulogize life’s passing: the artificial flowers recall the same kinds that decorate African American graves in the South, and the wires he has reworked into human profiles appear more as hauntings than flesh-and-blood presences. In contrast, Morgan’s brightly colored paintings vigorously bypass these references to death and affirm messages of a glorious afterlife. Yet in its emphasis on life’s transitions from one realm to another, Morgan’s art acknowledges faith in enduring aesthetic creativity—one that can live and move across time and space, and among many generations. There can be continuity in the face of loss. Just how they speak and how we ought to listen has been largely what this dissertation has tried to reconsider. What are some broader areas for future research?

While historical ethnographic research on the range of artists included in *Black Folk Art in America* would be revealing, the ability to locate individuals from that generation becomes increasingly difficult. Another compelling area for future research is the interface between trained African American artists with African American folklore, craft traditions, and informally-trained artists. Lowery Stokes Sims traced out the historical terrain that has made such identification with folk forms “tantalizingly close” for twentieth-century African American modernists, often as a way to forge a unique racial aesthetic.⁵⁶⁴ Only until *Black Folk Art in America*, she suggests, was the uniqueness of the black perspective raised as a social, political, and creative phenomenon—rather than an intrinsically racial one. While several artists such as

⁵⁶³ This title is borrowed from an assemblage work by Lonnie Holley, an African American artist without formal training who was a half-century younger than Sister Gertrude Morgan. The artwork is in the collection of the Souls Grown Deep Foundation, Atlanta, GA.

⁵⁶⁴ Lowery Stokes Sims, “Artists, Folk and Trained: An African American Perspective,” in Alice Rae Yelen, *Passionate Visions of the American South* (New Orleans and Jackson, MS: New Orleans Museum of Art in association with the University Press of Mississippi, 1993): 29-37.

Betye Saar, Faith Ringgold, and Noah Purifoy have notably incorporated found objects and folkloric content into their artworks, a synthetic history of such engagements has yet to be written. Such a study might also include analyses of exhibitions like *Black Art—Ancestral Legacy* (1988, Dallas Museum of Art) and *Next Generation: Southern Black Aesthetic* (1990, Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art) that integrate the work of self-taught and formally trained artists. The fruitfulness of collapsing boundaries between insider and outsider continues to this day and is exemplified by the exhibition, *When the Stars Begin to Fall* (2014, Studio Museum Harlem), in which the intergenerational group of artists' work render "Outsider" an increasingly fraught construct, as much a product of imagination as it is of place, namely the American South. Exhibitions like those discussed above "bea[r] witness to both a cherished tradition and a lively contemporary expression. Thus," Kinshasha Conwill insists, "given its rich antecedents, vernacular art, rather than being marginal to the larger discourse on contemporary art, becomes essential to its fuller delineation."⁵⁶⁵

A related area for research might query the history of collecting Black Folk art among African Americans, who remain a minority within a field historically dominated by white collectors (even among collectors of Morgan's work during her lifetime, only two have been identified as African American: Regenia Perry and Nathaniel Montague, the Los Angeles radio personality).⁵⁶⁶ One might start with an exceptional figure like Regenia Perry, who recognized the value of Black Folk Art starting in 1969 when she visited Melrose Plantation, home to Clementine Hunter.⁵⁶⁷ This Louisiana connection put her in touch with Larry Borenstein, and her engagement in the field continued throughout its expansion over the following decades. As an African American woman and art historian, Perry interacted with living black artists as a racial and an art-world insider. Familiar with the dynamics of the market in ways that Black Folk artists were not necessarily, she often advised families on how to negotiate sales with dealers and collectors in the interest of the artists' families.⁵⁶⁸ Though much of her black folk art collection has been dispersed, what insights might we gather by situating her seminal research on craft traditions, theories of African retention (commonly associated with the work of Robert Farris Thompson), and the ethnographic issues involved with collecting and writing on this material? What have been the politics of forming collections of African American art, and how have self-taught artists been included or excluded from them?

John Beardsley's essay in the *Black Folk Art in America* catalogue raises an additional topic for further research. Entitled "Spiritual Epics: The Voyage and the Vision in Black Folk

⁵⁶⁵ Kinshasha Conwill, "Feeling at Home with Vernacular African-American Art," in *Testimony: Vernacular Art of the African-American South* in Conwill et al., 61.

⁵⁶⁶ William A. Fagaly research files.

⁵⁶⁷ Perry's travel to Louisiana was funded by a grant supporting a project on nineteenth-century African American art. It was on this trip that she became interested in African American folk art. Perry interview with author, May 7, 2013.

⁵⁶⁸ Over her relationship with Nellie Mae Rowe and Rowe's family, Perry recounts frequent disputes with Judith Alexander, a folk art dealer based out of Atlanta who handled Rowe's work. Perry interview with author, May 2-3, 2014.

Art,” he notes the particular reliance upon visions in the work of the informally-trained black artist. Specifically, Beardsley links voyages as metaphors for their artistic achievements within physical and economic constraints. In this way, Morgan’s art gets couched in terms of “spirituality” rather than “religion.” Though a small distinction, does this discrepancy speak to a larger uneasiness with the moralizing dimensions of a religious system? Is it representative of the conundrum James Elkins has called the “strange place of religion in contemporary art”—a puzzle intricately tied to supercessionary models of modernism, in which religion has been conceptually sequestered from areas of secular life?⁵⁶⁹ How might pursuing this problem through a comparison with artists such as Morgan, Corita Kent, or José Bedía—each of whom professed faith in particular doctrines of belief—illuminate the place of religion and ethics within contemporary art? What vital contribution would they make to the analysis of art that launches not only political critique, but also integrates such critique with acknowledgment of affect—psycho-social states of being that acknowledge the personal within the systemic?

I hope to have made an argument for historical specificity when analyzing self-taught/outsider art, to let such art speak to situations and issues beyond the categories we assign to them. In addition, this approach allows us to use art historical tools to recognize their likenesses to larger aesthetic conventions that still, nevertheless, bear textures of difference within them. How we attune to these differences serves an additional aim for *Acts of Conversion*. Social differences in race, class, gender, education, or religious belief can alternately shift in value between liability or privilege—depending on where the social and cultural “center” lies. In arguing for the multiplicity and contemporaneity of centers that have anchored and mediated understandings of Sister Gertrude Morgan’s art, I have stressed the constructedness—and therefore, permeability—of self-taught/outsider art’s boundaries. We might construe this permeability as her art’s fundamental openness: its openness to engaging in new conversations, forging new kinships with future audiences, and speaking her accumulated wisdom into these future circumstances. As Kinshasha Conwill has written, “In the end...one of the greatest gifts of vernacular artists, beyond their intrinsic creativity, is the ability to force us to rethink, if not abandon, our ways of seeing and talking about contemporary art and its mix of histories, affinities, and responses to current market pressures.”⁵⁷⁰ Morgan’s creative expressions are those gifts, and their histories the means by which we must ultimately sense and apprehend their richness.

⁵⁶⁹ Edward Puchner has argued convincingly for the integral role of religion in the work of Horace Pippin, Minnie Evans, William Edmondson, and Elijah Pierce in his dissertation, “Godly Fruit in the Modern Era: The Evangelical Church, the African American Experience, and a Redefinition of American Folk Art” (doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, submitted 2012).

⁵⁷⁰ Conwill, 61.

Figures



Figure 1. Noel Rockmore, *Sister Gertrude Morgan's shelves of white garments at the Everlasting Gospel Mission, ca. 1970.* Emilie Rhys Collection.



Figure 2. Noel Rockmore, *Sister Gertrude Morgan walking in the French Quarter*, ca. 1970. Emilie Rhys Collection.



Figure 3. Lyle Bongé, *Sister Gertrude Morgan performing at Associated Artists Gallery with Larry Borenstein sitting to the right, ca. 1962*, photograph. Private Collection.

Figure 4. Michael P. Smith. 1972 Louisiana Heritage Fair, Fairgrounds. Historic New Orleans Collection.



Figure 5. Matthew Anderson, *Larry Borenstein with Sister Gertrude Morgan at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, 1972*, gelatin silver print. Collection of the photographer.

Figure 6. Michael P. Smith, *Sister Gertrude Morgan at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, 1973 or 1974*. Historic New Orleans Collection.

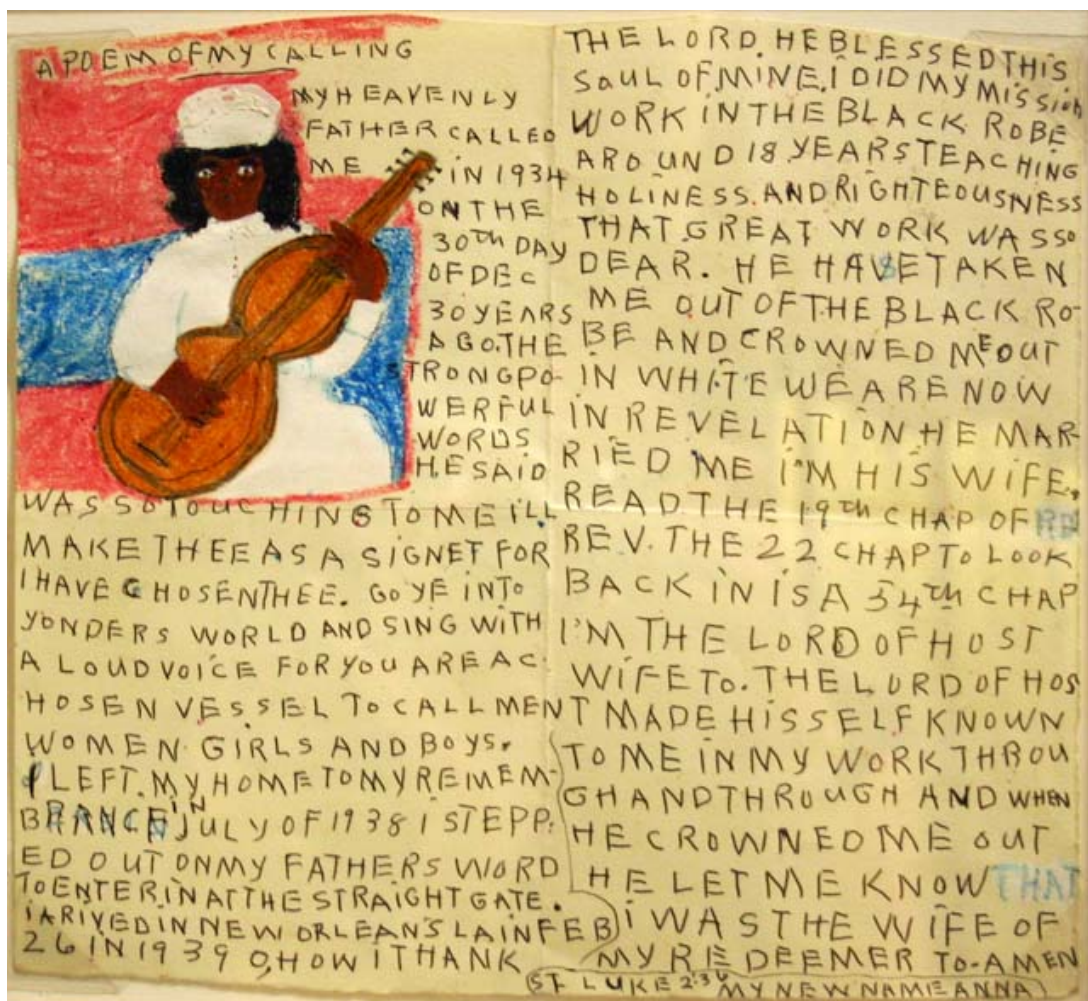


Fig. 7. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *A POEM OF MY CALLING*. n.d. 8¼ x 9 in. Crayon, tempera, graphite, and ball point ink on paper. New Orleans Museum of Art. Gift of Maria and Lee Friedlander.



Figure 8. Richard Avedon, Donyale Luna, dress by Paco Rabanne, New York, December 1966. Gelatin silver print.



Figure 9. Barkley L. Hendricks, *New Orleans Niggah*, 1973. Oil and acrylic on canvas. 72 x 52 inches. National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center, Wilberforce, OH.

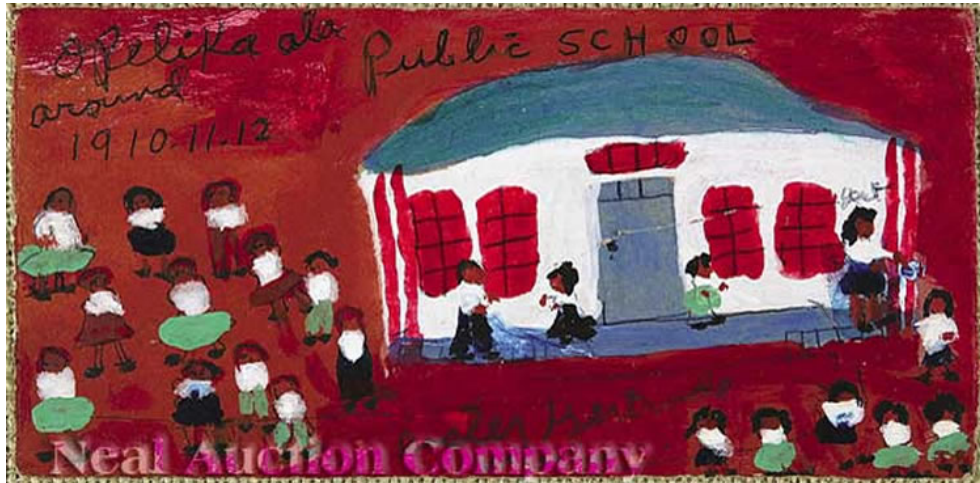


Figure. 10. Photograph of Opelika Colored School (East Street School). No photo credit provided by website, <http://www.opelikapepperellhistory.com>.

Figure. 11. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *Opelika Ala around 1910.11.12*. n.d. 3.62 x 7.25 in. Mixed media on cardboard. Current repository unknown.



Figure 12. Sanborn Insurance Map, 1909 Index, Opelika, Lee County, Alabama. University of Alabama Historical Map Archive online, <http://alabamamaps.ua.edu/index.html>. The red star marks the location of the Baptist High School. The area of Avenue C where Morgan’s siblings lived (just below region “4”) was not surveyed in 1909.

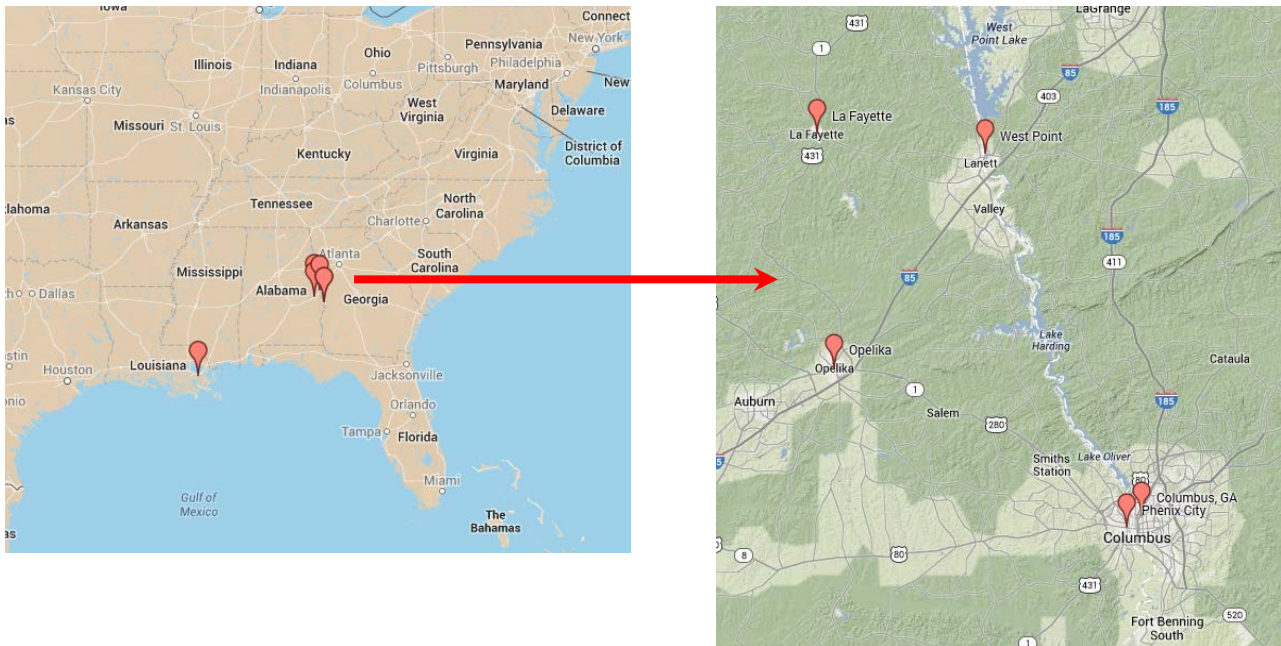


Figure 13. Regional maps of the United States marking sites of Morgan’s early life in the Chattahoochee River Valley shared between Alabama and Georgia. Morgan was born on April 7, 1900 in La Fayette, Alabama; moved between Opelika, West Point, and Phenix City (all in Alabama) during childhood before settling in Columbus, GA from 1917-1939. In 1939, she went to New Orleans.



Figure 14. Unidentified photographer. 1915. SG15466, Alabama Department of History and Archives. *The caption on the verso states, "A faithful group of Hickory Grove Homemakers' Club Girls. These girls have canned enough vegetables and fruit for the use of their families this winter."*

"ALABAMA MUST FEED HERSELF"
MEMBERSHIP BLANK
HOMEMAKERS CLUBS FOR NEGRO GIRLS
ALABAMA, Pharos COUNTY

In joining the Home Makers' Clubs I promise to do one or more of the following things: 1. Have a good garden. 2. Plant some covers or trees in my yard. 3. Keep my house and yard neat and clean. 4. Willingness to plant my house, fence and outbuildings. 5. Learn to cook vegetables and to make some good corn bread. 6. Can some vegetables and fruit for use in my home and winter.

Agent, Margie L. Cooper Date, Sept 2 1917

My garden is 29 yards long and 16 yards wide.

VEGETABLES PLANTED				SHARES LEARNED TO COOK			
DATE	KIND OF VEGETABLE	ROWS	FEET	DATE	NAME OF DISH	QUANTITY	PERCENT
	collards	1	12		cabbage	12	
	spinach	1	6		tomatoes	6	
	cabbage	1	13		beans	13	
	onions	1	8		Irish potatoes	8	
	squash	1	20		beans	20	
	beans	1	10		beets	10	

VEGETABLES GATHERED FROM GARDEN				CANNING DONE			
DATE	KIND	ROWS	FEET	DATE	FRUIT OR VEGETABLE	QUANTITY	PERCENT
	beets	4	60		peaches	60	
	beans	2	2		beans	2	
	corn	15	4		corn	4	
	onion	3	8		tomatoes	8	
	cabbage	2	6		pickled peaches	6	
	tomatoes	4	5		pickled peaches	5	
	collards	8	10		jelly	10	
	squash	1	3		chickens chow	3	
	pepper	1	4		colcass	4	
	spinach	1	12		peaches	12	
	Irish potatoes	4	12		hickory nut jelly	12	
	okra	2	25				
	butter beans	8					

Things Done to Beautify My Home Since Joining the Club:

DATE I signed exhibit showing my house, and did my duty towards the Club. DATE

This Blank must be signed by member applying and approved by County Agent, and returned to member to be kept by her during the season. Membership approved: Margie L. Cooper Agent.

Figure 15. Margie L. Cooper's Membership Blank for the Homemakers Clubs for Negro Girls. Rural School Agent Correspondence, Alabama Department of History and Archives.

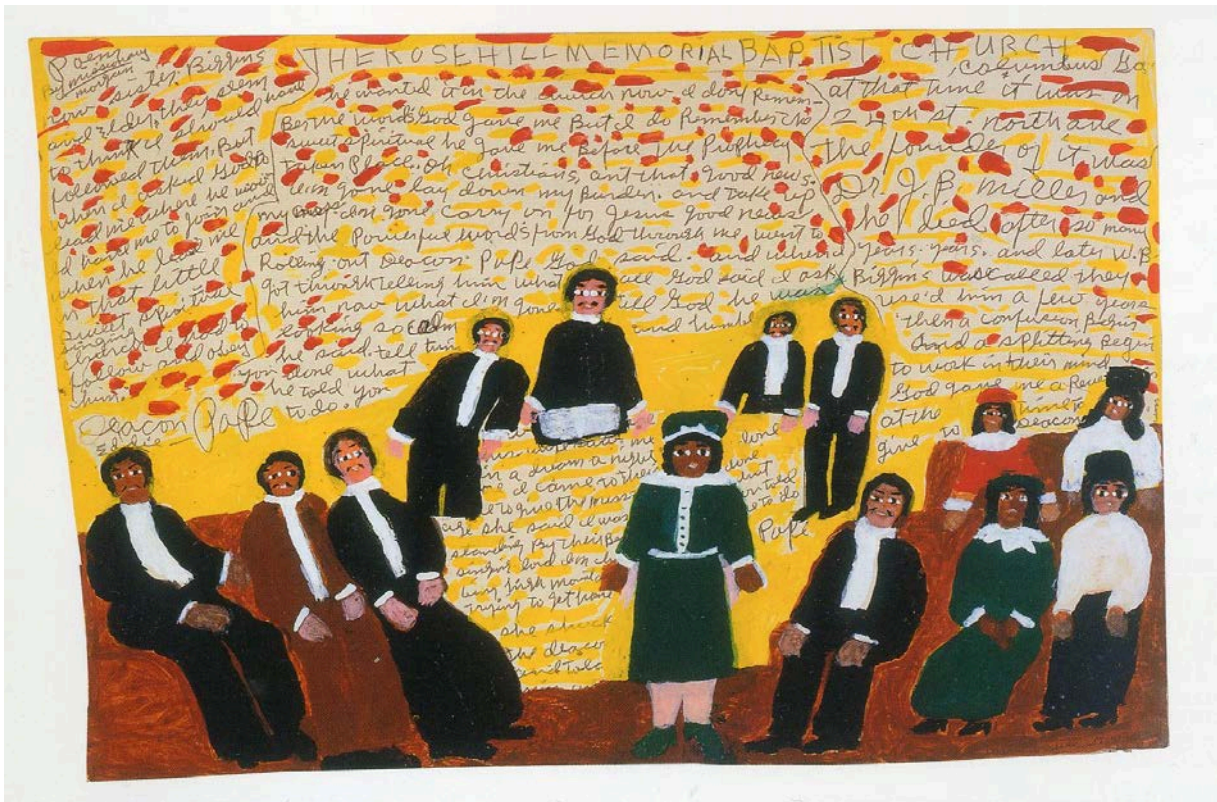


Figure 16. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *THE ROSE HILL MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH* Columbus Ga. n.d. 11 ¼ x 16 7/8 in. Acrylic and/or tempera, ball point ink on paper. Collection of Alvina and Paul Haverkamp.

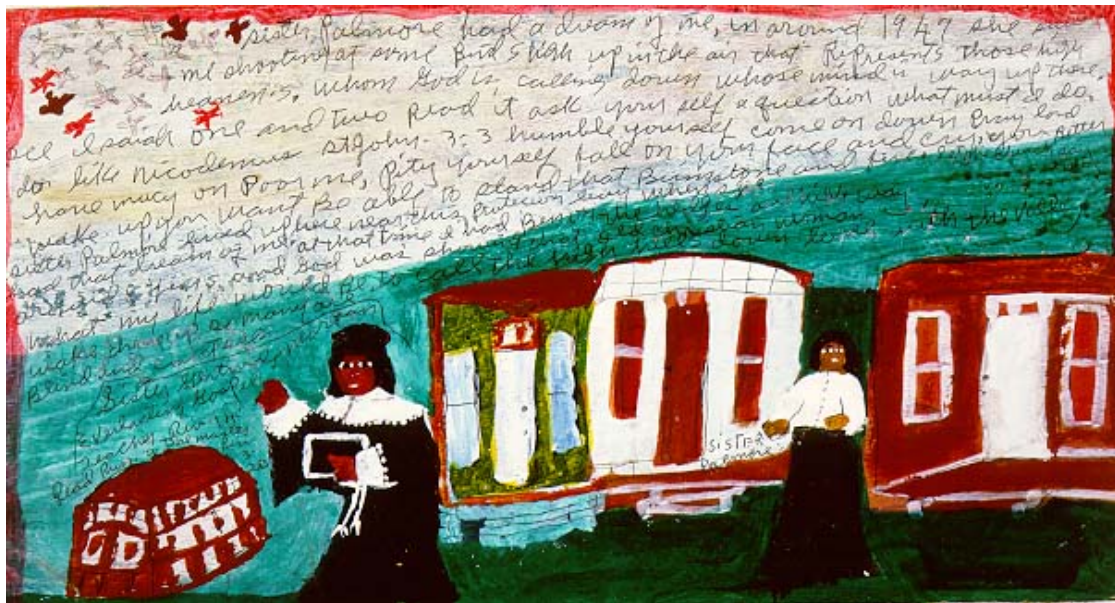


Figure 17. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *Sister Palmore had a Dream of Me*. ca. 1960. 8 1/6 x 15 1/16 in. Acrylic and ballpoint ink on cardboard. Louisiana State Museum, Gift of Noel Rockmore, 1981.123.

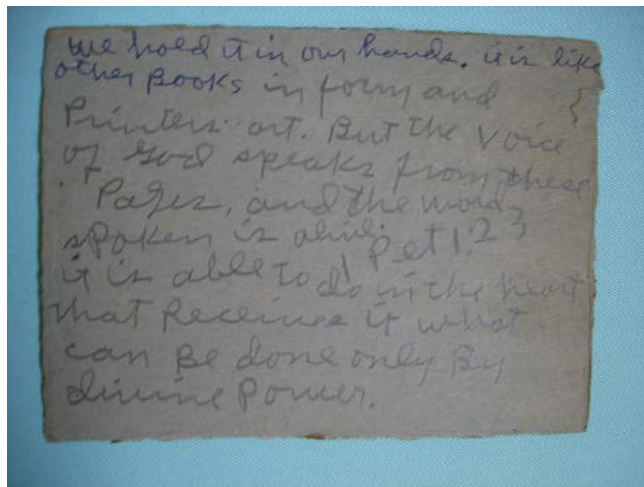
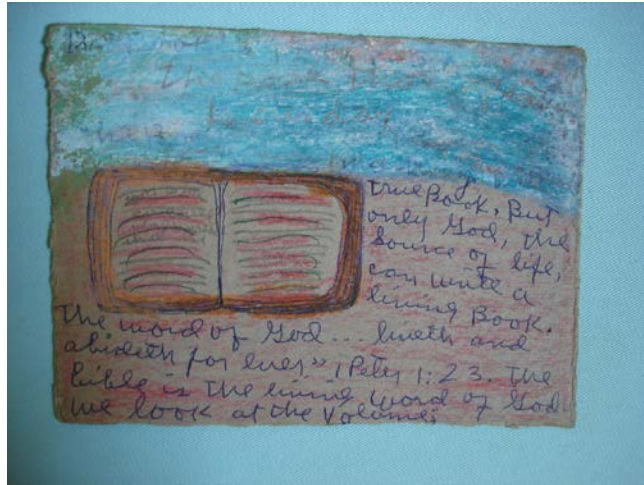
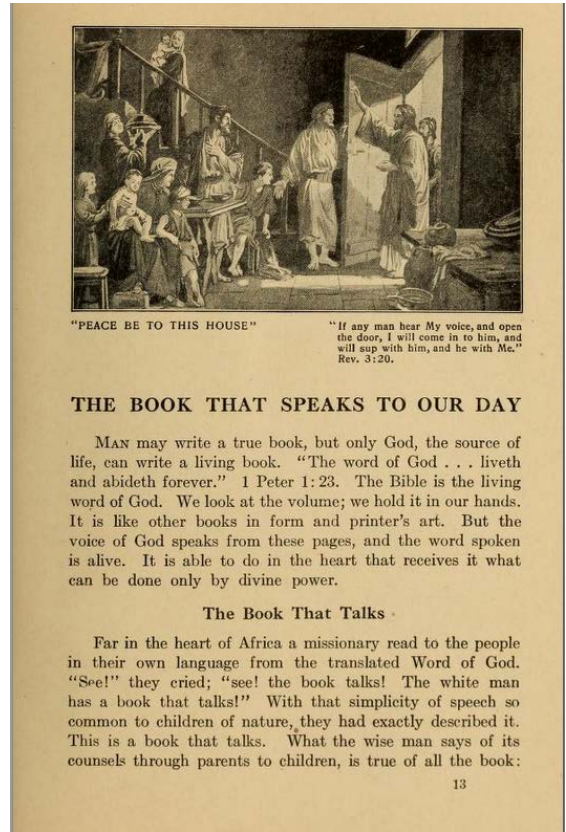
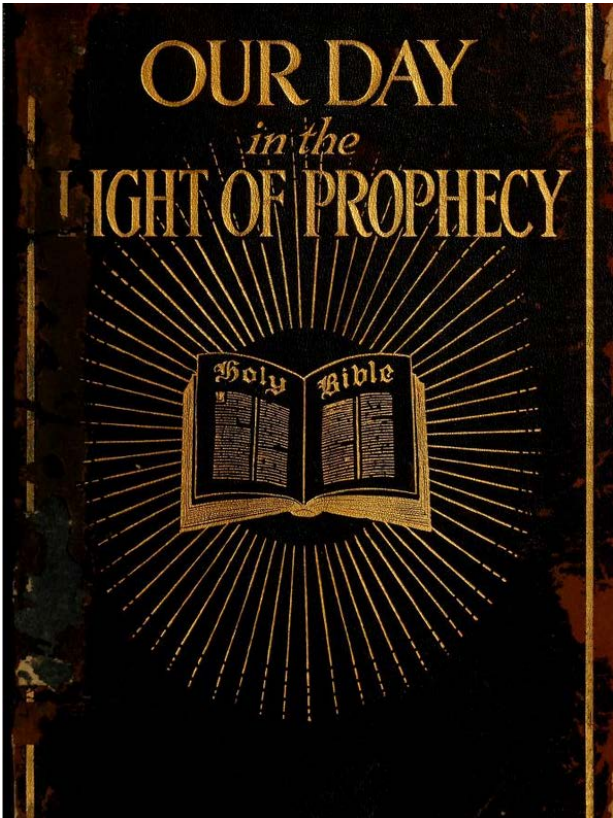


Figure 18. Sister Gertrude Morgan. ...*true Book* (recto and verso). undated. Acrylic, ballpoint ink, pencil, and crayon on cardboard. Private Collection.

On the left-hand side of the open book drawing, “For God so loved the world that He gave” is written out in pencil.



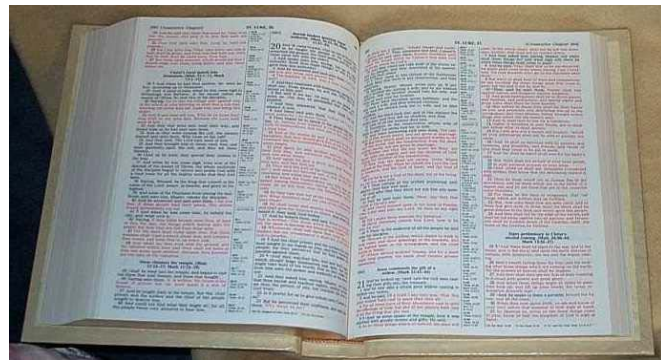
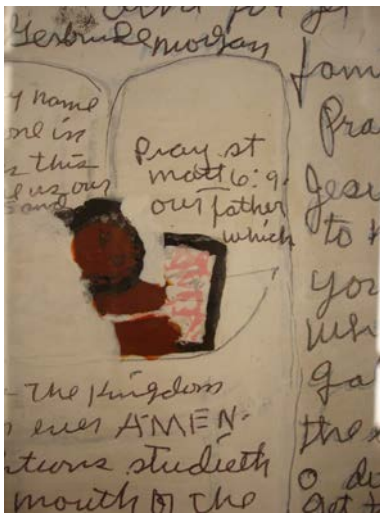
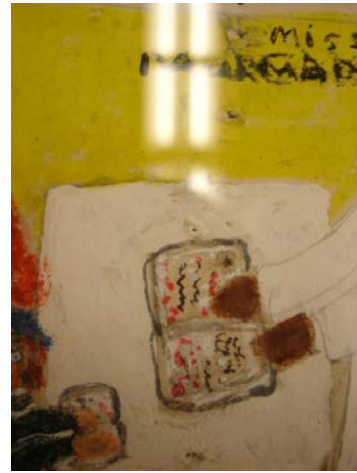
THE BOOK THAT SPEAKS TO OUR DAY

MAN may write a true book, but only God, the source of life, can write a living book. "The word of God . . . liveth and abideth forever." 1 Peter 1:23. The Bible is the living word of God. We look at the volume; we hold it in our hands. It is like other books in form and printer's art. But the voice of God speaks from these pages, and the word spoken is alive. It is able to do in the heart that receives it what can be done only by divine power.

The Book That Talks

Far in the heart of Africa a missionary read to the people in their own language from the translated Word of God. "See!" they cried; "see! the book talks! The white man has a book that talks!" With that simplicity of speech so common to children of nature, they had exactly described it. This is a book that talks. What the wise man says of its counsels through parents to children, is true of all the book:

Figure. 19. Cover and page from William Ambrose Spicer, *Our Day In Light of Prophecy*. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1918. Made available from the Library of Congress through www.archive.org.



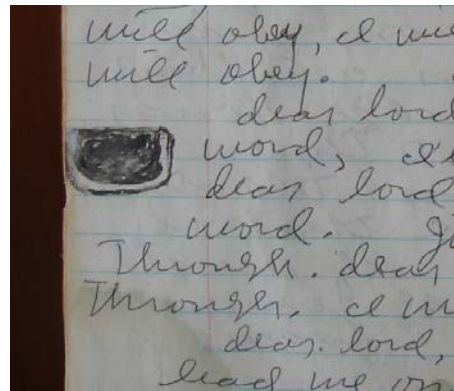
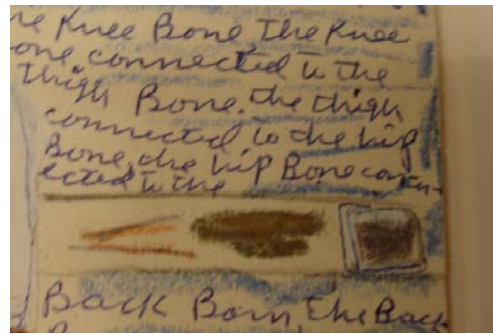
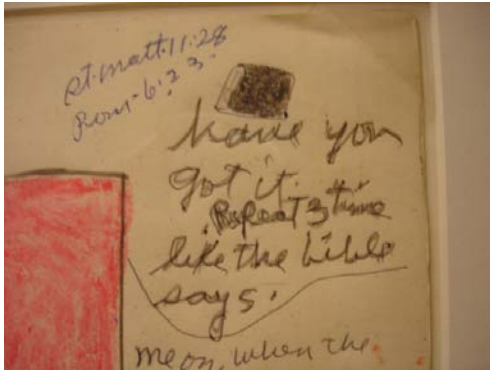
Details from various artworks by Sister Gertrude Morgan showing her treatment of biblical text and the open book. All examples are undated, crayon, graphite, pen, and acrylic/tempera paint on paper or cardboard, and are in the New Orleans Museum of Art.

Figure 20. (upper left) *These Words Spake Jesus*.

Figure 21. (upper right) *Famine of the Word*.

Figure 22. (lower left) *The Righteous and the Wicked Prov. 15:28*.

Figure 23. Example of red-letter edition of a printed bible.



Details from Morgan's artworks suggesting the visual kinship between the biblical word and doorways as portals to faith.

Figure 24. (upper left) Sister Gertrude Morgan, *Have You Got it Like the Bible Says*, undated, crayon, graphite, pen, and acrylic/tempera on paper, New Orleans Museum of Art.

Figure 25. (upper right) Sister Gertrude Morgan, *Calling the Dry Bones*, undated, crayon, graphite, pen, and acrylic/tempera on paper, New Orleans Museum of Art.

Figure 26. (lower left) Sister Gertrude Morgan, *Revelation Charter*, undated, crayon, graphite, pen, and acrylic/tempera on paper. Collection of Dolores B. Alton.

Figure 27. (lower right) Sister Gertrude Morgan, *page from spiral notebook*, undated, pen and crayon on lined notebook paper. Collection of the Jaffe Family.

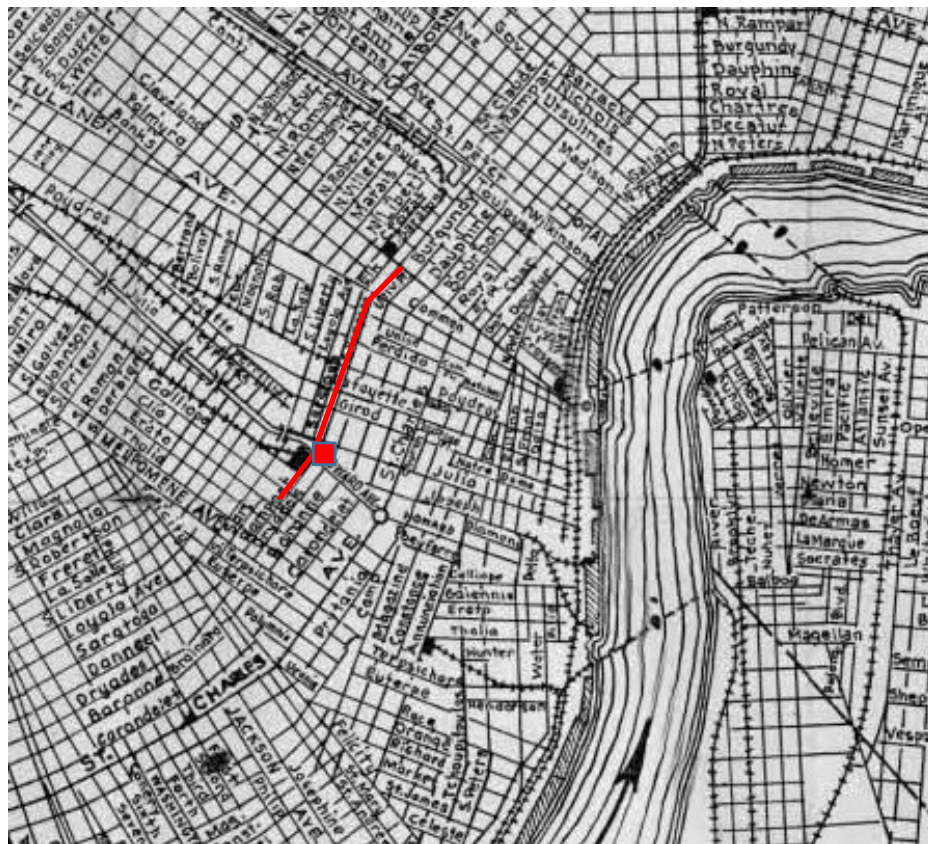
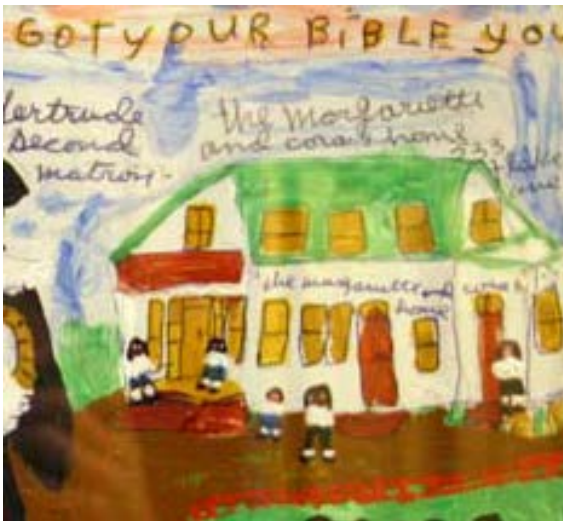


Figure 28. Map highlighting South Rampart Street between Canal and Clio Streets, as described in Marcus Christian's account. The orphanage listed in the 1940 Federal Census, 816 ½ South Rampart Street, is noted by the red square (it is situated between Howard Avenue and Julia Street, just off the uptown edge of the French Quarter). 1924-25 Taylor's Map of New Orleans, New Orleans Public Library.



Figure 29. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *You Got Your Bible You Can Read*. n.d. 11 ¼ x 14 ¼ in. Acrylic and/or tempera, pencil, and ball point ink on paper. New Orleans Museum of Art, Gift of Maria and Lee Friedlander, 2000.109.



Details from Morgan artworks depicting the orphanage at 533 Flake Avenue. “Just a SCETCH OF the [house]” is barely legible beneath the steps and groups of children in the detail on the right.

Figure 30. (left) Sister Gertrude Morgan, *You Got Your Bible You Can Read*, undated, acrylic and/or tempera, graphite and ball point ink on paper, 11 x 14 ¼ in. New Orleans Museum of Art, 2000.109.

Figure 31. (right) Sister Gertrude Morgan, *this is sister Gertrude morgan from the margariette and cora's home*, undated, crayon, graphite and ball point ink on paper, 7 1/2 x 10 in. Collection of Norma Siegel.



Figure 32. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *Triumph the Church and Kingdom of God in Christ Mission No. 3*. Current whereabouts unknown. This artwork was reproduced on a poster for an exhibition held at Baker University, KS in 1972. Poster in the Sacha B. Clay Collection.

Figure 33. *Triumph the Church and Kingdom of God in Christ Mothers and Teachers, 1916*. I am indebted to Josephine Samuels of TCKOGIC for sharing this photograph and the church's history album with me.

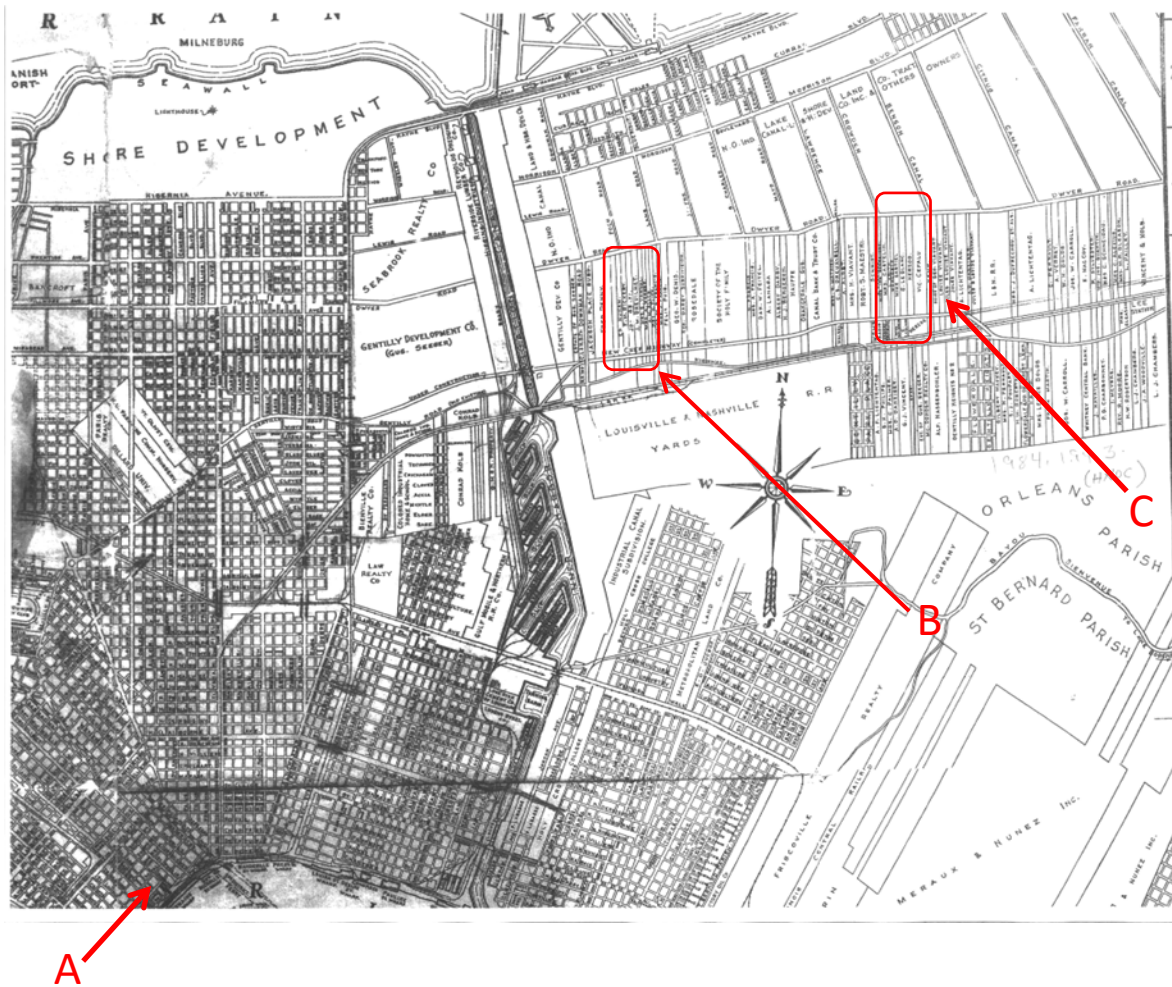


Figure 34. Map Of Greater New Orleans Louisiana, published by New Orleans Association of Commerce, ca. March 2, 1931. Historic New Orleans Collection, 1984.194.3.

- A) French Quarter, along the bend of the Mississippi River.
- B) Eventual site of Haydel Heights Subdivision, second site of property ownership for M. Parker.
- C) Eventual site of Flake Avenue. Current map shows private lands, some former plantations, before being converted to subdivisions.

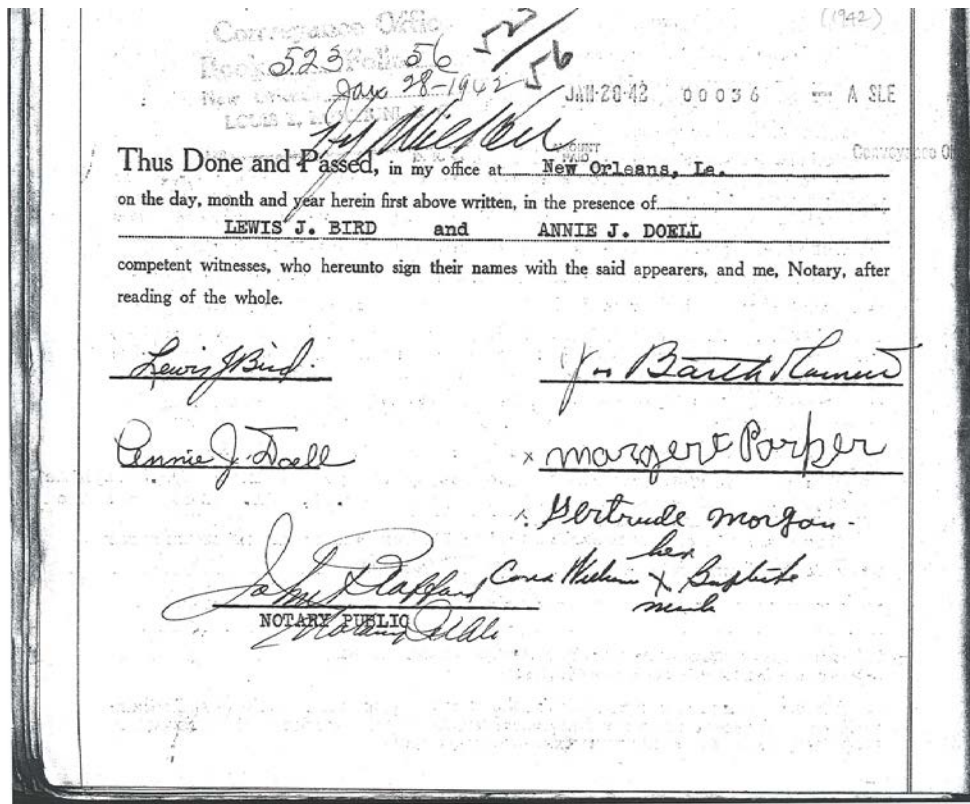


Figure 35. Signatures from John F. Stafford, NA3465, January 26, 1942 for the purchase of Flake Avenue, square 4, lots 19-20 (later 437 Flake). Notarial Archives, New Orleans.

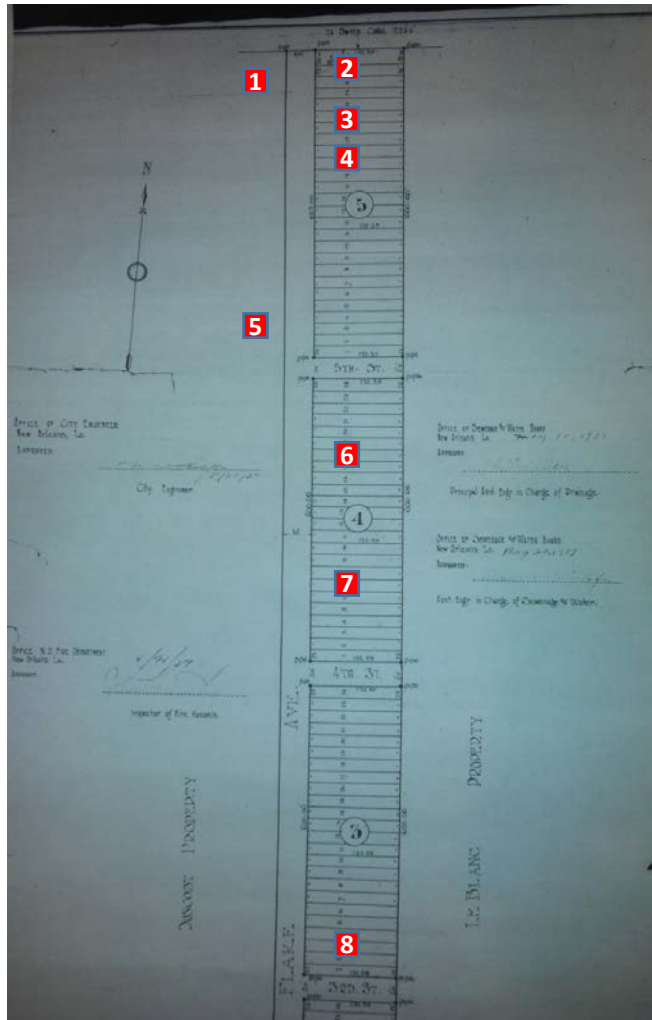


Figure 36. Locations of churches and residences of religious leaders along Flake Avenue, based on 1956 City Directory (locations are estimated, except for #4 and 6, where lot numbers are known)

1. Reverend Bessie Johnson, 556 Flake
2. Reverend Leonard Diggins of Holy City Baptist Church, 557 Flake
3. LaFrances, known to do mission work, 541 Flake
4. Margariette & Cora Home, or the Flake Avenue Orphanage at 533 Flake
5. Holy City Baptist Church, 504 Flake
6. 437 Flake, formerly owned by M. Parker, C. Williams, and G. Morgan
7. Church of God in Christ, 419 Flake
8. St. Paul Spiritual Tabernacle, 305 Flake

“Subdivision of Gabriel Property-Gentilly, New Orleans.” Map and Survey by S. A. Calogne’s Sons, C.E. & S., New Orleans, LA, December 7, 1936. Part of John F. Stafford, Notary Act dated May 28, 1937, registered Conveyance Office Book 492, folio 277. New Orleans Notarial Archives.

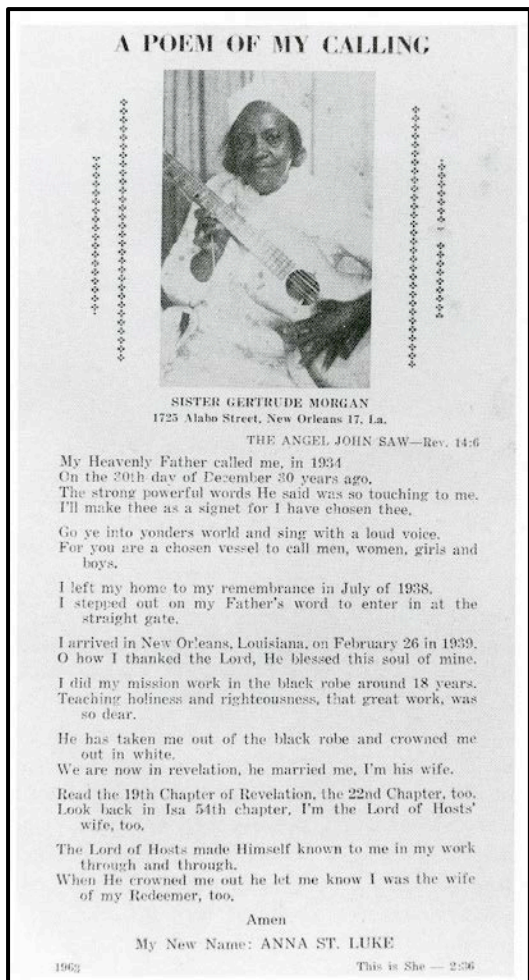


Figure 37. Sister Gertrude Morgan, *A Poem of My Calling* Handbill, ca. 1963. 9 ¼ x 4 ¾ in. Private Collection.

Figure 38. *Mrs. Donna* Handbill. An example of many handbills for New Orleans diviners, psychics, and spiritual advisers. Marcus Christian Collection, University of New Orleans.

Figure 39. Business card for Margaret Parker, ca. 1964. Vertical File for Mother Margaret Parker, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University.



Figure 40. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *CANTY*. n.d. 6 3/4 x 4 5/8 in. Acrylic and/or tempera, crayon, pencil, and ball point ink on paper. Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, gift of the Friends of the Cabildo, 1981.106.7.

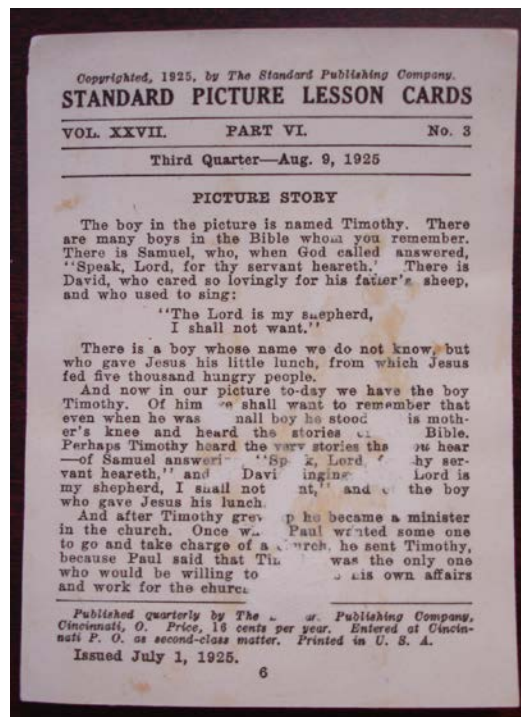


Figure 41. "How the Boy Became a Missionary" (recto and verso), August 9, 1925. Picture Lesson Card Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archive, Nashville, TN. The picture reproduced here appears on other lesson cards but with different contextualizing text, demonstrating the degree to which the meaning of the picture is dictated by the caption.



Figures 42-44. Sister Gertrude Morgan. L to R: *I'm on my Way to the Promised Land* (ca. 1960, 6 ½ x 4 in.), *Who are you Little Lady?* (1956, 8 3/8 x 3 7/8 in.), and *Rock of Ages* (ca. 1960, 5 ¾ x 3 in.). Crayon, acrylic, and ballpoint ink on paper. Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, gift of the Friends of the Cabildo, 1981.106.002-4.

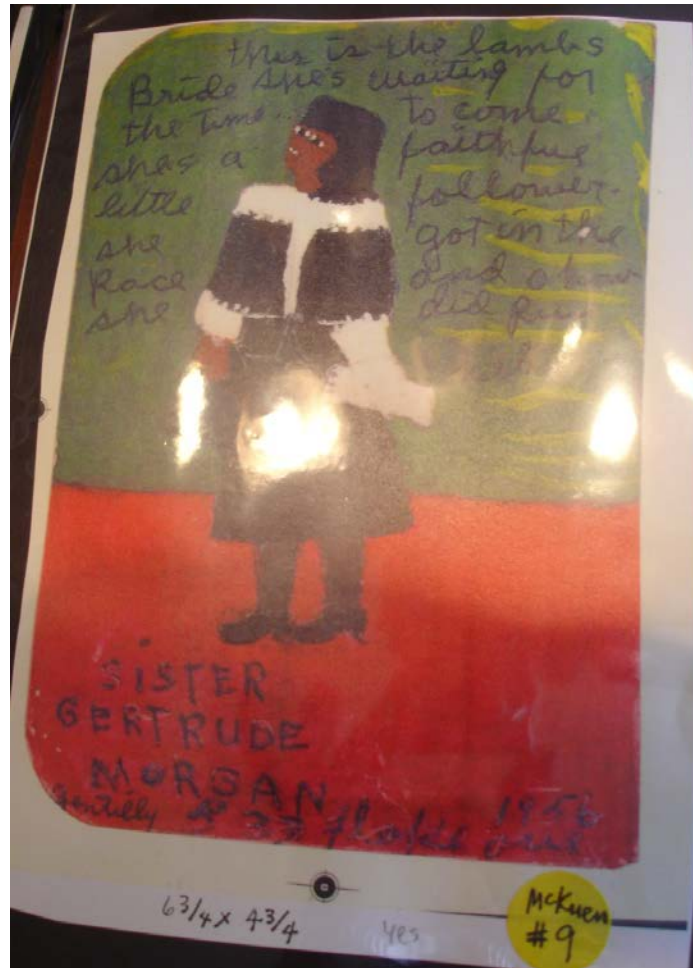


Figure 45. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *This is the lambs Bride*. Crayon, acrylic, and ballpoint ink on paper. 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. Collection of Rod McKuen.

Although the year "1956" appears on the front of the drawing, it is possible that Morgan painted this at a later date and labeled the image to a time before her crowning in 1957.



Figure 46. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *Lamb's Wife*. Watercolor, graphite, ink, paint, and cotton on paper. Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, gift of the Friends of the Cabildo, 1981.106.008.



Figure 47. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *Jesus Christ the lamb of God and his little Bride*. 1960s. Crayon and ballpoint pen on paper. 9 x 11 in. Collection of Gordon W. Bailey.

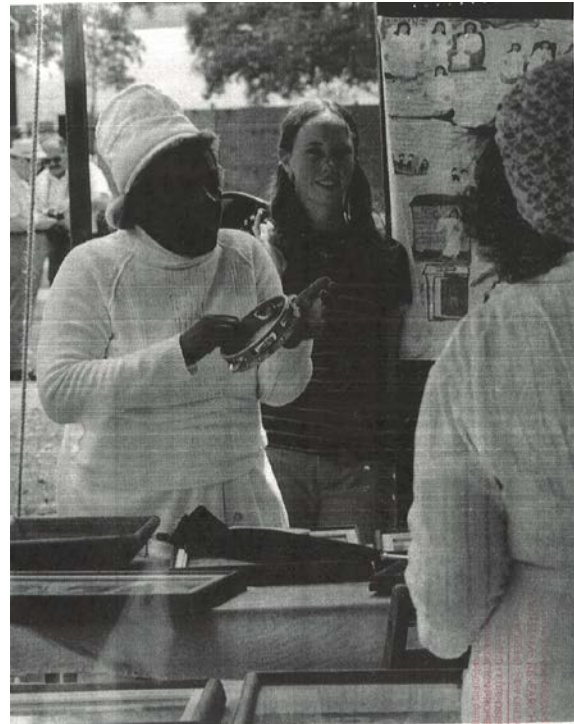


Figure 48. Unidentified photographer. *Sister Gertrude Morgan Playing Guitar at 726 St. Peter Street (?), ca. 1960s*. Image reprinted in William Carter, *Preservation Hall: Music from the Heart* (New York: Norton, 1991).

Figure 49. Jules Cahn. *Sister Gertrude Morgan at the 1971 JazzFest*. Historic New Orleans Collection, 2000.78.1.1693.



Figure 50. Jules Cahn. *Sister Gertrude Morgan at home in the Everlasting Gospel Mission*, ca. early 1970s. Historic New Orleans Collection, unaccessioned at time of viewing.

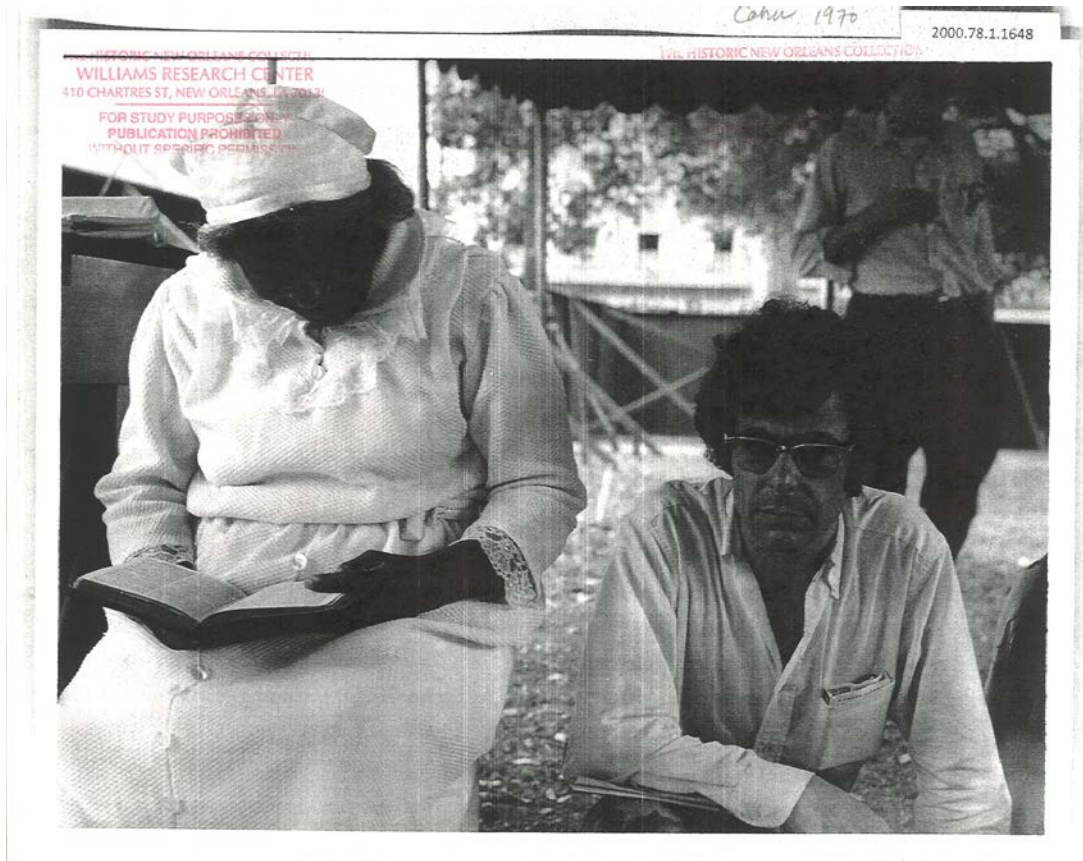


Figure 51. Jules Cahn. *Sister Gertrude Morgan JazzFest, 1970*. Historic New Orleans Collection, 2000.78.1.1648.



Figure 52. *Sunday School, Holiness Church, Jackson*

Figure 53. *Baby Holiness Member, Holiness Church*

Both photographs by Eudora Welty, 1939. (photographic medium and size unavailable; reproduced in *Eudora Welty: Photographs*, foreword by Reynolds Price. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1989.



Figure 54. Jules Cahn. *Sister Gertrude Morgan performing two unidentified women at JazzFest, 1971.* Historic New Orleans Collection, unaccessioned at time of viewing.



Figure 55. Jules Cahn, *Sister Gertrude Morgan with unidentified women outside a New Orleans Church*, ca. 1970. Historic New Orleans Collection, unaccessioned at time of viewing.



Figure 56. Jules Cahn. *Sister Gertrude Morgan and others inside of church, waiting to speak*, ca. 1970. Historic New Orleans Collection, unaccessioned at time of viewing.



Figure 57. Jules Cahn or Noel Rockmore, *Sister Gertrude Morgan standing outside her home at 5444 N. Dorgenois, ca. 1970.* Emilie Rhys Collection.

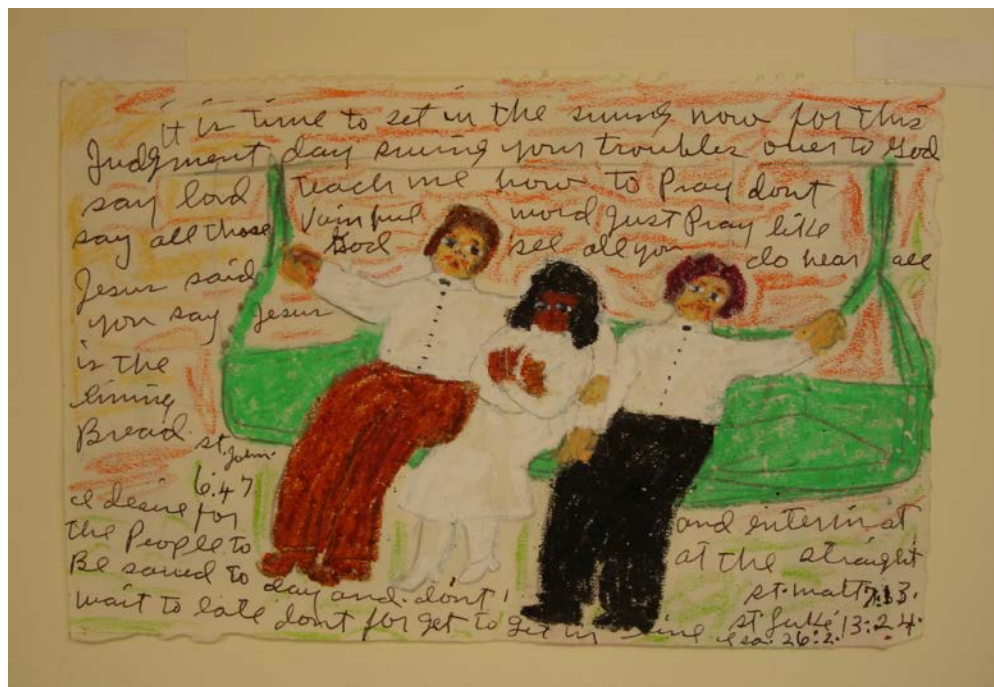


Figure 58. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *It is Time to Set in the Swing*. Crayon, gouache, graphite, and ballpoint pen on paper. 5 ¾ x 9 in. New Orleans Museum of Art, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Robert Ryan, 74.5.



Figure 59. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *Dada God, Dada Jesus (self-Portrait with God & Jesus)*, ca. 1970. Watercolor, graphite, and ballpoint pen on paper. 8 ½ x 11 in. New Orleans Museum of Art, Gift of Maria and Lee Friedlander, 2000.104.

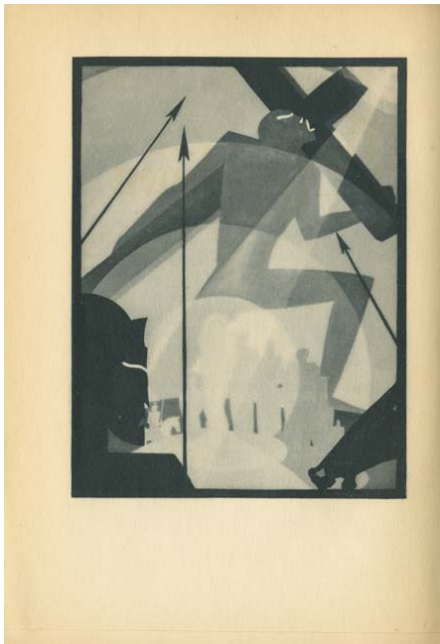


Figure 60. Aaron Douglas. "Crucifixion" in *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons In Verse* by James Weldon Johnson. New York: Viking Press, 1927.

Figure 61. William H. Johnson. *Mount Calvary*. ca. 1944. Oil on paperboard. 27 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 33 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the Harmon Foundation, 1967.59.979.

genesis 10:6 Ethiopia a country lying in the upper
 Nile valley. Called Cush by the Hebrews. ~~At that~~
 Cush the son of Ham brother of Mizraim Phut and Canaan.

a little black girl like me to just
 what you and daddy say. I love
 you my little darling girl this
 is the Black man's day. now
 daddy so many people don't under-
 stand about the Black man's day. you
 will have to turn to God in holiness
 and righteousness and put all your
 sins away. Read the bible 5 chap of
 Galatians. Put hatred out of your
 life. humble your self fight with prayer
 you can't make it & through sin and
 strife. Read about wheat - tax st. matt. 13: 37
 make up read about the holy
 and righteous life.

Leviticus 11: 42. Read Rom.
 Deut. 6: 7 Read chap.
 Deut. 28. Chap Read Be Blessed -
 Psalm 15.
 Prov. 7 Read.

Read on through
 humble your self
 you can't make it
 high minded
 sing What's the matter
 - God's gone up.
 grate the wheat from
 the tax did it he
 say.
 Read st. matt.
 13: 31. Read
 chap.

Sister Gertrude
 Morgan
 Missionary

Ring it's
 harvest time
 Repeat.

Figure 62. Sister Gertrude Morgan. Ethiopia. Undated. Collection of Kurt Gitter and Alice Rae Yelen.



Figure 63. Guy Mendes. *Sister Gertrude Morgan Sitting in the Prayer Room of the Everlasting Gospel Mission*. 1973. 9 ½ x 9 ½ in. Gelatin silver print. New Orleans Museum of Art, gift of Guy Mendes, 78.166.

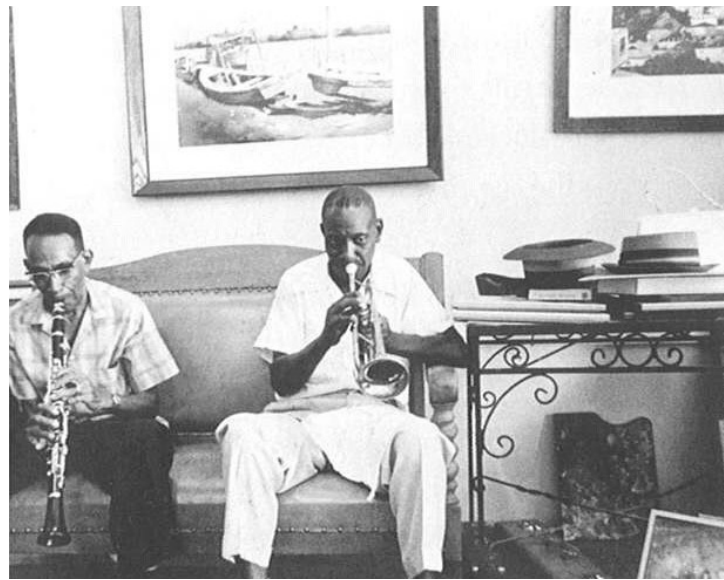


Figure 67. Unidentified photographer, ca. 1960. Members of the Preservation Hall Jazz Band performing in the courtyard of 726 St. Peter Street. Larry Borenstein and his wife, Pat, sit on the bench immediately next to the bassist.

Figure 68. Lyle Bongé, ca. 1962. George Lewis and “Kid” Thomas Valentine at Associated Artists Gallery.



Figure 69. Lyle Bongé, c. 1962. Sister Gertrude Morgan performing at Associated Artists Gallery with Larry Borenstein sitting to the right.

Figure 70. Unidentified photographer, 1957. Exterior of Associated Artists Gallery with Borenstein standing in the doorway, 726 St. Peter Street, New Orleans.



Figure 71. Unidentified photographer, Sister Gertrude Morgan with some of her “children” at Associated Artists Gallery with Harry Souchon, Emmanuel Sayles (banjo) and Punch Miller (trumpet), ca. 1960s. Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University.

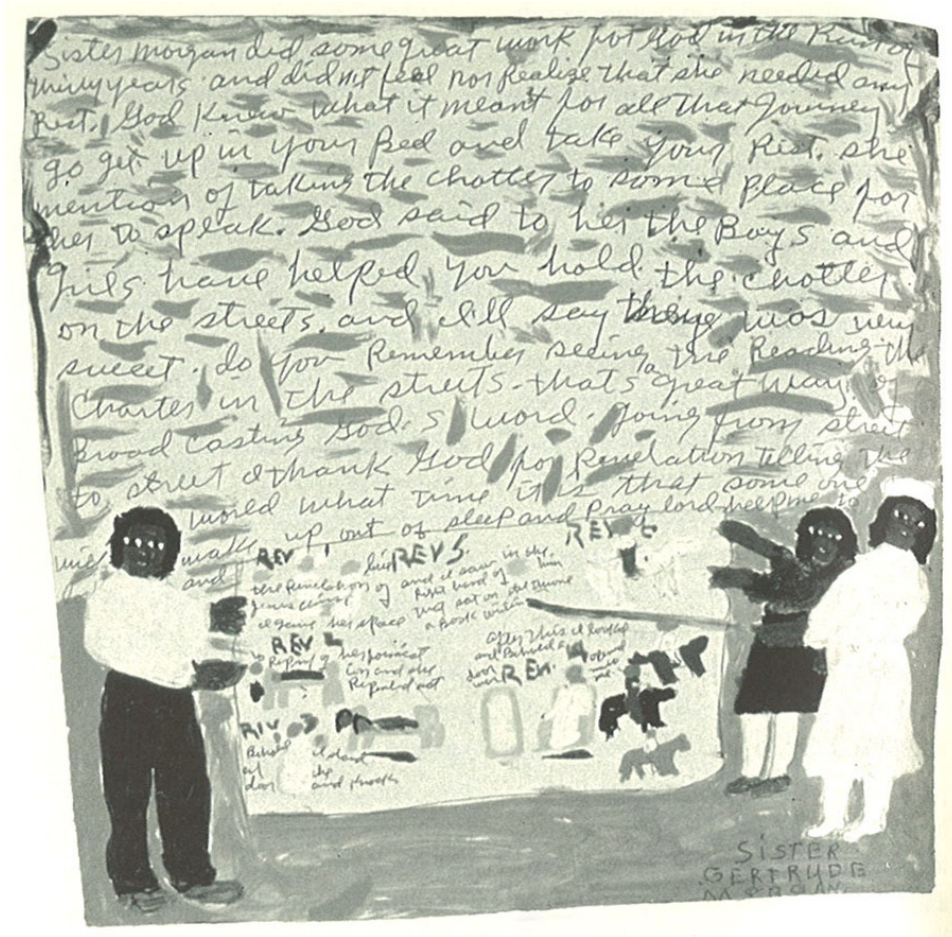


Figure 72. Sister Gertrude Morgan, *Sister Morgan Did Some Great Work*, 1970, gouache and ballpoint pen on cardboard, 12 x 11 ½ inches. Collection of Robert A. Roth.

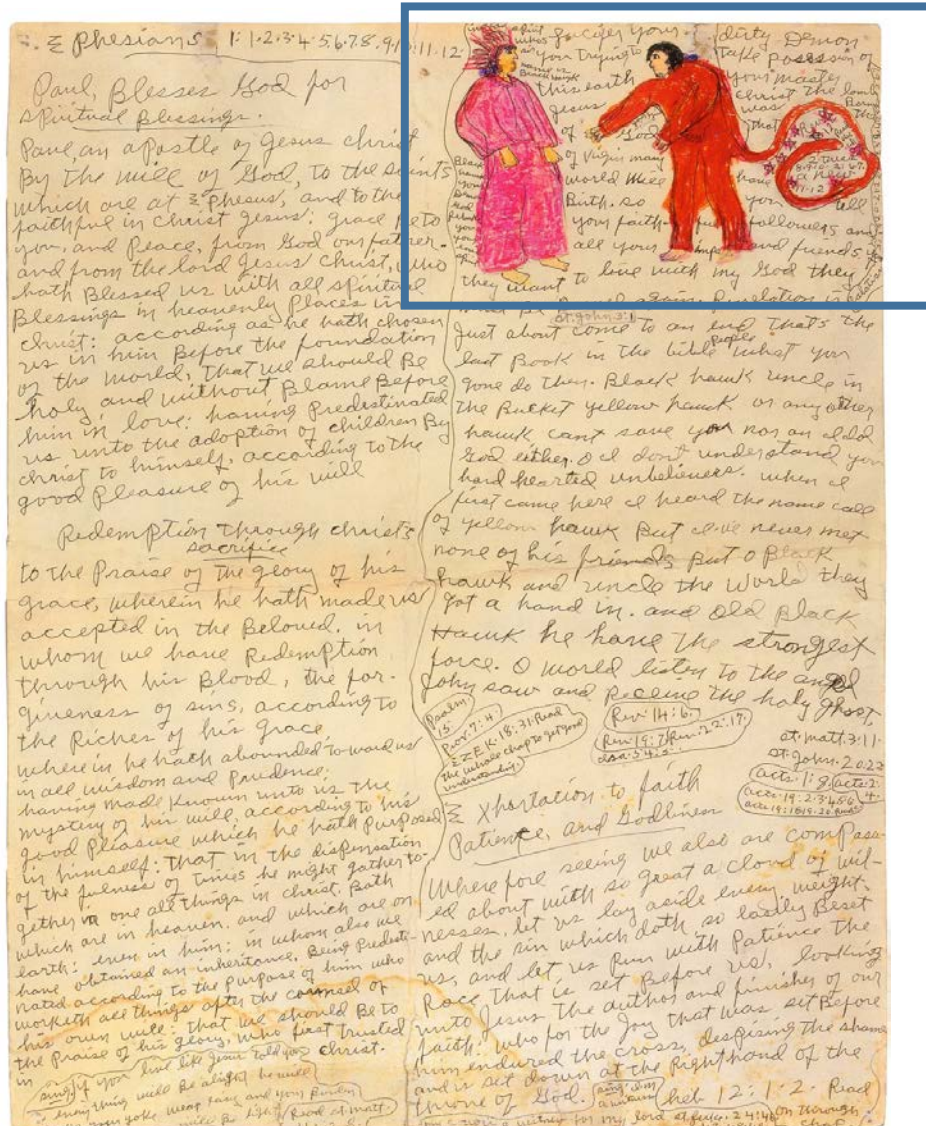


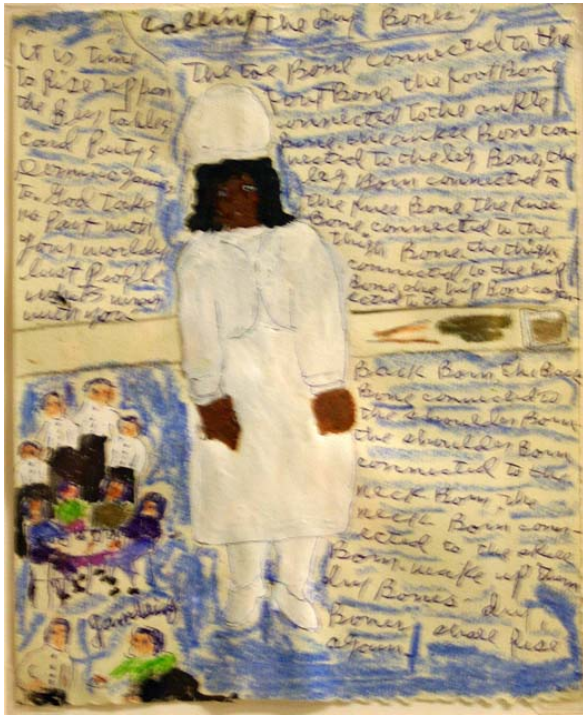
Figure 73. Sister Gertrude Morgan, *Ephesians 1:1.2.3.4.5.6.7.8.9.10.11.12*, acrylic and/or tempera, crayon, and ballpoint ink on cardboard. 28 x 22 in. New Orleans Museum of Art.

The left column transcribes a portion of the New Testament book Ephesians. The right column is Morgan’s rebuke to Lucifer, ending with a plea: “O world listen to the angel John saw and receive the Holy Ghost.” The final portion is an “Exhortation to faith[,] Patience, and Godliness” from Hebrews 12:1-2.

The highlighted portion indicates the portion of writing quoted in my chapter text.



Figure 74. Sister Gertrude Morgan, *Let's Make A Record*, ca. 1971-4, acrylic and/or tempera, ballpoint ink, and pencil on album cover. 12 ½ x 12 ½ in. Smithsonian American Art Museum.



Poem by me SUB-J its getting late
 and do you write getting late
 why not get up? are you
 expecting to find God any
 of your time. Come on then
 and stop all that old wisest
 fuss. the devil got his
 music going all through the
 streets the people so many
 of them are shaking by juiper
 music from their head to their
 feet. juiper got so many
 different ways to come to you
 in decease, God love
 the world so dear he gave
 his son that you might read
 his word and believe.

Figure 75. (left) Sister Gertrude Morgan, *Calling the Dry Bones*, undated, crayon and/or tempera, ballpoint ink. New Orleans Museum of Art.

Figure 76. (right) Sister Gertrude Morgan, *Poem by me SUB-J its getting late*, undated manuscript. Sacha B. Clay Collection.

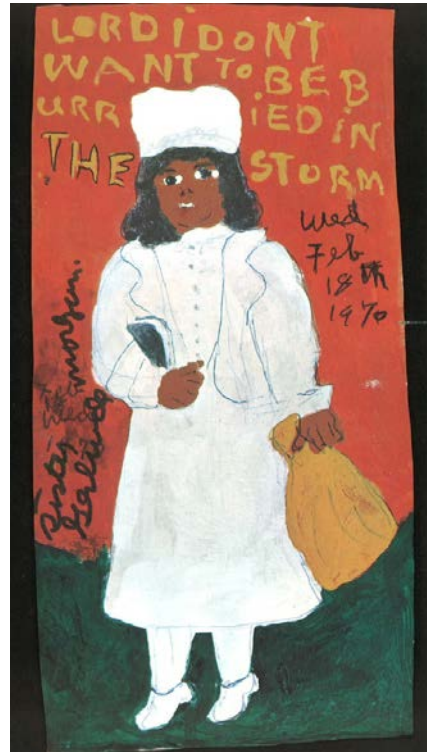
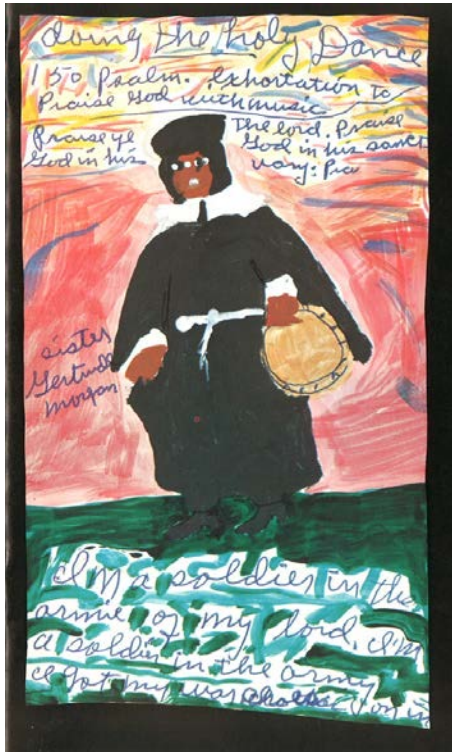


Figure 77. (left) Sister Gertrude Morgan, *Doing the Holy Dance*, undated, acrylic and ballpoint ink on paper. 7 ½ x 4 3/8 in. Private Collection.

Figure 78. (right) Sister Gertrude Morgan, *Lord I Dont Want to be Buried in the Storm*, 1970, acrylic and/or tempera, ballpoint ink, and pencil on cardboard. 8 x 4 inches. Private Collection.



Figure 79. Elder Utah Smith with his wings and electric guitar, May 18, 1941. Published in *P.M.'s Weekly*.



Figure 80. Sister Gertrude Morgan, *When I've done the best I can I want my crown*, undated. Acrylic and/or tempera, crayon, pencil, and ballpoint ink on canvas mounted on Masonite. 16 x 19 ¾ inches. Collection of Dolores B. Alton.

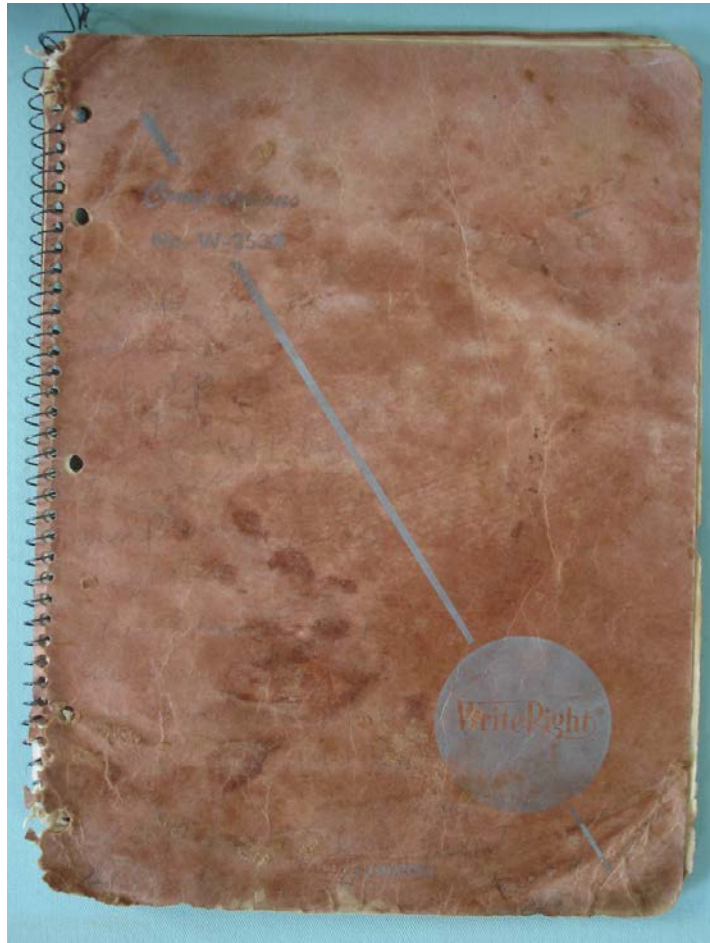


Figure 81. Sister Gertrude Morgan, undated and unpaginated spiral notebook. Private Collection. The cover has the following penciled on it:

“I can’t make it with[out] you /
Help me / repeat / Lord help me to
walk...right...talk...do...pray...ac
t...live...sing...love”

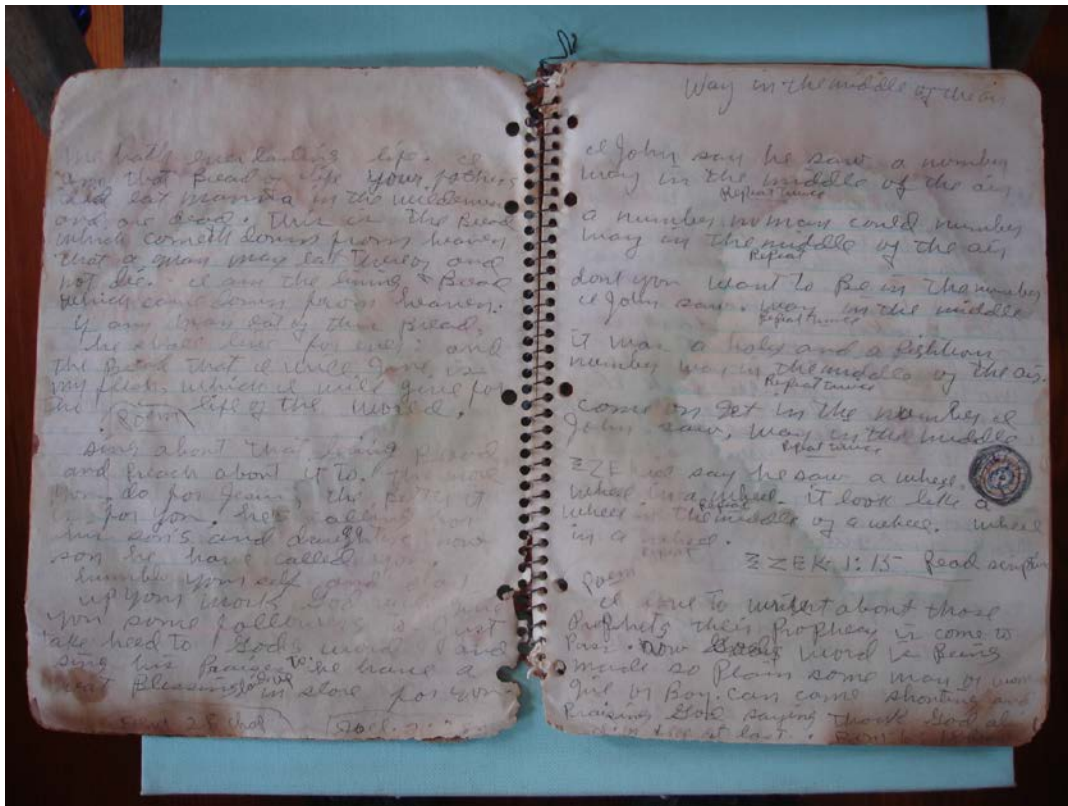


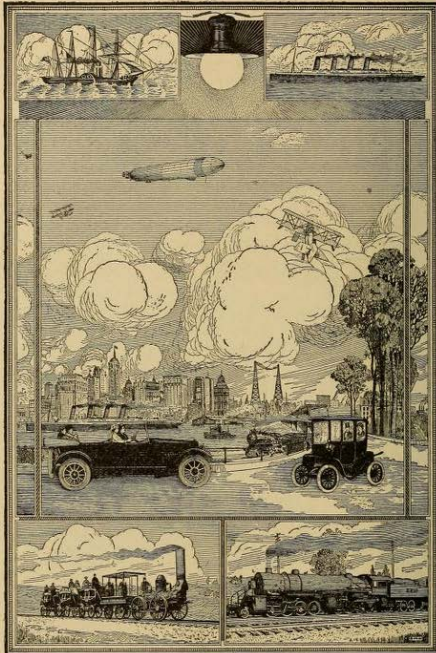
Figure 82. Sister Gertrude Morgan, undated and unpaginated spiral notebook. Private Collection. Sample pages.



Figure 83. Joshua Horwitz. *Sister Gertrude Morgan Singing and Playing the Tambourine on the Front Gallery of the Everlasting Gospel Mission*, detail with service signage highlighted. ca. 1974, gelatin silver print, 7 x 5 inches. Collection of Joshua Horwitz.

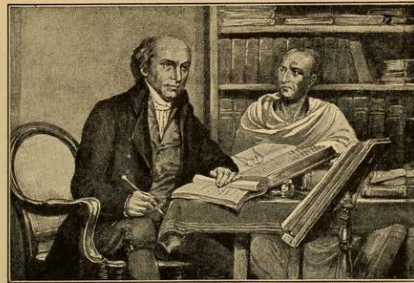
History the opening of all lands
as the time came for knowledge to be in-
creased, it was necessary that all lands
should be open to receive the enlightening
agencies, thus, as the time of the end
came, we see distinctly the hand of Providence
swinging open the doors into all countries
it has been an era of world survey and
development. Particularly is this true of the
last sixty or seventy years. It was in 1844
that the time referred to in the prophecy came
for the special advent movement, bearing the judg-
ment hour message to the world. The range of
the movement is thus described in the
Prophecy; I saw another angel fly in
the midst of heaven having the ever-
lasting gospel that dwell on the
every nation, and
and people." Rev 14:6.
aration that as the time
closing gospel to be done, the
nation and tongue and people would be thrown open
in 1844. Or But a few years before. much of the
world was closed to missionary endeavor. But
as the prophecy indicates the year following
I have witnessed the swift and systematic opening
of all lands to the gospel message.
Prophetess

Figure 84. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *History the opening of all lands*. Undated, acrylic and/or tempera and pencil on paper, 11 x 8 1/2 in. Collection of Susann E. Craig.



MODERN INVENTIONS FULFILLING PROPHECY

"Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." Dan. 12:4.



CAREY IN INDIA TRANSLATING THE BIBLE

"So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed." Acts 19:20.

THE TIME OF THE END

"Thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." Dan. 12:4.

Thus the words of the angel, spoken nearly twenty-five hundred years ago, announced the opening of a new era of enlightenment when the latter days should come.

The Time

At the end of the long period of predicted tribulation of the church — the twelve hundred and sixty years of Daniel's prophecy — the world entered upon this era of "the time of the end."

"They shall fall by the sword, and by flame, by captivity, and by spoil, many days. . . . And some of them of understanding shall fall, to try them, and to purge, and to make them white, even to the time of the end: because it is yet for a time appointed." Dan. 11:33-35.

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mighty tide set in, which from that day to this has been steadily rising and spreading."—*A Hundred Years of Missions*, p. 69.

The time of the prophecy had come, and the hand of providence was bringing into being agencies that have spread light and knowledge over all lands.

"Look where the missionary's feet have trod —
Flowers in the desert bloom; and fields, for God,
Are white to harvest. Skeptics may ignore;
Yet on the conquering Word, from shore to shore,
Like flaming chariot, rolls. Ask ocean isles,
And plains of Ind, where ceaseless summer smiles;
Speak to far frozen wastes, where winter's blight
Remains; — they tell the love, attest the might
Of Him whose messengers across the wave
To them salvation bore, hope, freedom gave."

— Horace D. Woolley.

The organization of foreign missionary enterprise was quickly accompanied by the establishment of Bible societies for a systematic work of translating and world-wide distribution of the Scriptures. In 1804 the British and Foreign Bible Society was organized. Students of the prophetic word felt at the time that these agencies were coming in fulfilment of the prophecy. One writer of those times said:

"The stupendous endeavors of one gigantic community to convey the Scriptures in every language to every part of the globe may well deserve to be considered as an eminent sign even of these eventful times. Unless I be much mistaken, such endeavors are preparatory to the final grand diffusion of Christianity, which is the theme of so many inspired prophets, and which cannot be very far distant in the present day."—*G. S. Faber, D. D., "Dissertation on the Prophecies," Vol. II, p. 406 (1844).*

Now the Word of God, in whole or in part, is speaking in more than five hundred languages, and it is estimated that these tongues, at least in their spoken form, can make the divine message comprehensible to ninety-five per cent of the inhabitants of the earth.

The work of modern missions, that had its birth as the time of the end came, is one of the great world factors today.

Nearly thirty million dollars a year are given for Protestant missions, and a force of more than twenty thousand foreign missionaries is in the field, not counting the many thousands of native missionaries and helpers. Truly the time of the end is proving to be an era of increasing light and knowledge.

The Opening of All Lands

As the time came for knowledge to be increased, it was necessary that all lands should be open to receive the enlightening agencies. Thus, as the time of the end came, we see distinctly the hand of Providence swinging open the doors into all countries. It has been an era of world survey and development. Particularly is this true of the last sixty or seventy years. It was in 1844 that the time referred to in the prophecy came for the special advent movement, bearing the judgment-hour message to the world. The range of the movement is thus described in the prophecy:

"I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." Rev. 14:6.

This was a declaration that as the time came for the closing gospel work to be done, the doors of access to every nation and tongue and people would be thrown open. In 1844, or but a few years before, much of the world was closed to missionary endeavor; but as the prophecy indicates, the years following have witnessed the swift and systematic opening of all lands to the gospel message.

It was in 1842 that five treaty ports in China were opened to commerce and to missions,— advance steps in the opening of all China to the gospel. In 1844 Turkey was prevailed upon to recognize the right of Moslems to become Christians, reversing all Moslem tradition. In 1844 Allen Gardiner established the South American Mission. In 1845 Livingstone's determination was formed to open up the African interior.

Figures 85 and 86. Pages from W. A. Spicer, *Our Day In Light of Prophecy*, including portion entitled "The Opening of All Lands" from which Morgan copied.



Figure 87. Unidentified photographer. Mother Margaret Parker and child performing at 726 St. Peter Street with musicians (George Lewis is second from right). 1961. Louisiana State Museum.



Figure 88. Unidentified photographer. Idelle Williams, George Boone, Luella Pitts, and unidentified singer performing at 726 St. Peter Street. William Russell, Barbara Reid, Thomas Valentine, and George Guesnon are on the left side of the room. Ca. 1960s. Collection of Kelley Reid Edmiston.

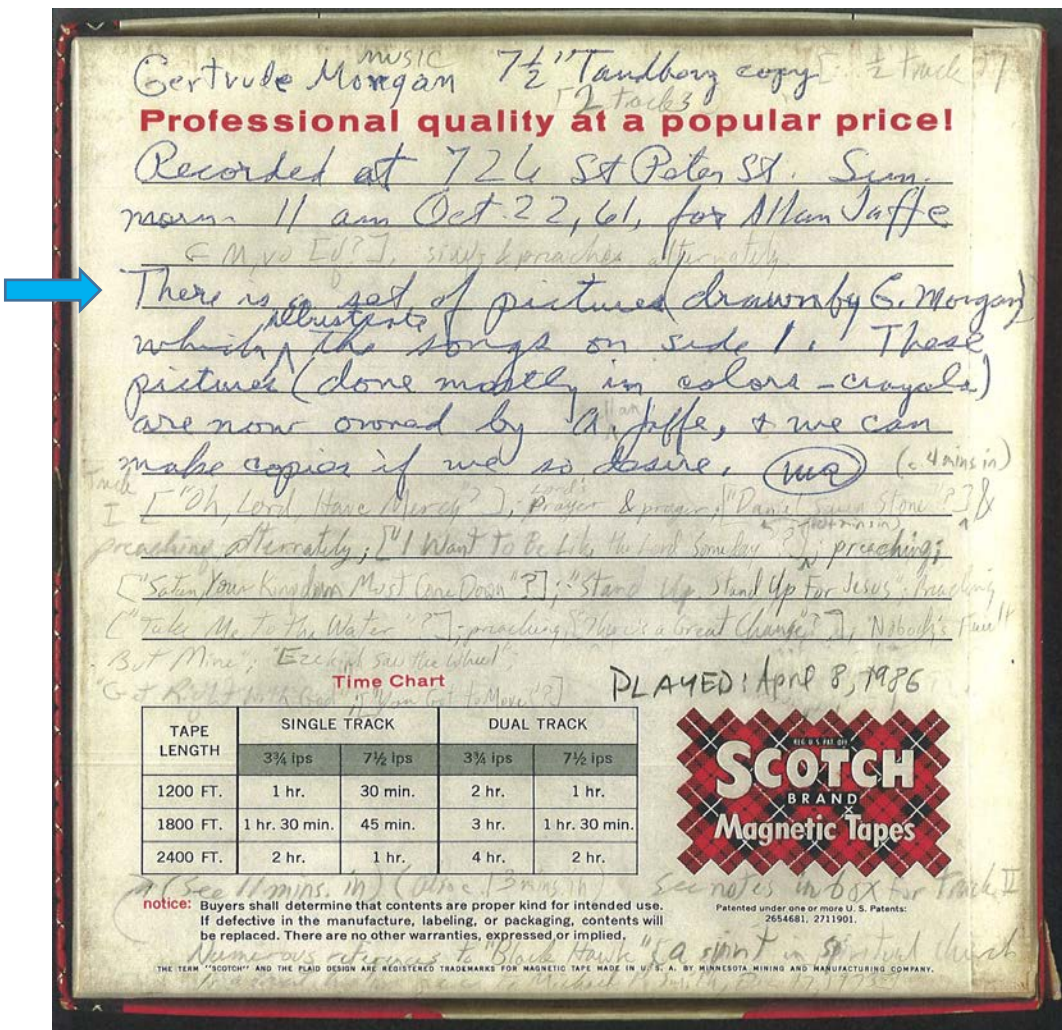


Figure 89. Reel case for recording of Sister Gertrude Morgan’s singing and preaching was made on October 22, 1961. Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane.

“There is a set of pictures drawn by G. Morgan which illustrate the songs on side 1. These pictures (done mostly in colors – crayola) are now owned by A. Jaffe” – WR (William Russell, archivist at Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University from 1958-1965)

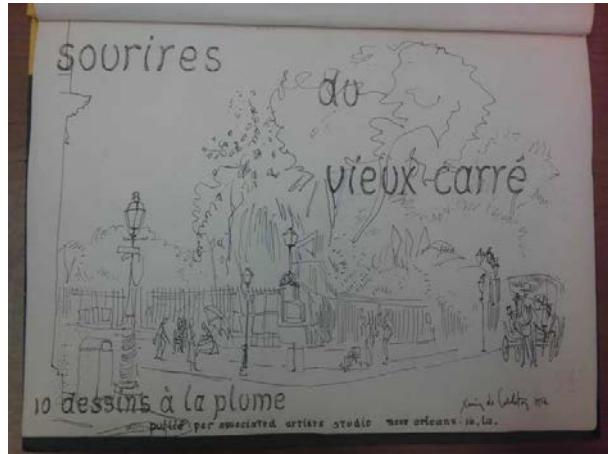


Figure 90. (above) Andrew Lang, 1 of 10 drawings from portfolio published as a set entitled *Jamming at the Wit's End*, undated.

Figure 91. (top right) Xavier de Callatay, *Sourires du Vieux Carré*, set of 10 drawings published as a set, ca. 1956.

Figure 92. (lower right) Noel Rockmore, *Babe Stovall*. Oil on canvas, ca. 1963. Current location unknown.



Figure 93. (upper left) Unidentified photographer, Xavier de Callatay painting Margaret Parker with Preservation Hall Jazz Band, ca. summer 1961.

Figure 94. (upper right) Unidentified photographer, Joan Farmer painting Kid Thomas Valentine, 1960s.

Figure 95. (bottom) Unidentified photographer, Noel Rockmore painting Punch Miller, 1963.

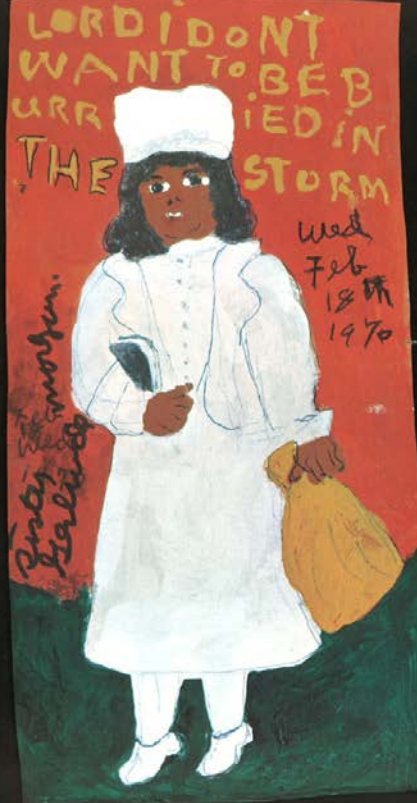


Figure 96. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *This is a mystery work.* Acrylic and/or tempera, pencil, and ballpoint ink on paper. undated, Southern Oregon University.

New Orleans'

JAZZ & HERITAGE FESTIVAL

APRIL 22 THRU 26, 1970



For over three decades, Sister Gertrude Morgan used the streets of our city as her Church.

Figure 97. 1970 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival Program Cover.



Figures 98 and 99. (above left and right) Exterior and interior views of the S.S. President, site of the evening concerts for the 1970 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University.

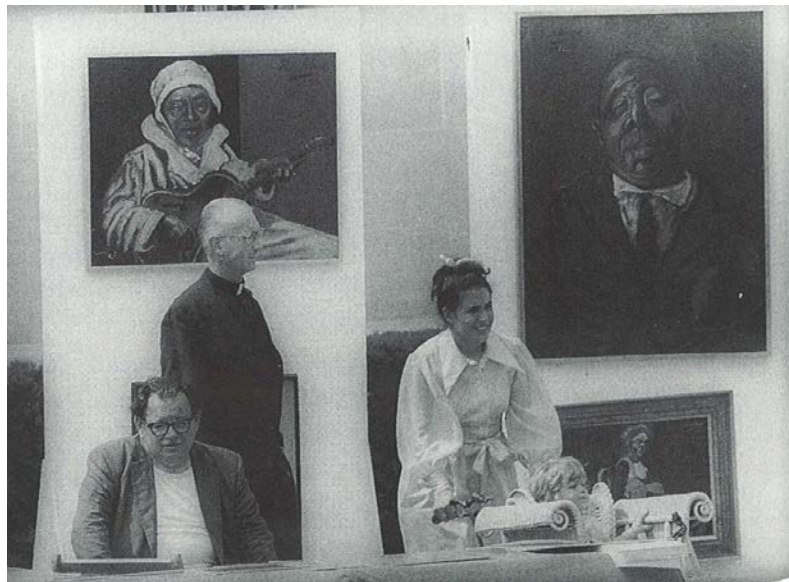
Figure 100. (lower right) Michael P. Smith. View of the afternoon concerts held at the Municipal Auditorium, 1970.



Figures 101 and 102. (top left and right) Michael P. Smith. *1970 Louisiana Heritage Fair, Beauregard Square (now Congo Square)*. Historic New Orleans Collection. Reproduced in *New Orleans Jazz Fest* (Pelican Publishing, 1991).



Figure 103. Jules Cahn, *1970 Louisiana Heritage Fair*. Historic New Orleans Collection.



Figures 104 and 105. Michael P. Smith. Food, exhibit, and art booths at the 1970 Louisiana Heritage Fair, Beauregard Square (now Congo Square). Historic New Orleans Collection. Reproduced in *New Orleans Jazz Fest* (Pelican Publishing, 1991).



Figures 106 and 107. Michael P. Smith. Food, exhibit, and art booths at the 1970 Louisiana Heritage Fair, Beaugard Square (now Congo Square). Historic New Orleans Collection. Reproduced in *New Orleans Jazz Fest* (Pelican Publishing, 1991).



Figures 108 and 109. Ambrose Thibodeaux on the Cajun Stage.

Both photographs by Michael P. Smith. *1970 Louisiana Heritage Fair, Beauregard Square (now Congo Square)*. Historic New Orleans Collection. Reproduced in *New Orleans Jazz Fest* (Pelican Publishing, 1991).



Figure 110. Willie Thomas, Percy Randolph, and Babe Stovall on the Blues Stage

Figure 111. Annie Pavageau and the Morning Star Baptist Church Choir.

Both photographs by Michael P. Smith. *1970 Louisiana Heritage Fair, Beauregard Square (now Congo Square)*. Historic New Orleans Collection. Reproduced in *New Orleans Jazz Fest* (Pelican Publishing, 1991).



Figure 112. Eureka Brass Band.

Figure 113. Duke Ellington and Mahalia Jackson (detail) at
Beauregard Square.

Michael P. Smith. *1970 Louisiana Heritage Fair, Beauregard
Square (now Congo Square)*. Historic New Orleans Collection.
Reproduced in *New Orleans Jazz Fest* (Pelican Publishing, 1991).



Figure 114. Michael P. Smith. *Sister Gertrude Morgan and Others in the Gospel Tent, 1970 Louisiana Heritage Fair, Beauregard Square (now Congo Square).* Historic New Orleans Collection.



Figure 115. Jules Cahn, *George and Joyce Wein with Sister Gertrude Morgan at the 1972 Louisiana Heritage Fair, Fairgrounds.* Historic New Orleans Collection.



Figure 116. (left) Unidentified photographer. *Larry Borenstein and Allan Jaffe*, undated. Collection of Christopher and Jane Botsford.

Figure 117. (right) John Messina. *Allison Miner and Quint Davis (with cowbell)* at the 1970 Louisiana Heritage Fair. New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation and Festival Archive.



Figures 118 and 119. Lee Friedlander, Mother's Day Parade, Harahan, Louisiana, 1973. Photographs reproduced in *Playing for the Benefit of the Band* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 2013.



Representations of New Orleans second line parades led by brass bands.

Figure 120. (top right) Michael P. Smith, Avenue Steppers Marching Club, Annual Banner Blessing Parade, 1982. Historic New Orleans Collection.

Figure 121. (lower right) Lee Friedlander, Young Tuxedo Brass Band, 1959.



Figure 122. Noel Rockmore, photograph of Morgan in the Gospel Tent at the Louisiana Heritage Fair, 1970 or 1971. Emilie Rhys Collection.



Figure 123. Noel Rockmore, photograph of Morgan's Revelation Charter in the Gospel Tent at the Louisiana Heritage Fair, 1970 or 1971. Emilie Rhys Collection.

Beginning with the upper left and moving up from the bottom of the middle column, the vignettes are: John, the angel of Revelation, and God on the Throne (Revelation 1); "and I gave her space to repent of her fornication" (Revelation 2 – women in beds); Christ at the door knocking (Revelation 3); throne of God with rainbow (Revelation 4); the four horsemen of the apocalypse (Revelation 6) and finally another throne of God with twenty-four elders (also Revelation 5).



Figures 124, 125, 126. Noel Rockmore, photographs of Morgan and associates (Idelle Williams with guitar) in the Gospel Tent at the Louisiana Heritage Fair, 1970 or 1971. Emilie Rhys Collection.



Figure 127. Noel Rockmore, photograph of Morgan holding painting of the Gospel Tent at the Louisiana Heritage Fair, 1970 or 1971. Emilie Rhys Collection.



Figure 129. Unidentified artist. Revival Banner (Revival: Messages of the Times). Ca. 1930, oil on linen, 37 x 52 7/8 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum.



Figures 130 and 131. Jules Cahn (top) and Michael P. Smith (bottom), photographs of Sister Gertrude Morgan at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festivals, 1970 and 1972. Historic New Orleans Collection.



Figure 132. (top) Robbie Bedell, *Sister Gertrude Morgan and Sanctified Associates at the 1971 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival*, sitting behind table of artworks, probably by Morgan.

Figure 133. (bottom) John Messina, *Sister Gertrude Morgan and Sanctified Associates at the 1971 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival*. New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival Foundation Archive.

Malachi
4:1-5
Shepherd Jerusalem a cup of
tremblings Zech 12:13-14

A herder of sheep in Biblical times
he led them to pasture to watering
places and at night to the fold.
he killed or drove away attacking wild
beasts 1-sam. 17:34-36 His solicitous
care for each member of his flock is
Proverbial it is said that he knew
each sheep by name and each recogni-
zed his voice John 10:3-5 he carefully
counted them as they entered the
sheepfold Abel was the first shepherd
Biblically mentioned Genesis 4:2 Jesus

called himself the good shepherd John
10:14 Read chap Read the bible take
the word and help me wake up California
I ben wanting to work in Calif -
God is able to throw his voice
there. I wanted to put my first
charter on a ship to spread the
Revelation but my race didn't tell
the young man so God let a
white minister ~~make~~ made a
Present of one was bought from
me at that time around 7 years ago
Others ben going since then to different
states I was taking a little on the
work for a short while I want

Figure 134. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *Shepherd Jerusalem a Cup of Tremblings Zech 12-13-14*. Sacha Borenstein Clay Collection, New Orleans.

“Read the bible take the word and help me wake up California I ben wanting to work in Calif God is able to throw his voice there. I wanted to put my first charter on a ship to spread the Revelation but [...] God let a white minister Be made a Present of one was bought from me at that time around 7 years ago Others ben going since then to different states.”



Figure 135. (top) Lee Friedlander, *Sister Gertrude Morgan* reprinted in *The Jazz People of New Orleans* (1992). Taken sometime between 1959-1979.

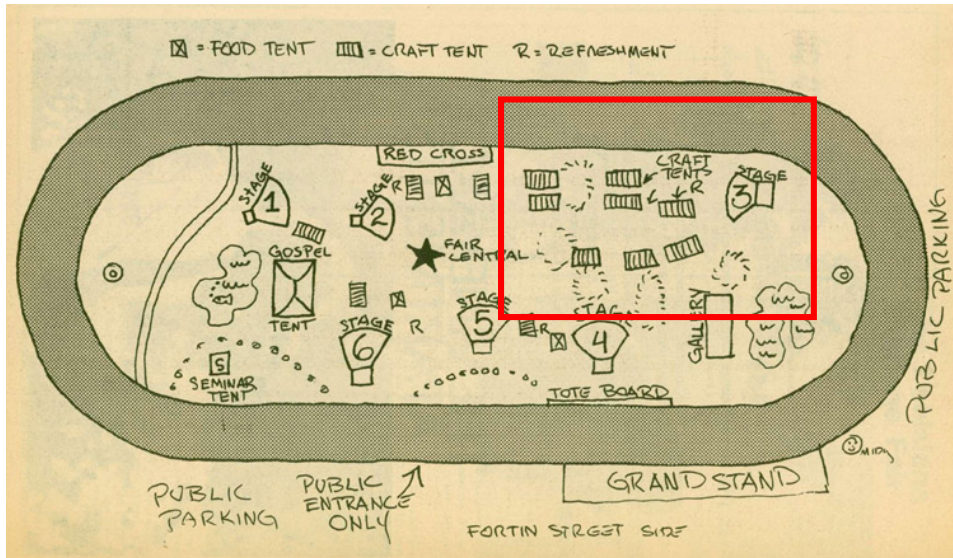
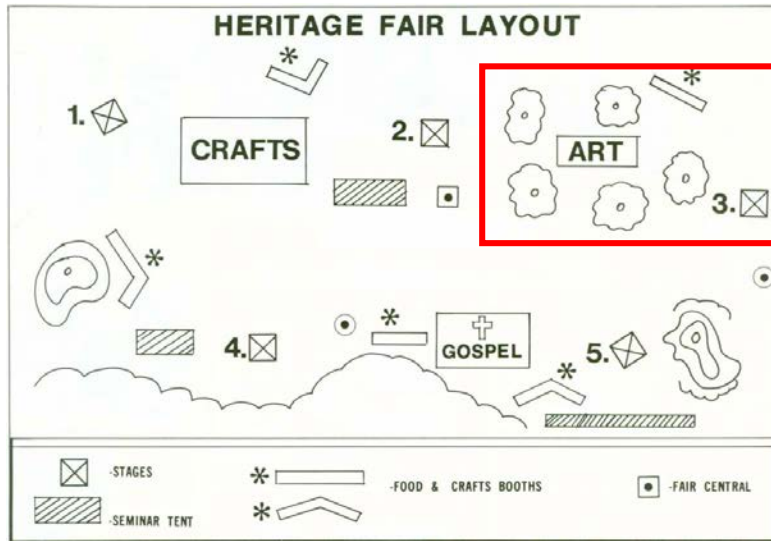
Figure 136. (bottom) September 1973 issue of *Interview* magazine, featuring Sister Gertrude Morgan.



Figure 137. Michael P. Smith. 1972 *Louisiana Heritage Fair, Fairgrounds*. Historic New Orleans Collection. Reproduced in *New Orleans Jazz Fest* (Pelican Publishing, 1991).



Figure 138. Harriet Blum, *Sister Gertrude Morgan's "Tabernacle Booth"* at the 1973-4 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. Photograph courtesy of the photographer.



Figures 139 and 140. Maps of the fairgrounds from the 1973 (top) and 1974 (bottom) Louisiana Heritage Fair portion of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festivals. Highlighted areas are the likely locations for Morgan’s “tabernacle booth.” New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival Foundation Archive.



Figures 141 and 142. Louisiana Heritage Fairs, 1972 (top) and 1973 (bottom).

Artworks highlighted in orange are the objects used for comparison of size increase of her art during the 1970s.

Lower right: Example of one of Morgan's painted fan constructions.



Poem
By me
sister
Destiny
Jesus Christ the Lamb of
God.
that man got some lovely pictures of
him and his wife. I never seen or
heard of such mystery before no

history
Bringing back the lost
dominion
of all the worlds that shine in the
heavens declaring the glory of God

Rev.
21
new Jerusalem spiritual
I got a new world in my view
and my journey of perseu. I'm

Figure 143. Details from examples of Morgan's manuscripts, indicating categories of text. Sacha Borenstein Clay Collection.

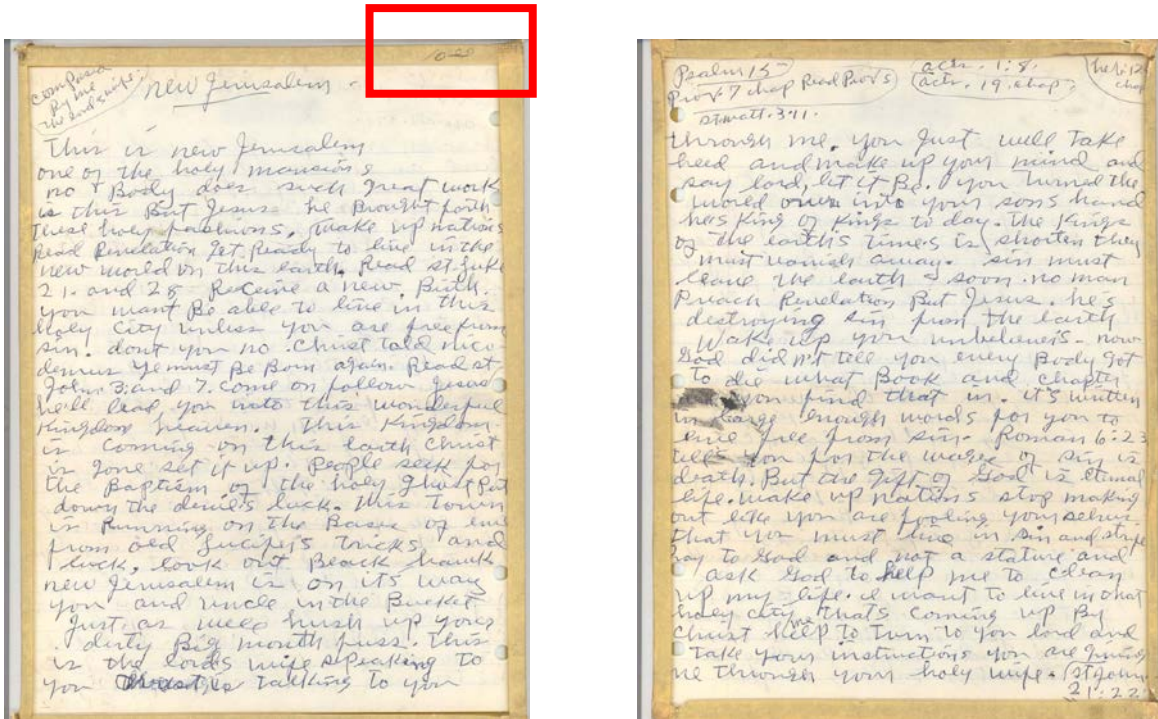


Figure 144. Sister Gertrude Morgan, *New Jerusalem Composed by Me the Lord's Wife* between panes of glass and with price "\$10.00" highlighted, recto and verso. Sacha Borenstein Clay Collection.



Figure 145. Unidentified photographer. *Sister Gertrude Morgan at Louisiana Heritage Fair at the Fairgrounds, 1973 or 1974.* INTUIT: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art.

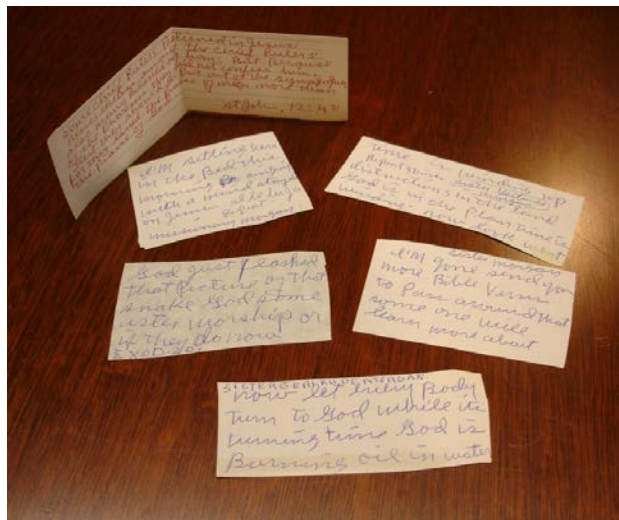


Figure 146. Detail of Michael P. Smith photograph (figure 142) of Morgan at the 1973 Louisiana Heritage Fair, with artwork highlighted.

Figure 147. Assorted Morgan writings on cut paper, Collection of Kurt Gitter and Alice Rae Yelen.



Figure 148. Detail of Michael P. Smith photograph (figure 142) of Morgan at the 1973 Louisiana Heritage Fair, with *Let's Make a Record* highlighted.

Figures 149 and 150. Sister Gertrude Morgan with Larry Borenstein, *Let's Make a Record* album cover in original printed form (lower left) and painted over by Morgan (lower right), 12 3/8 x 12 1/2 in., released by True Believer Records. Unpainted album cover in the collection of the author. Painted version is in the Smithsonian American Art Museum Gift of Chuck and Jan Rosenak 1981.136.5A-B.



Figure 151. Charles L. Franck, Pilgrims Travelers Baptist Church, 2016 6th Street, New Orleans, with an African American preacher standing at the pulpit, 1905. Franck-Bertacci Photographers Collection, The Historic New Orleans Collection, 1994.94.2.1018.



Figure 152 and 153. Noel Rockmore, Sister Gertrude Morgan in a small African American church, ca. 1970s. Emilie Rhys Collection. Note the symmetry of the floorplan.



State Library of Louisiana (<http://www.state.lib.la.us>)

Figure 154. Erol Barkemeyer, Theatrical production at the Fifth Baptist Church in New Orleans Louisiana in the 1930s, 3425 S. Rampart Street, New Orleans. State Library of Louisiana, <http://www.louisianadigitallibrary.org/cdm/ref/collection/LWP/id/1588>.



BEHOLD!

The Man Who Carves His Sermons In Wood

Displayed by Mr. and Mrs. E. Pierce

PLACE _____

TIME _____

ADMISSION _____

Quartet Singing Good Music

New Model Printing Co., 768 Mt. Vernon Ave. Ad. 9159

Figure 155. Unidentified photographer, James Hampton standing by his *Throne of the Third Heaven* in a Washington, D.C. garage, undated. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Figure 156. Broadside featuring Elijah and Cornelia Pierce with woodcarvings, ca. 1935.

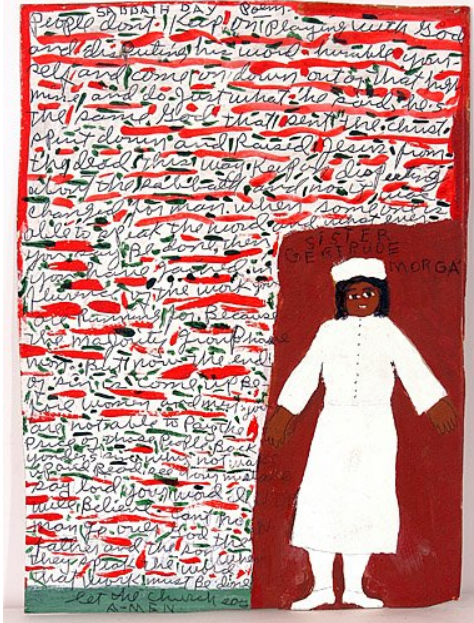


Figure 157. James Van Der Zee, *Sweet Daddy Grace*, 1938, gelatin silver print. Library of Congress. (shown here with figures 6 and 131 included for comparison)



Figure 158. (top) Sister Gertrude Morgan, *Lord Help Me Make this World My Home*, c.1972, crayon, graphite, pen, and acrylic on cardboard, 7 x 12 in. New Orleans Museum of Art.

Figure 159. (bottom) Sister Gertrude Morgan, *New Jerusalem*, undated, acrylic and/tempera, ballpoint ink, and pencil on cardboard, 12 x 19 in. American Folk Art Museum, New York.



Sister Gertrude Morgan art works sold at auction, with all information accessed on Live Auctioneers, www.liveauctioneers.com.

Figure 160. (upper left) *Sabbath Day*, undated, ink and paint on cardboard, 8 ½ x 12 in. Sold by Slotkin Folk Art for \$12,500 on May 5, 2007.

Figure 161. (upper right) *LIGHT with Self-Portrait*, c.1970s, paint with watercolor and ink on paper, 9 x 8 in. Sold by Slotkin Folk Art for \$11,000 on April 21, 2012.

Figure 162. (bottom) *Lord I'm Doing all the Good I Can*, undated, crayon, acrylic and/or tempera with graphite and ink on paper, 5 x 4 ¼ in. Sold by New Orleans Auction, St. Charles Gallery for \$2,400 on November 23, 2008.



Figures 163 (top) and 164 (bottom). Unidentified photographer, *Regenia Perry* standing in the galleries of “*What It Is: Black Folk Art from the Collection of Regenia Perry*” at the Anderson Gallery, Virginia Commonwealth University, October 6-27, 1982. Courtesy of Regenia A. Perry.



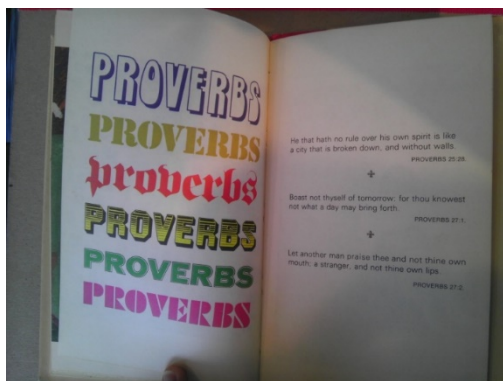
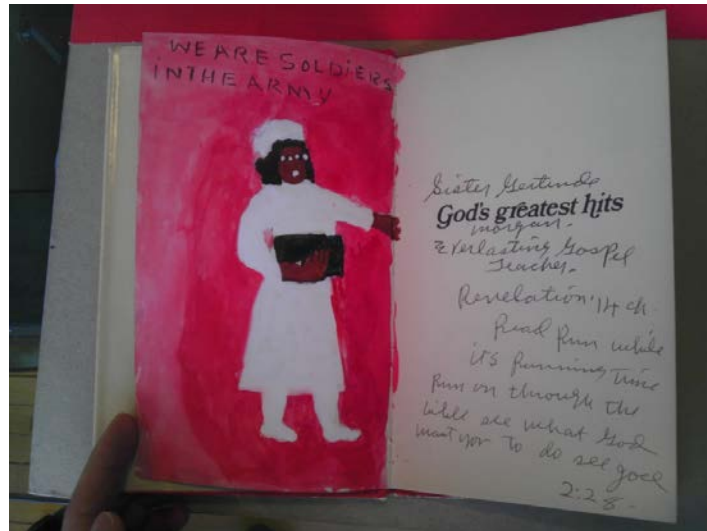
Figure 165. Sister Gertrude Morgan, *I'm Pressing on the upward way*, paint and ink on paper, 4 x 8 ½ in. Current whereabouts unknown.



Figure 166. Sister Gertrude Morgan, *Jesus Is My Air Plane*, undated. Acrylic and/or tempera, ballpoint ink, and pencil on paper. 18 x 26. Smithsonian American Art Museum.



Figure 167. Detail of *Jesus is My Air Plane*, figure 158.



Figures 168-170. Painted and inscribed title page (top) and selected pages of *God's Greatest Hits* (bottom), text selected by Wade Alexander and featuring artwork by Sister Gertrude Morgan from the collection of Rod McKuen. Stanyan Books, 1971. Courtesy of Fleischer-Ollman Gallery, Philadelphia.



Figure 171. Lee Friedlander, photograph of *Sister Gertrude Morgan*, 1970. Reproduced in *American Musicians* (New York: D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, Inc.), 1998.



Lee Friedlander, photographs reproduced in *Playing for the Benefit of the Band* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 2013.

Figure 172. (top) Alcide "Slow Drag" Pavageau, 1962.

Figure 173. (lower left) Mr. and Mrs. Chester Zardis, 1973.

Figure 174. (lower right) Alice Zeno (George Lewis' mother), 1957.



Lee Friedlander, photographs reproduced in *Playing for the Benefit of the Band* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 2013.

Figure 175. (left) Second Liners, 1961

Figure 176. (right) Young Tuxedo Brass Band, 1966

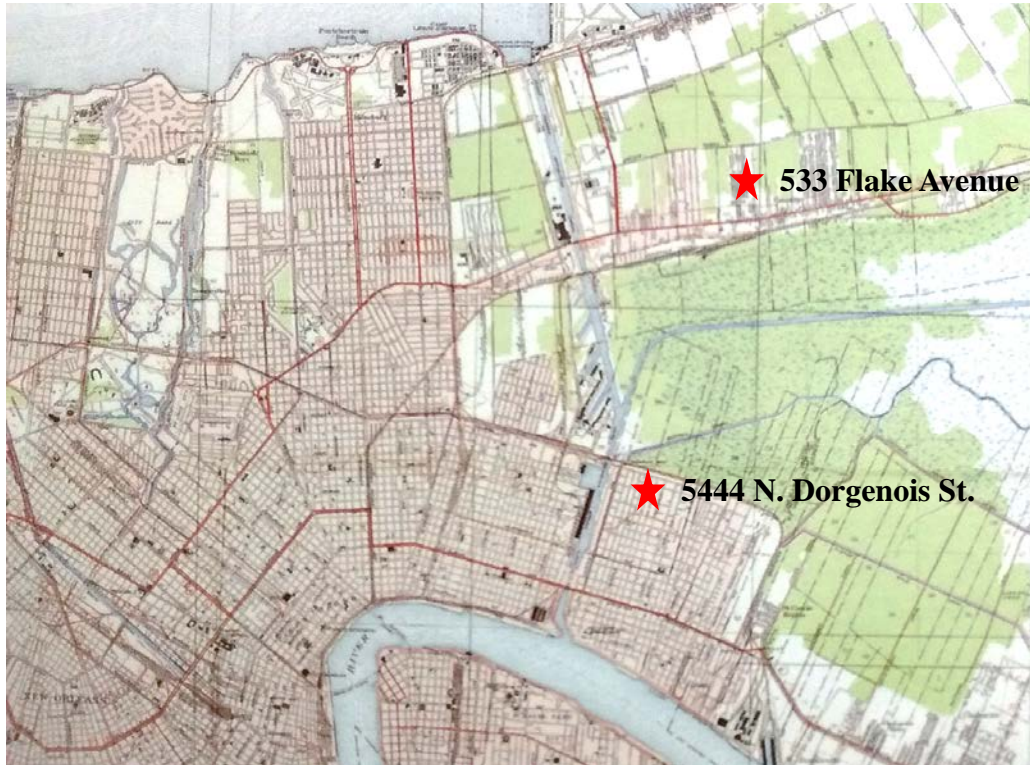


Figure 177. Map marking the location of 533 Flake Avenue (the orphanage) and 5444 N. Dorgenois Street (where Morgan boarded with Jennie Johnson), the two addresses at which Morgan resided the longest. U.S. Geological Survey Map, 1951. Reproduced in Breunlin and Lewis 2009, 20.



Figure 178. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *Sister Gertrude In Her Prayer Room*. Undated, 16 x. 20 in. Watercolor, acrylic and/or tempera, pencil, and crayon on paper. Collection of Jack M. Sawyer.



Figure 179. (left) Owen Murphy. *Sister Gertrude Morgan Using a Megaphone and Tapper to Assist in Her Service in the Prayer Room of the Everlasting Gospel Mission.* 1973, gelatin silver print, 10 x 8 in. New Orleans Museum of Art.

Figure 180. (right) Owen Murphy. *Sister Gertrude Morgan in the Prayer Room of the Everlasting Gospel Mission.* 1973, gelatin silver print, 8 x 10 in. New Orleans Museum of Art.

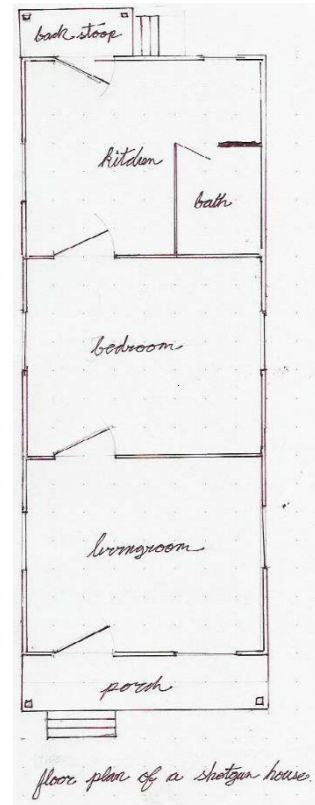
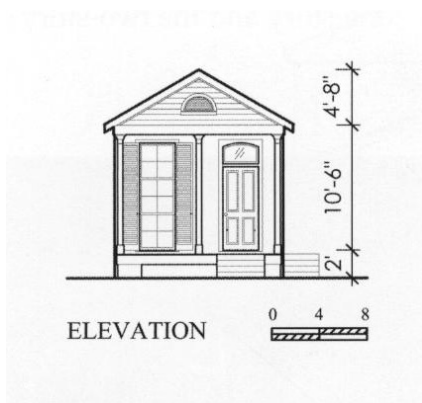


Figure 181. (upper left) Two examples of two-bay shotgun-type houses in New Orleans.

Figure 182 and 183. (lower left, right) Basic elevation and plan for shotgun house.



Figure 184. Joshua Horwitz. *Sister Gertrude Morgan Singing and Playing the Tambourine on the Front Gallery of the Everlasting Gospel Mission (5444 N. Dorgenois Street), ca.1974*, gelatin silver print, 7 x 5 in. Collection of Joshua Horwitz.



Figure 185. (left) Noel Rockmore. *Self-Portrait (with Japanese Print)*. 1956, oil on canvas. 36 ¼ x 24 ½ in. Hirshhorn Museum of Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution.

Figure 186. (right) Noel Rockmore. *Coney Island Labyrinth*. 1958, oil on canvas, 57 x 41 in. Collection of Richard Dodds.



Figure 187. Noel Rockmore. *Sister Gertrude Morgan (Eye of God)*. Ca. 1970, oil on canvas with collage (?). Collection of Upperline Restaurant, Jo Ann Clevenger.



Figure 188. Noel Rockmore. Detail of *Sister Gertrude Morgan (Eye of God)*, figure 179.

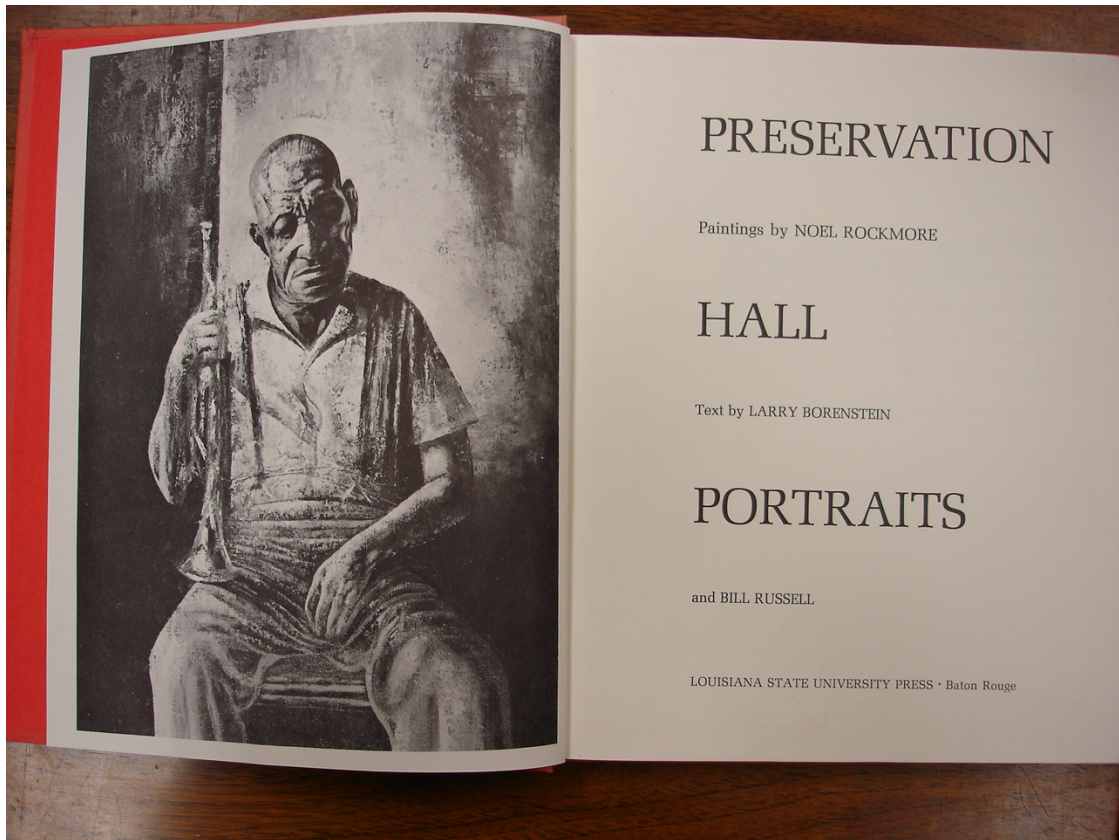


Figure 189. Frontispiece by Noel Rockmore, *Preservation Hall Portraits*, published by Louisiana State University Press, 1968.

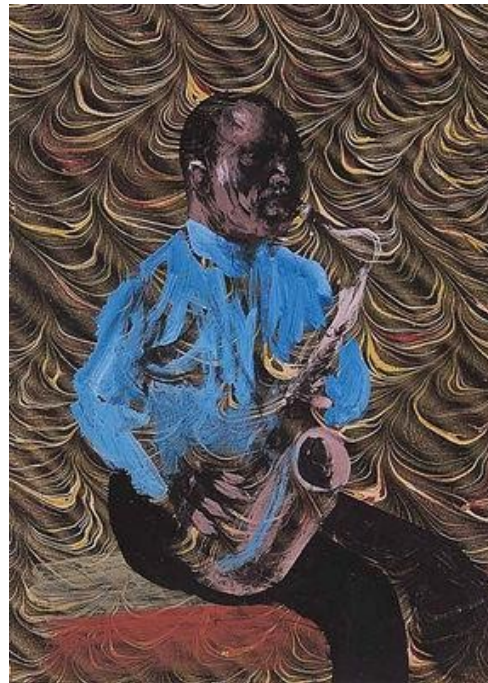
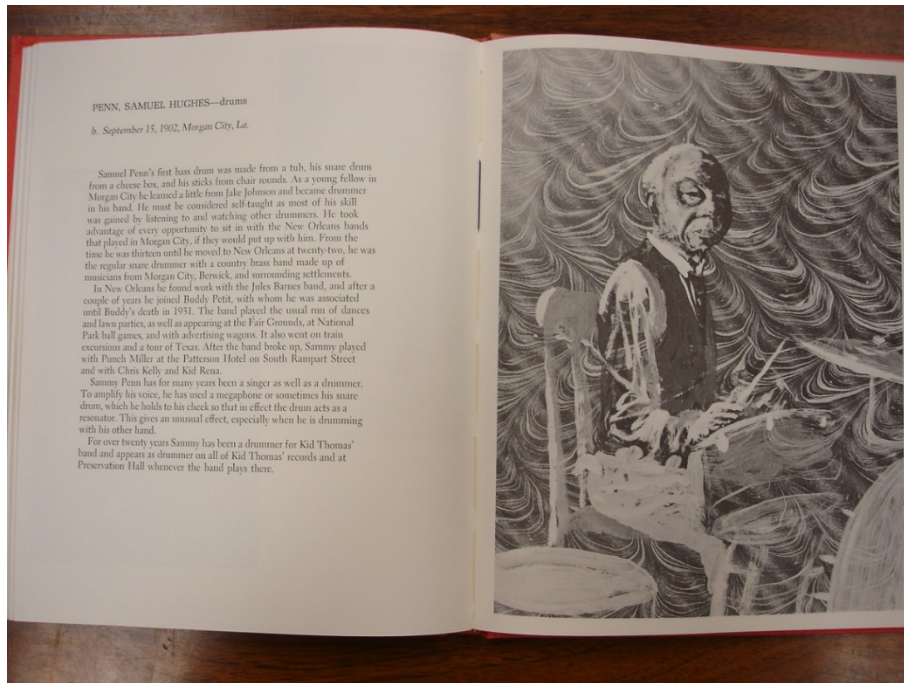
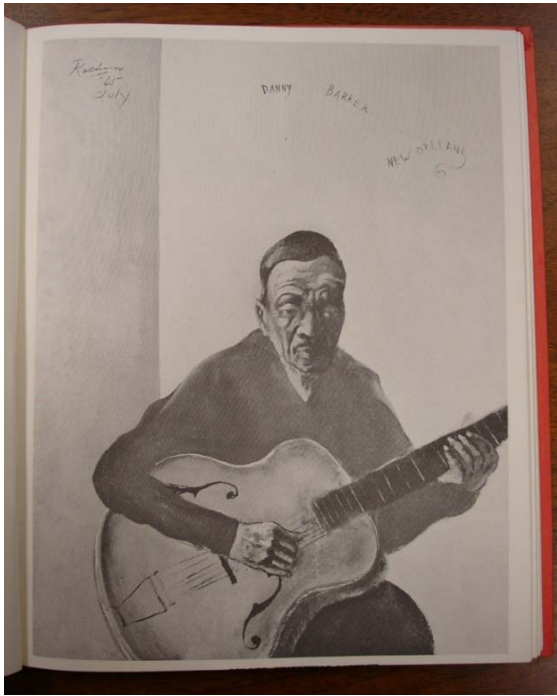


Figure 190. (top) Noel Rockmore portrait of Samuel Hughes Penn in *Preservation Hall Portraits*, published by Louisiana State University Press, 1968.

Figure 191. (bottom) Noel Rockmore, *Emanuel Paul*, 1964. Acrylic and polymer paint (?) on paper. Current whereabouts unknown.

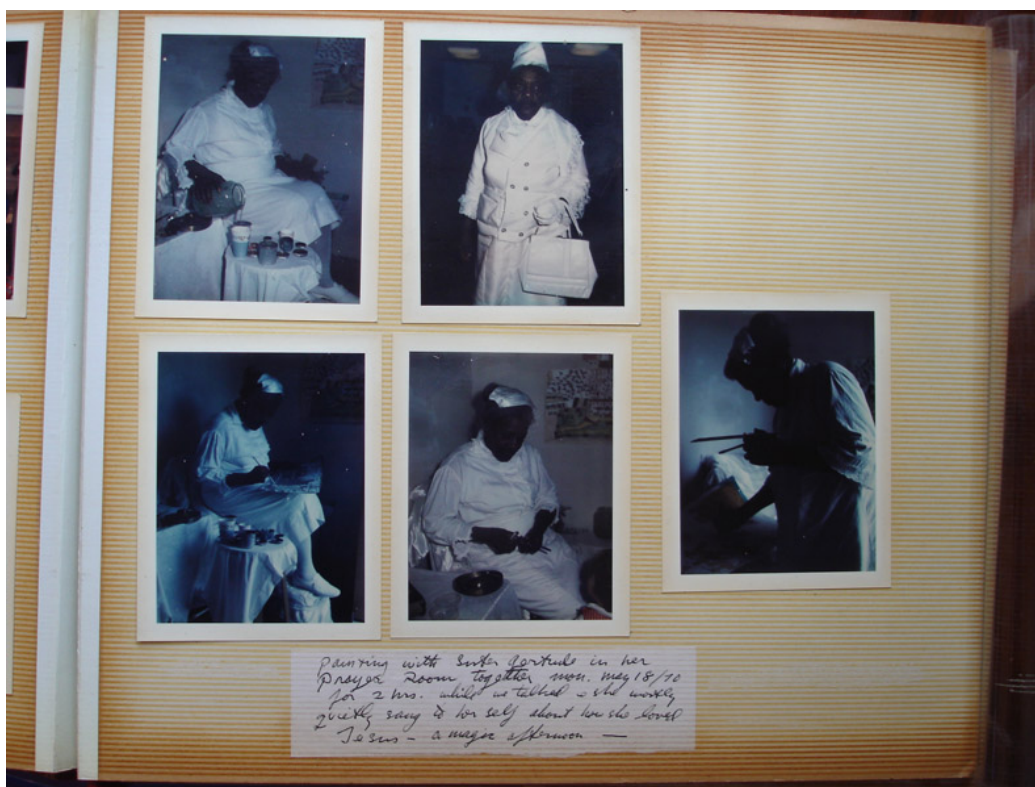


Figures 192 and 193. Noel Rockmore portrait of Danny Barker in reproduction (*Preservation Hall Portraits* publication) and original, July 1965. Acrylic and polymer paint (?). Current whereabouts unknown.



Figure 194. Noel Rockmore portrait of Israel Gorman in *Preservation Hall Portraits*, published by Louisiana State University Press, 1968.

Figure 195. Noel Rockmore portrait of Kid Valentine in *Preservation Hall Portraits*, published by Louisiana State University Press, 1968.



Planning with Sister Fortitude in her
Prayer Room together approx. May 18/70
for 2 hrs. while in talking - she worked
quietly away in her seat about her the world
Jesus - a major afternoon -

Figure 196. Page from a photo album belonging to Noel Rockmore, with photographs taken by Rockmore of Gertrude Morgan on May 18, 1970. Emilie Rhys Collection.



Figure 197. Detail of figure 196 showing Gertrude Morgan painting in the rearmost room of the Everlasting Gospel Mission, 1970. Emilie Rhys Collection.

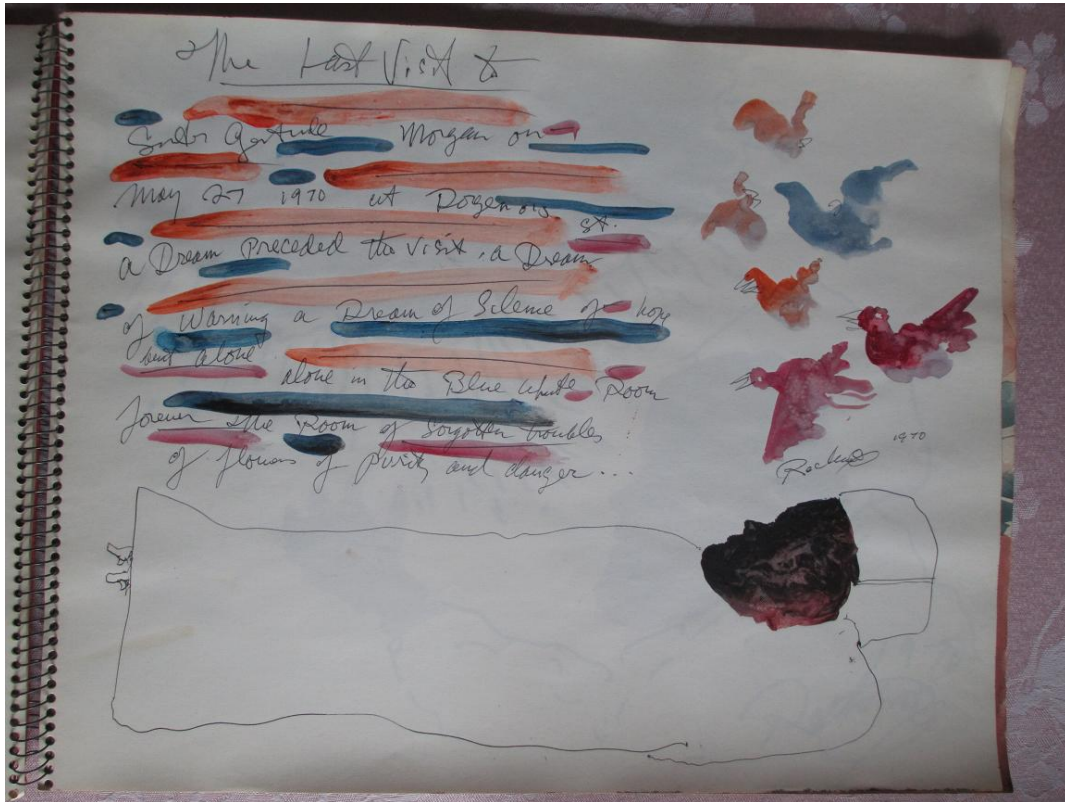


Figure 198. Noel Rockmore sketch of Sister Gertrude Morgan, 1970, ink and watercolor or tempera on paper. Collection of Rita Posselt.



Figure 199. (top) Henri Rousseau, *Sleeping Gypsy*. 1897, 51" x 6'7 in., oil on canvas. Museum of Modern Art.

Figure 200. (bottom) Paul Gauguin, *Spirit of the Dead Watching*. 1892, 28 1/2 x 36 3/8 in., oil on canvas. Albright Knox Gallery of Art.



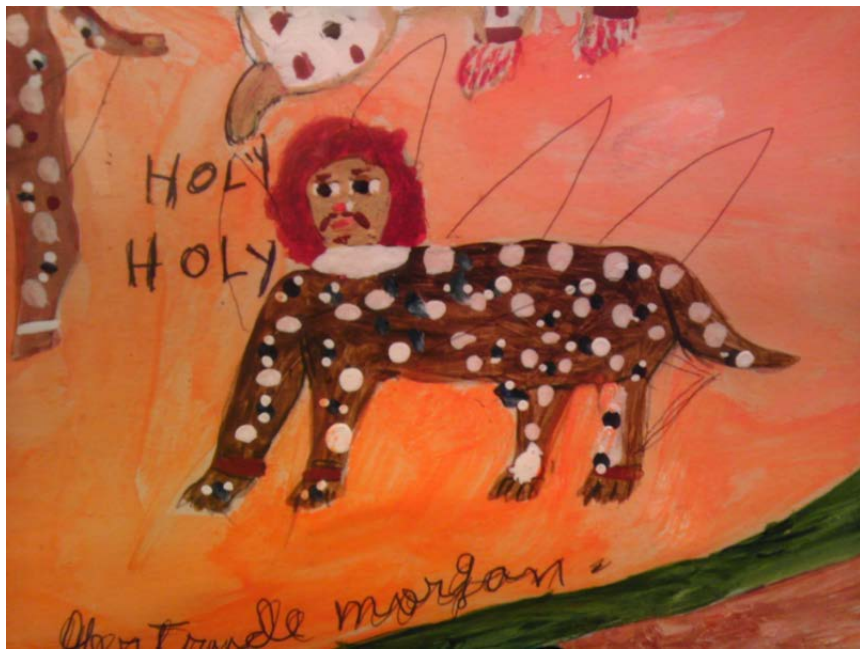
Figure 201. Noel Rockmore, sketch of Sister Gertrude Morgan, 1970, tempera and/or acrylic on paper. Collection of Rita Posselt.



Figure 202. Page from a photo album belonging to Noel Rockmore, with photographs taken by Rockmore of Gertrude Morgan on May 12, 1970. Emilie Rhys Collection.



Figure 203. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *REV 4 The Throne of God*, ca. 1967, mixed media on paper. Collection of Richard Gasperi and James Resko.



Figures 204 and 205. Details from figure 195, *REV 4 The Throne of God*, ca. 1967, mixed media on paper. Collection of Richard Gasperi and James Resko.



Figure 206. Harriet Blum, Sister Gertrude Morgan in a room in the Everlasting Gospel Mission, 1973 or 1974, gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the photographer.



Figure 207. (top) Detail of figure 178, *Sister Gertrude Morgan in her Prayer Room*.

Figure 208. (bottom) Detail from *The Lamb's Wife*, figure 46.



Figure 209. (top) Noel Rockmore. Photograph of Morgan painting in the Everlasting Gospel Mission, 1970. Private Collection.

Figure 210. (upper right) Detail from *She's In Her Prayer Room*, crayon and pen. Collection of Rod McKuen.



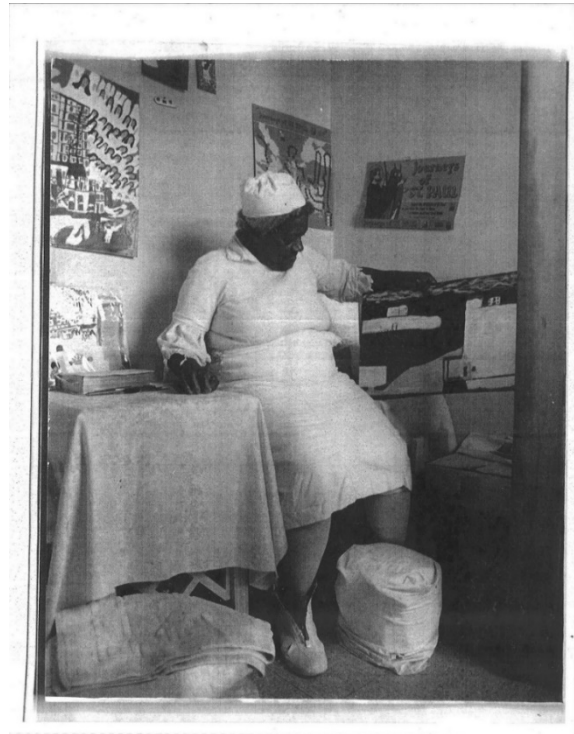
Figure 211. (left) Rev. George Kornegay. Monument with hubcaps, Brent, AL, 1992. Photograph by Judith McWillie.

Figure 212. (right) Florence Gibson, silver-painted objects in Gibson's yard, Savannah, GA, 2003. Photograph by Judith McWillie.



Figure 213. James Hampton. *The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly*. Ca.1950-1964, old and silver aluminum foil, Kraft paper, and plastic over wood furniture, paperboard, and glass; 180 pieces in overall. Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Figure 214. A crown created as part of James Hampton's *Throne of the Third Heaven*. Note the central protuberance is a foil-covered light bulb.



Figures 215 and 216. Jules Cahn, Sister Gertrude Morgan in the rearmost room in the Everlasting Gospel Mission, undated. Historic New Orleans Collection.



Figures 217. Jules Cahn. Photographs of Sister Gertrude Morgan in the rearmost room in the Everlasting Gospel Mission. Undated. Historic New Orleans Collection.

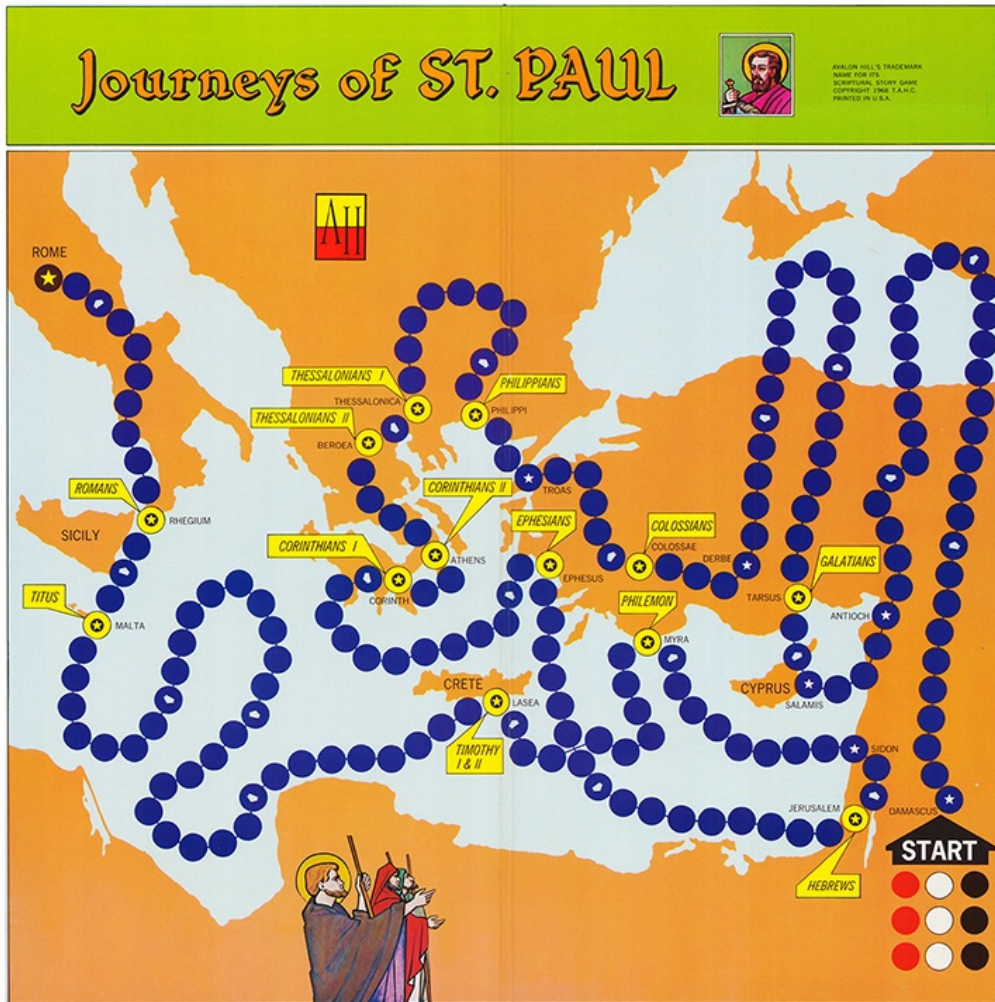


Figure 218. Board for *Journeys of St. Paul*, board game, 1968.



Figure 219. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *New Jerusalem*, undated. Acrylic and/or tempera, pencil, and ballpoint ink on paper. Collection of the Jaffe Family.



Figure 220. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *There's a Bright Crown Waiting for me*, undated. Acrylic and/or tempera, pencil, and ballpoint ink on paper, 14 7/8 x 22 in. Collection of Siri van Reis.



Figure 221. Annotated version of figure 220.



Figure 222. Sister Gertrude Morgan, detail from *Hurricane Betsy Flood*, undated. Collection of Kristina Johnson.



Examples of New Orleans building types. Clockwise from upper left:

Figure 223. 2-Bay Shotgun house.

Figure 224. Urban Creole Cottage.

Figure 225. Urban Plantation House (Madame John's Legacy, French Quarter).



Figure 226. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *New Jerusalem with Jesus is My Airplane*, ca. 1970s. Acrylic and/or tempera, pencil, and ballpoint ink on paper, 18 x 20in. Collection of Christopher and Jane Botsford.



Figure 227. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *New Jerusalem REV 21.1.*, c.1967. Acrylic and/or tempera, crayon, pencil, and ballpoint ink on paper. Collection of Eugene A. Mora.



Figure 228. Sister Gertrude Morgan. Unfinished *New Jerusalem*. Undated. Acrylic and/or tempera, pencil, and ballpoint ink on paper. Collection of the Jaffe Family.



Details from paintings showing variations in Morgan's techniques for rendering angels (clockwise from upper left):

Figure 229. Detail from *Jesus is My Air Plane*, figure 166.

Figure 230. Detail from *New Jerusalem*, figure 219.

Figure 231. Detail from *after these things I saw four Angels*, undated, watercolor, acrylic and/or tempera, ballpoint ink, and pencil on paper, 14 ¾ x 19 ¾ in. Collection of Stephen D. and Patricia L. Brink.



Figure 232. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *Lucifer Plotting Against the Government of God*. Undated. Crayon, acrylic and/or tempera, and pencil on cardboard, 7 5/8 x 7 7/8 in. Collection of the Jaffe Family.

Figure 233. Source illustration from Spicer's 1917 text, *Our Day In Light of Prophecy*.



Figure 234. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *New Jerusalem*, 1972, 22 x 28 in., acrylic and ink on paper. Collection of Kurt Gitter and Alice Rae Yelen.



Figure 235. Sister Gertrude Morgan. *Paradise: I no we can Reign here* (recto), undated, acrylic and/or tempera and ballpoint ink on cardboard cut-out, 11 ½ x 9 ½ in. Collection of Robert A. Roth.

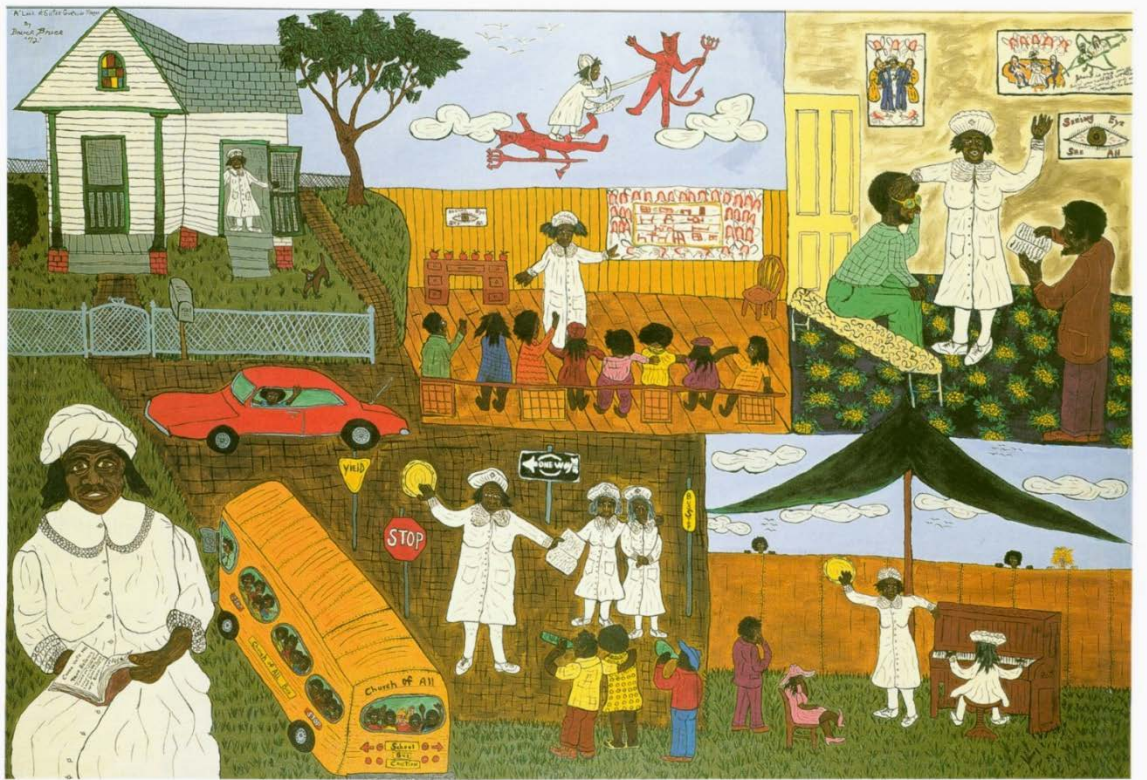


Figure 236. Bruce Brice. *A Look at Sister Gertrude Morgan*. 1972, 48 x 70 in., oil on canvas. Collection of George and Joyce Wein.



Figures 237 and 238. Unidentified photographer. These are two of four photographs printed on a single contact sheet, which I have found typically accompanying artworks sold through Borenstein. They were likely used as publicity materials, making them easily accessible to Brice.



Figure 239. (top left and right) Unidentified photographer, Sidney Kittenger (with Anna Gaule) operating the puppet theater.

Figure 240. (bottom) Unidentified photographer, Sidney Kittenger displaying and selling his work at Jackson Square, French Quarter.



Figure 241. Bruce Brice. *Still-Life*. 1969, Louisiana State Museum, 1982.142.4.

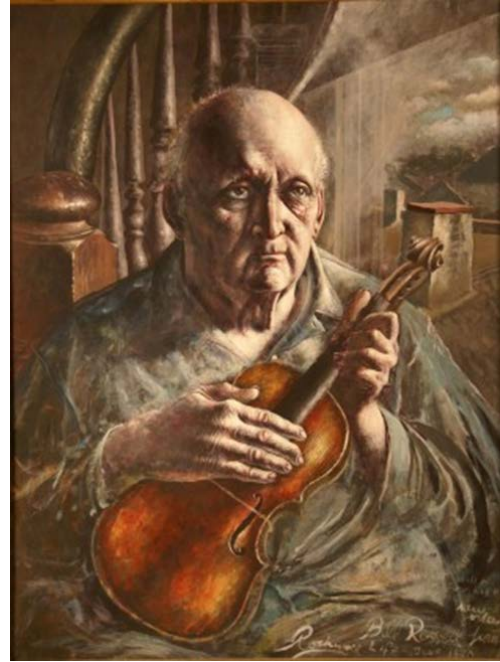


Figure 242. Noel Rockmore. *Jim Robinson*. Mid-late 1960s. Whereabouts unknown.

Figure 243. Noel Rockmore. *Bill Russell Holding Violin*. 1970, 23 x 17 5/8 in., oil on canvas. Sacha Borenstein Clay Collection.



Clockwise, starting from upper left, all by Noel Rockmore.

Figure 244. *Johnny Whites' Little Joint*, ink & wash, 1964.

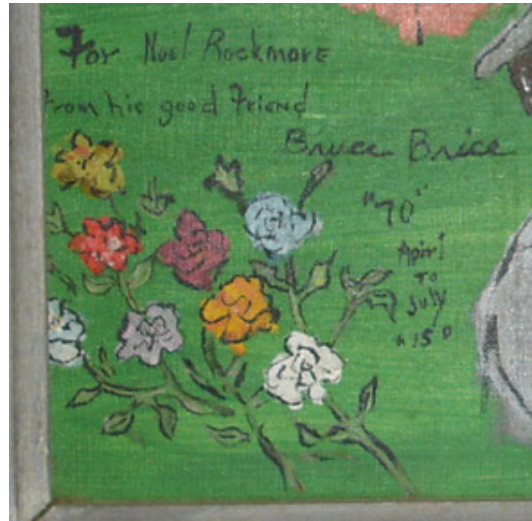
Figure 245. *Larry Dreaming*, medium unknown, 1970s.

Figure 246. *Circus Horses*, ink and wash, 1956.

Figure 247. *Saki*, oil on canvas, undated.



Figure 248. Bruce Brice. *Buster's (Have Fun)*. 1970. Oil on canvas. Collection of the Jaffe Family.



Figures 249 and 250. Bruce Brice. Details from *Buster's (Have Fun)*. 1970. Oil on canvas. Collection of the Jaffe Family.



Figure 251. Bruce Brice, *Rockmore in Studio*, 1971, oil on canvas, 70 x 94 in. New Orleans Museum of Art.

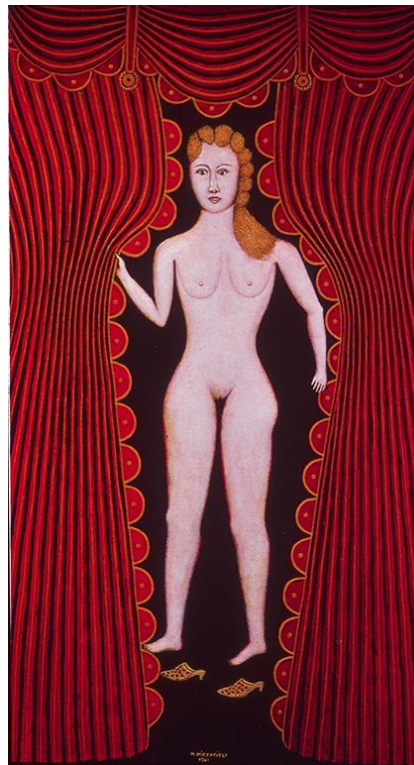
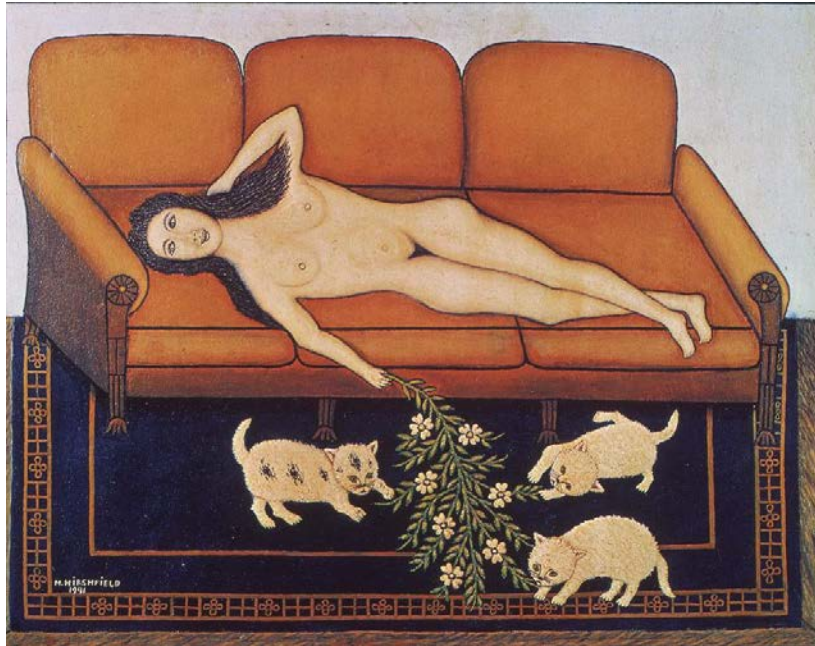


Figure 252. Morris Hirshfield, *Nude on a Sofa with Three Pussies*. 1941, oil on canvas.
Figure 253. Morris Hirshfield, *Nude at the Window*. 1941, oil on canvas.

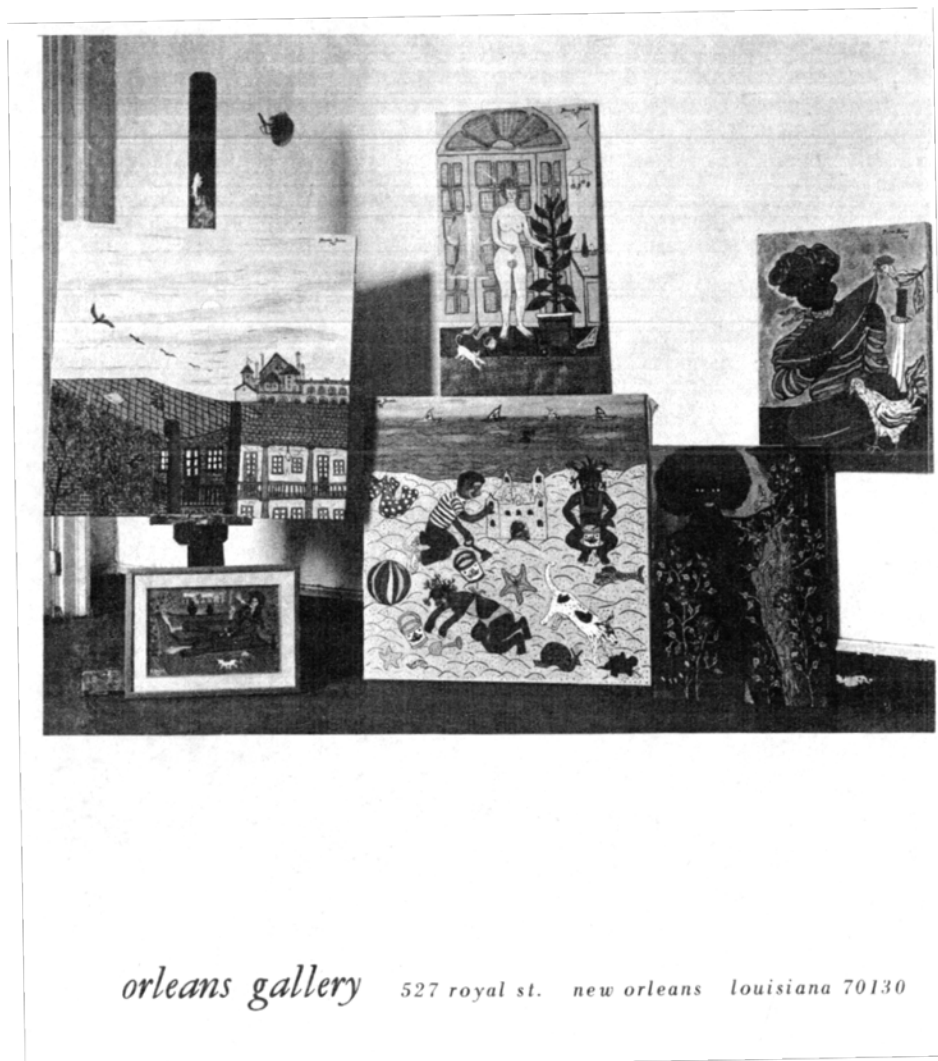


Figure 254. Gallery announcement for one-man show at the Orleans Gallery for Bruce Brice, 1972.



Figure 255. Jeff Donaldson. *Wives of Shango*. 1969, watercolor with mixed media on paper, 30 x. 22 in. Brooklyn Museum of Art.

Figure 256. Barbara Jones-Hogu. *Relate to Your Heritage*, 1971, screenprint on paper, 34 x 43 in. Brooklyn Museum of Art.



Figure 257. Wadsworth Jarrell. *Revolutionary*. 1972, screenprint on paper, 34 x 26 1/2 in. Brooklyn Museum of Art.

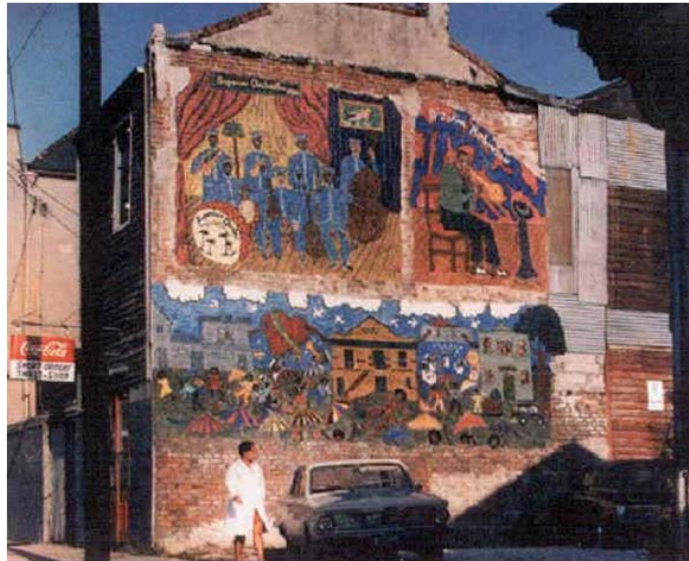
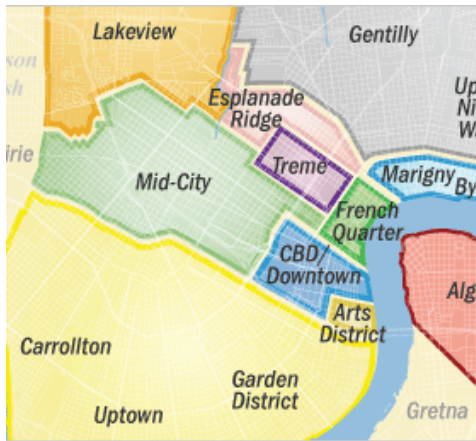


Figure 258. (top left) Map of different New Orleans neighborhoods. Tremé is outlined in purple, located just above the French Quarter.

Figure 259. (top right) Michael P. Smith. *Bruce Brice Mural, the Tremé community* 638/21A, 1972.

Figure 260. (bottom) Photograph of the Superior Orchestra, 1910. Possibly published in Al Rose and Edward Souchon's book, *New Orleans Jazz: A Family Album*, published in 1967 and a source photograph for Brice's mural.

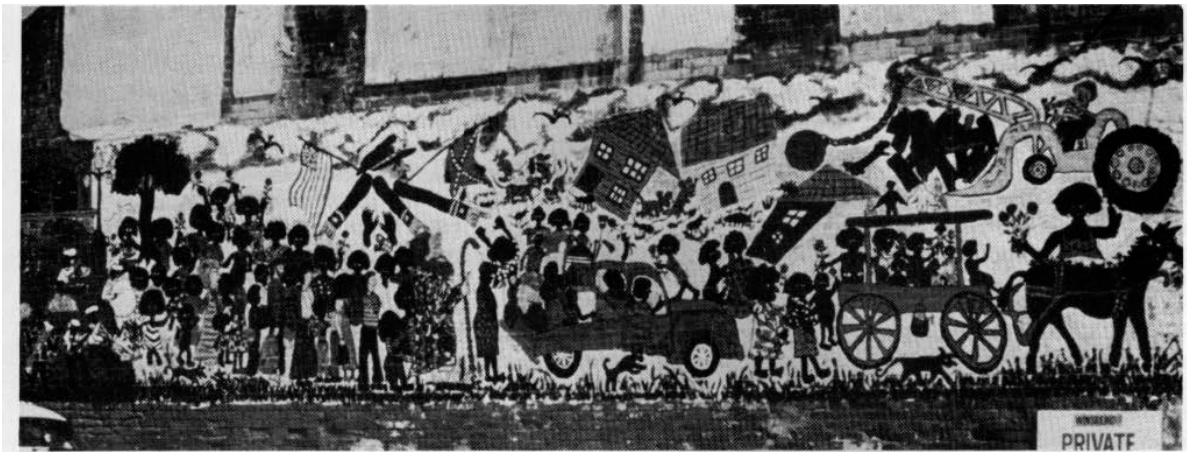


Figure 261. Bruce Brice. Close-up view of untitled mural, located at 1271 St. Philip Street, Tremé. 1971 (no longer extant).



Figure 262. (top) Michael P. Smith, photographer. Color photograph of Bruce Brice mural in the Tremé, 1970s (same mural as in figure 261).

Figure 263. (bottom) Unknown photographer. Bruce Brice painting the Tremé mural, St. Philip Street. Photograph courtesy of the artist.



Figure 264. Bruce Brice. Partial view of the Desire Street mural. 1971 (left side; mural no longer extant).

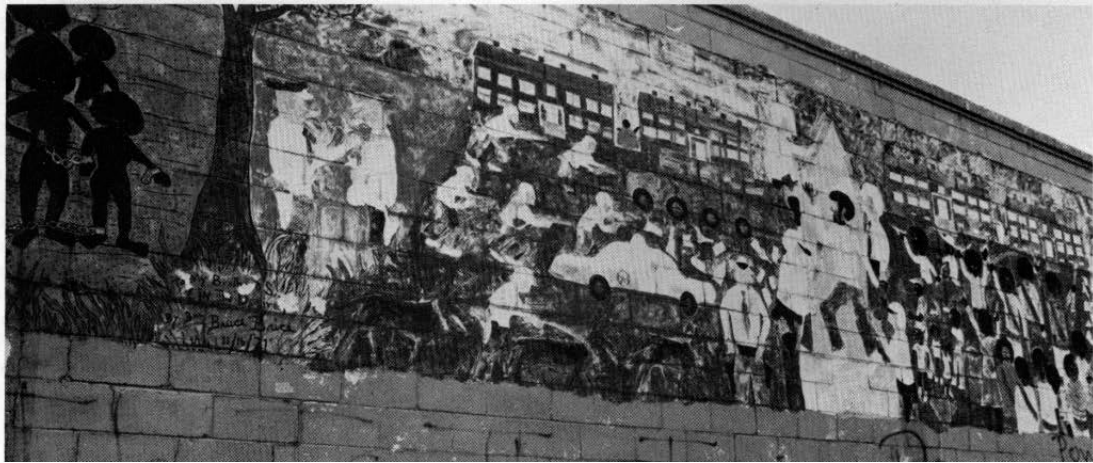


Figure 265. Bruce Brice. Partial view of the Desire Street mural and detail view of the artist's dedication. 1971 (right side; mural no longer extant).

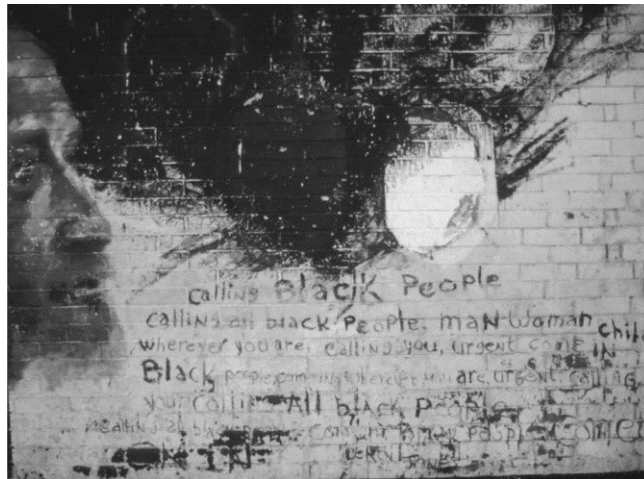


Figure 266. (top) *The Wall of Respect*, Chicago, 1967 (no longer extant).

Figure 267. (bottom) Bob Crawford, detail of Edward Christmas's painting of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka's poem SOS on the *Wall of Respect*, 1967.



Figure 268. Bruce Brice. Poster published in the *Vieux Carré Courier*, April 18-24, 1974.

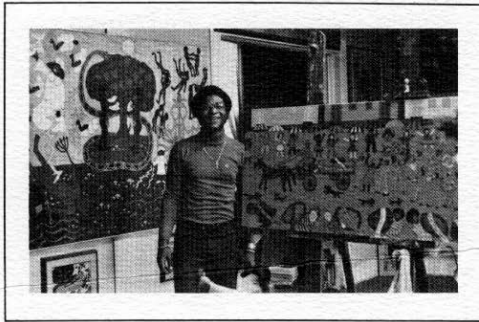


Figure 269. Detail of poster published in the *Vieux Carré Courier*, April 18-24, 1974, figure 268.



Figure 270. Unidentified photographer. Bruce Brice at the 1971 Heritage Fair of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, Congo Square.

Bruce Brice



their work, there are similarities in how they construct their pictures. Each has developed a series of images which form the elements or basic vocabulary of his pictorial syntax, and an important factor in attempting to qualitatively assess their production is in grasping how ingeniously varied the combination and arrangement of these elements are. No matter that Sister Gertrude's execution is loose and rapid compared to Brice's neat technique; the one serves as an efficient vehicle of expression as surely as does the other.

The two painters share a directness and lack of equivocation in their pictures that is one of the basic and underlying common factors in all art of this type: there is no mistaking what is going on in any picture, and it is laid out for us to see with a wealth of explicit and repetitive detail. This repetition must be understood not as the painter's lack of inventive ability but rather as the intention that a given image is meant to be both symbolic and literal in the same moment. In this way much "naive" art shares an important esthetic principle with a good deal of earlier and non-western visual traditions — ancient Near Eastern art for instance. Beneath the differences between Sister Gertrude's completely self-developed technique and imagery and Brice's paintings (which unmistakably reveal the background of some earlier school training experience), it is this special function of their separate visual repertoires which unite them in the still vital tradition of a personal and vividly powerful art.

DENNIS ADRIAN

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1975

Figure 271. Detail of announcement for *Two New Orleans Folk Artists* at the Dorothy Rosenthal Gallery, 1975.

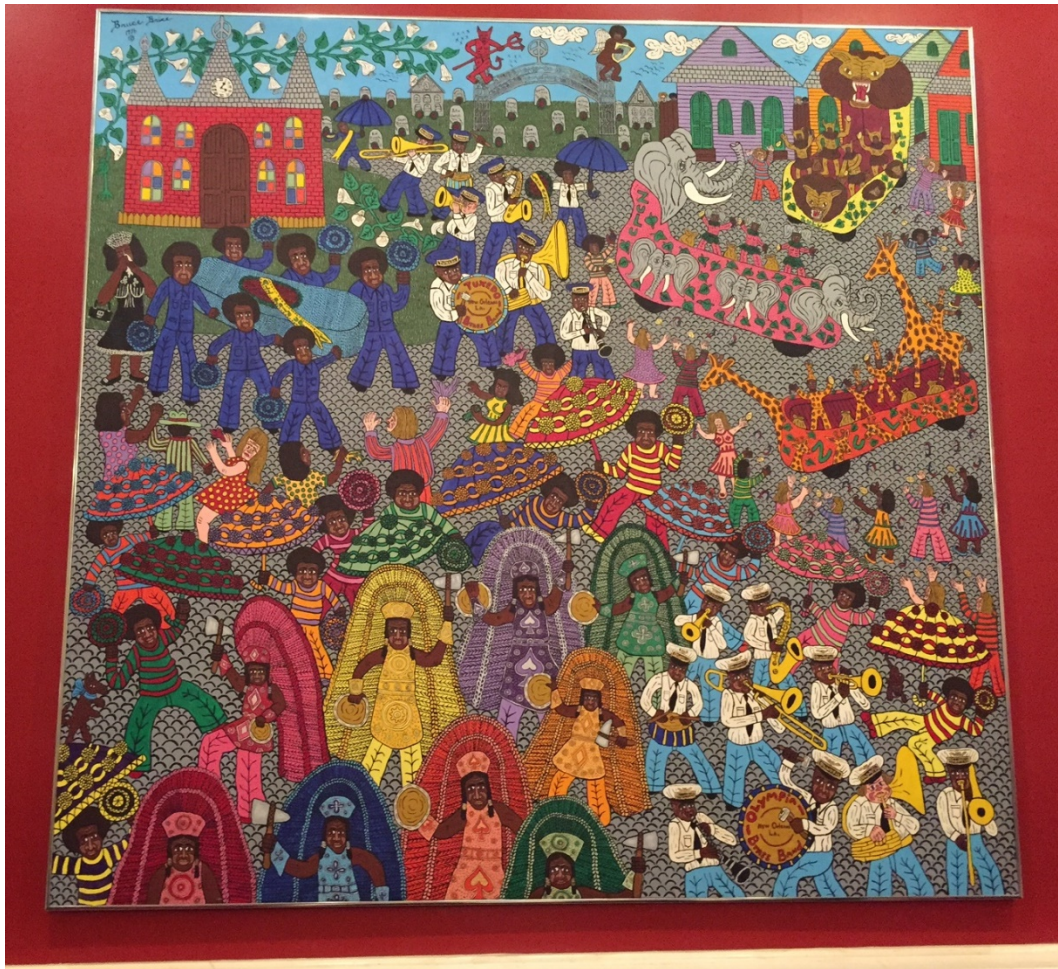


Figure 272. Bruce Brice. *Zulu Mardi Gras*. 1976, oil on canvas. Collection of Dooky Chase Restaurant.



Figure 273. Detail of pallbearers, Bruce Brice. *Zulu Mardi Gras*. 1976, figure 272.



Figure 274. Detail of Zulu floats, Bruce Brice. *Zulu Mardi Gras*. 1976, figure 272.



Figure 275. Detail of second line paraders, Bruce Brice. *Zulu Mardi Gras*. 1976, figure 272.

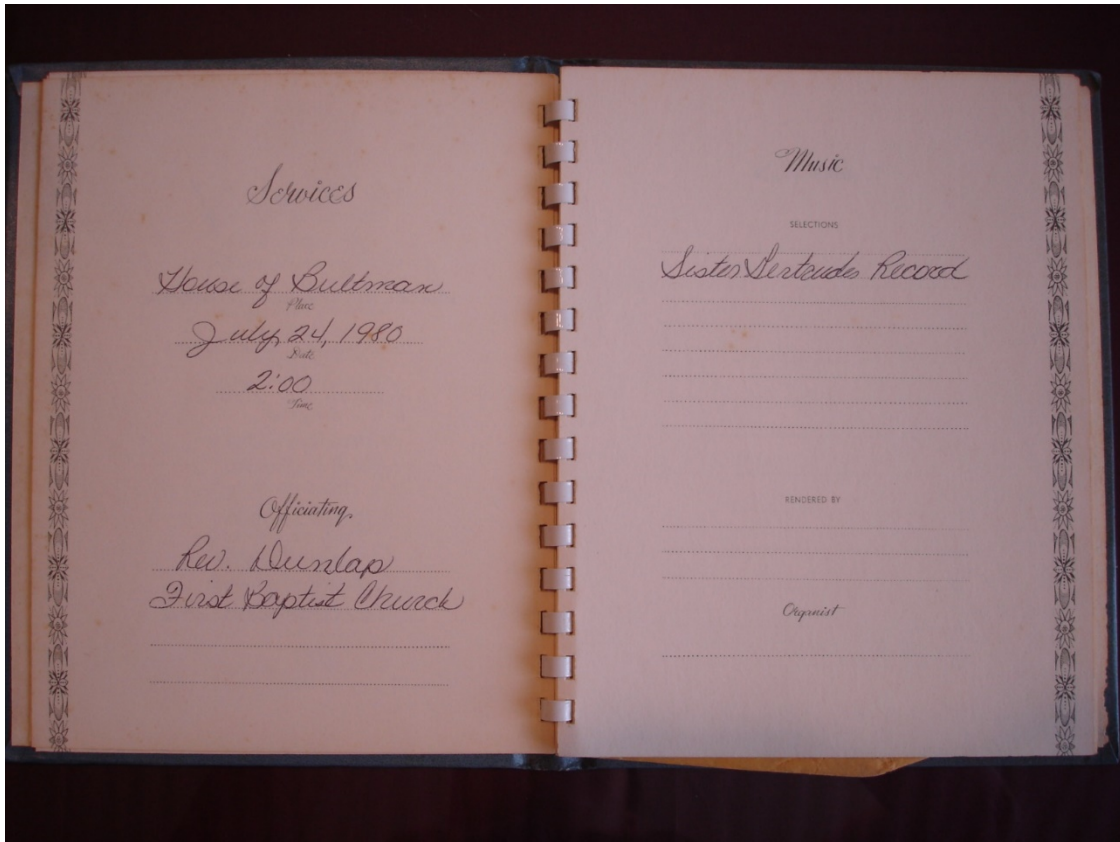


Figure 276. Opening pages of guestbook for the Sister Gertrude Morgan's Memorial Service, July 24, 1980. Private Collection.

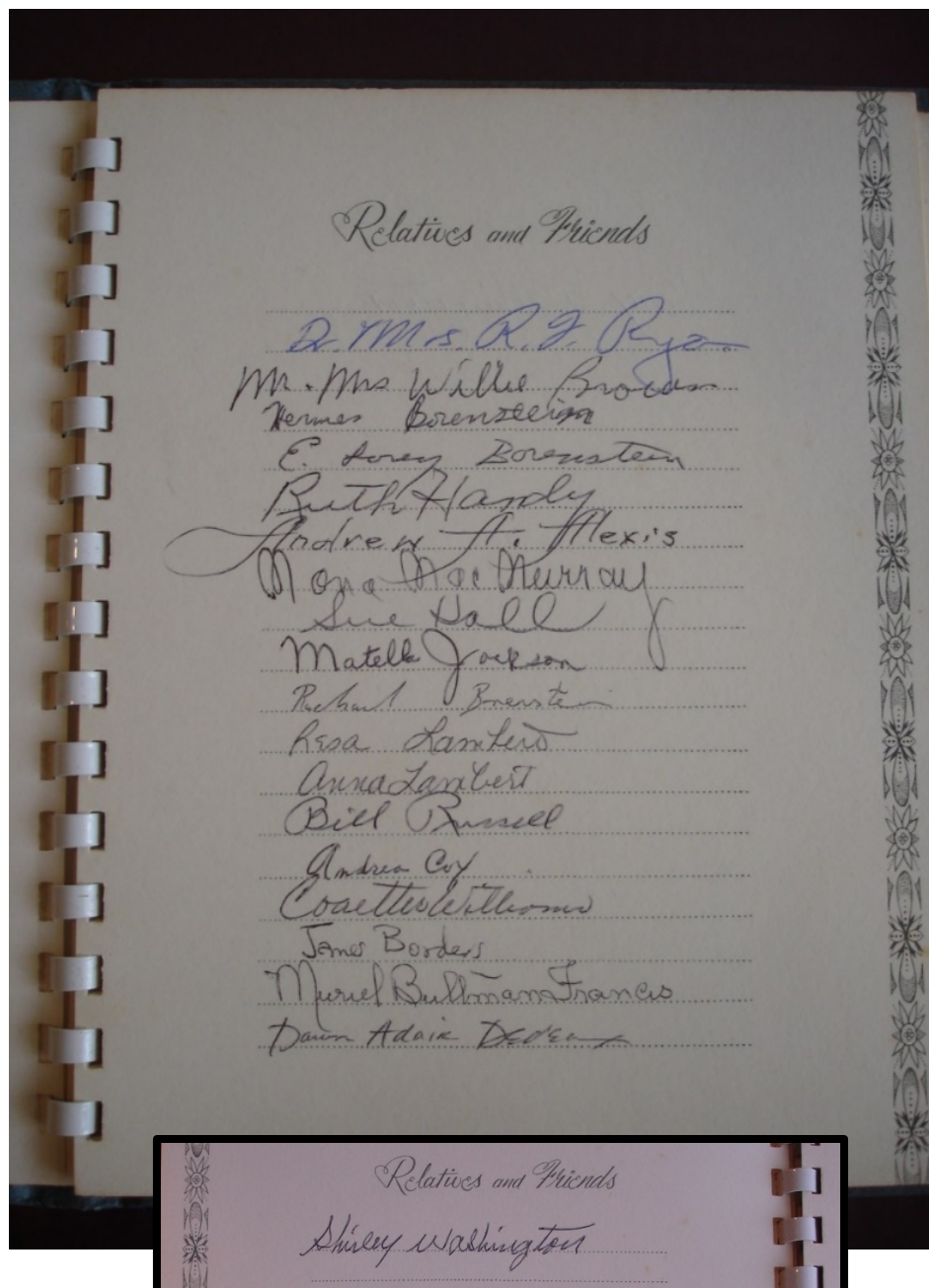


Figure 277. List of names entered into the guestbook for Sister Gertrude Morgan's Memorial service at House of Bultman, July 24, 1980. Private Collection.



Figure 278. Sister Gertrude Morgan installation, *Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980*, exhibited at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in 1982.

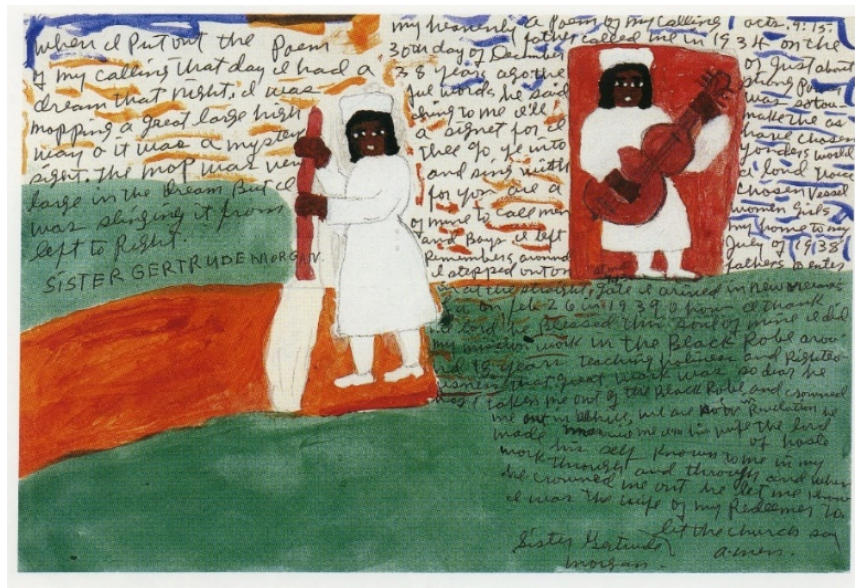


Figure 279. (top) Sister Gertrude Morgan, *Revelation of St. John the Divine*, c.1965-74, ink and acrylic on window shade, 4' x 7'. New Orleans Museum of Art, Gift of Lee and Maria Friedlander.

Figure 280. (bottom) Sister Gertrude Morgan, *A Poem of My Calling*, 1972, ink and acrylic on paper, 10 ½ x 15". Collection of Susann E. Craig.



Sister Gertrude Morgan

Born 1900, Lafayette, Alabama¹
Died 1980, New Orleans, Louisiana

It was through visiting Sister Gertrude Morgan in 1974 in her small white frame house in St. Bernard Parish, in New Orleans' Ninth Ward, that an important aspect of the aesthetic of self-taught black artists began to become evident. Sister Gertrude was a powerfully gifted person, not just as a painter but as a preacher and singer, a woman whose faith in God and determination to help others were forcefully sensed just by her presence. It seemed somehow perfectly unextraordinary to discover that her front lawn was covered with four-leaf clovers.

Gertrude Morgan's life seems to have followed a series of progressions from one to another phase in both her religious and artistic callings. Her childhood was spent in Lafayette, Alabama; she was an active member there of Dr. J. B. Miller's Baptist church. In 1937, when she was 37, a voice said to her, "Go and preach, tell it to the world." She went in 1939 to New Orleans, where she began a period of intensive missionary work, beginning as a street preacher. She started an orphanage with two other women, Mother Margaret Parker and Sister Cora Williams, raising money through

facing page:
New Jerusalem, c. 1965-75. Pen, pencil and
acrylic on cardboard, 22 x 28 1/2". Alan Jaffe,
New Orleans. Cat. no. 150.

97

Figure 281. Page from *Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980* exhibition catalogue featuring photograph by Guy Mendes.



Figure 282. Unidentified photographer, *Sister Gertrude Morgan with young girls at the Associated Artists Gallery, 1959*. Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University, Esselynck Collection.



Figure 283. Installation view of William Edmondson's sculptures as part of *Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980* at the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

Figure 284. Louise Dahl-Wolfe, photograph of William Edmondson, 1937, gelatin silver print. Reproduced for the installation of *Black Folk Art in America*.



Figure 285. Installation view of Leslie Payne sculptures as part of *Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980* at the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

Figure 286. Robert Jones, photograph of Leslie Payne, undated. Reproduced and cropped for the installation of *Black Folk Art in America*.



Figure 287. Installation view of Ulysses Davis sculptures as part of *Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980* at the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

Figure 288. Melinda Blauvelt, photograph of Ulysses Davis in his barbershop in Savannah, GA, 1981. Reproduced and cropped for the installation of *Black Folk Art in America*.



Figure 289. Lonnie Holley, *The Music Lives After the Instruments is Destroyed*, 1984, burned musical instruments, artificial flowers, wire, 33 x 36 x 13 in. Collection of the Souls Grown Deep Foundation.

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Susann E. Craig
William A. Fagaly
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Benjamin Jaffe
Regenia A. Perry
Emilie Rhys
Alice Rae Yelen and Kurt Gitter

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Harriet Blum
Christopher Botsford
Hazell Boyce

Bruce Brice
Joann Clevenger
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Appendix 1: Transcription of Poem by Sister Gertrude Morgan, recorded on May 10, 1961 at 726 St. Peter Street [audio 5], Sacha B. Clay Collection, New Orleans.

Poem, Sister Gertrude Morgan

God's Law wrote on Stone
Spanglin bird [Spangenberg] with his house will keep the Sabbath until the end
If it was not the Father's will, He would not reveal Exodus 20 and 8 scripture to be filled
I know God's Word is right, He wants you to come out of darkness into this great light
Do you take the Lord's name in vain? O, isn't that a shame
God had the whole world in his hands, why you won't keep his commands?
God said, "Keep my commandments and live; receive the Holy Ghost and be filled"
Don't you know God loves the world? Why His word you won't observe?
Revelation 14 and 12 tells of the patience of the saints that keeps the commandments of God
And the faith of Jesus and walk upright to please Him that He will release us.

Now, Rogers Williams [*sic*] was in that number too, he knew God's word is true
Zinzinder [*sic*], leader of Moravians, missionary movement, was a believer of the sanctity of the Sabbath of God. Questioning was discussed by Zinzinder [*sic*], He spoke to the Moravians on his visit to Pennsylvania.*

Now let us remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, and do God's work and be bolly [?]
Do you want to be saved? You are at the end.
Men, women, girls and boys, I'll tell you as Christ told Nicodemus. Ye must be born again.
Sister Missionary, can I enter back into my mother's womb again? No!
But when you are born of a woman, you is of flesh. You can do all kinds of fleshly-minded things. Whatever you, whatever your mind will tell you. But when you are born of the Spirit of God, you obey God. You have God's spirit in you.

Well, Sister Missionary, there are so many people I see, must not have God's Spirit in them.
Why? I see they do so many wicked doings from the pulpit back to the door. They need the Holy Ghost.

[paper rustles]

The Holy Ghost is power, see Acts 1 and 8. See Acts 2 and 4. John speaks from St. Matthew 3:11. Tell you he only baptizes with water. He's letting you know that water won't clean you, nor keep you clean. You know when you take a bath, you can use the best kind of soap, but if you don't bathe again soon, you accumulate, what? An old odor. Now if you don't have power to keep you, your mind will come evil and corrupted.

God Bless you, Sister Morgan [transitions on guitar to the song, *Jesus is on the Main Line*]

* The first half of this composition draws upon phrases and content from Spicer, 180.

Appendix 2: Audio Track List

1. “The Old Rugged Cross” – George Lewis
The Best of George Lewis, 1943-1964, GHB Music, compact disc, 2013.
2. “I Got a New World in My View” – Sister Gertrude Morgan
Let’s Make a Record, True Believer Records / Preservation Hall (1971), rereleased by Rope-A-Dope, compact disc, 2005.
3. “Let’s Make a Record,” excerpt from August 19, 1961 recording at 726 St. Peter Street -- Sister Gertrude Morgan with George Lewis and Kid Thomas
Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University
4. Prayer, excerpt from April 26, 1959 recording at 726 St. Peter Street – Sister Gertrude Morgan
Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University
5. Poem and “Jesus on the Mainline,” excerpt from May 10, 1959 recording at 726 St. Peter Street – Sister Gertrude Morgan
Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University
6. “I Got Two Wings” – Elder Utah Smith
Elder Utah Smith and COGIC Friends, CaseQuarter, compact disc, 2008.
7. “Tiger Rag” – George Lewis
The Best of George Lewis, 1943-1964, GHB Music, compact disc, 2013.
8. “Dry Bones in the Valley” – Reverend J.M. Gates and Congregation
Rev. J.M. Gates Volume 4 (1926), Document Records DOCD-5442, compact disc, 1996.
9. “Blackberries” – Dora Bliggen
Classic Sounds of New Orleans, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, compact disc, 2010.
10. “Ornithology” – Charlie Parker
Charlie Parker (at Storyville), Blue Note Records, compact disc, 1998.
11. Excerpt from “Allons a Lafayette” – Dewey Balfa
Cajun Fiddle, Old and New: Instruction, Folkways Records (1977), rereleased on compact disc on Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 2004.
12. “When the Circle Be Unbroken” – Babe Stovall
Sorrow Come Pass Around Me: A Survey of Rural Religious Black Music, Dust-to-Digital, 2013.
13. “Just a While to Stay Here” – Eureka Brass Band
Classic Sounds of New Orleans, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, compact disc, 2010.