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# Playing the worship

Building community through music in a Black Church

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# **PLAYING THE WORSHIP**

## **BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH MUSIC IN A BLACK CHURCH**

### **CONTENTS**

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	p. 4
a. Methodology	p. 6
<b>CHAPTER 1 – BLACKS, THE SOUTH, ATLANTA</b>	p. 9
<b>1.1 - African American history in the South</b>	p. 10
a. The slave trade: origins of African American history	p. 10
b. Formation of a new community: African retentions and enslavement	p. 14
c. Georgia at the end of slavery: modernization and demographics	p. 17
<b>1.2 – Atlanta: railroads and the South</b>	p. 20
a. Atlanta, the original site	p. 20
b. After Civil War: the railroad and black labor	p. 21
c. Development of Metro Atlanta and the Jim Crow laws	p. 23
<b>1.3 – Sweet Auburn district</b>	p. 25
a. Development of Sweet Auburn District	p. 25
b. Racial zoning	p. 35
<b>1.4 – The Black Church</b>	p. 39
<b>1.5 – Ebenezer Baptist Church – history and organization</b>	p. 44
<b>CHAPTER 2 - EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH</b>	p. 52
<b>2.1 – Ebenezer in Sweet Auburn: community and congregation</b>	p. 52
a. Community: Sweet Auburn social environment	p. 53
b. Congregation: promotion of personal involvement	p. 62
<b>2.2 – The worship service</b>	p. 68

a. The “Holy Spirit effect” p. 75

**CHAPTER 3 – PLAYING THE WORSHIP** p. 86

**3.1 – Structure and practices in the Afro-Baptist ritual** p. 88

**3.2 – Black Sacred Music** p. 100

a. Music in the Black Church p. 102

b. Genres of black sacred music p. 108

**3.3 – Musical practices at Ebenezer Baptist Church** p. 118

a. Tradition p. 123

b. Intentional *flexibility* p. 131

**CONCLUSION** p. 140

**APPENDIX – INTERVIEWS** p. 146

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** p. 192

## INTRODUCTION

When I first set out to start my fieldwork at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia, United States, my intention was to investigate the process of musical production of gospel and spiritual genres, within the environment of a black church. The term “Black Church” is used “as a kind of sociological and theological shorthand reference to the pluralism of the black Christian churches in the United States” (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990:1). The overarching intention was to theorize possible connections between specific sets of musical practices, and the production of traits of identity among African American communities. As Eileen Southern points out, “much of the evidence indicates that a large number of slave songs represent ‘variation upon a theme’ – that is, the songs seem to be altered versions of other songs. No doubt many of these songs – the social songs, in particular – were brought over from Africa and passed down from parents to children” (Southern 1997:185). Hence, to look for the practices through which this tradition would be reproduced, the context of the gospel and spiritual musical environment seemed to be the most relevant, since it tied directly with the social history of the African American community. The Black Church was in fact one of the founding institution of the very concept of an African American community, both from a social and cultural standpoint, thus constituting the perfect environment to look for processes of construction of identity. And after attending as a visitor the worship service at Ebenezer Baptist Church, I was convinced that that could be the place to concentrate my research. On one hand it represented a feasible object of study, in terms of my actual possibility of sustaining continued, relatively frequent

fieldwork; on the other hand it constituted a specific but also paradigmatic model of black church environment. Its historic and symbolic relevance – which will be addressed in detail subsequently – as well as the power and forcefulness of its musical environment, made it an optimal place to establish my research. But what I soon realized was that musical practices could hardly be separated from the consideration of the worship ritual as a whole, at least within that specific context.

While the historical continuity of spiritual and gospel genre as identity constituents of the African American community appeared to be consistent throughout the process of my research, what gradually appeared to be more important – and, thus, more interesting – was the peculiar relationship that musical practices had with the performance of the worship ritual. There seemed to be no actual solution of continuity between the preaching of the pastor and the songs performed by the choirs and musicians; and, even more interestingly, the congregation assembled Sunday after Sunday in the worship space had an apparent participative connection with the performance of the ritual that struck me profoundly, for the scope of its apparent intensity. Music, the preaching, and the reactions of the congregation throughout the ritual were hardly separable in terms of critical analysis: if I wanted to gather any clues on the patterns of production of identity among the black community at Ebenezer I needed to look closely on the worship ritual as a whole which included musical, as well as preaching and worshipping practices. And in fact the observation and close examination of the worship service ultimately shed some light on the specificity of musical practices within that black church: music appeared to be a unique functional medium of emotional transformation for the congregation. This process of transformation constituted the very core of the overall worship ritual, so that music

could thus be perceived and considered as a pivotal part of the black Baptist ritual itself.

The next chapters are an ethnographic account of my research at Ebenezer Baptist Church. The first one is dedicated to the definition of the historical background of the African American community in the United States and in particular in the South. Starting from the roots of the African diaspora that brought to the formation of a first enslaved, then racially segregated community, I relate the particular historical and geographical formation of Ebenezer Baptist Church within the context of Atlanta Metropolitan Area. The second chapter I first set out to define the social context in which the church is situated, and in particular Sweet Auburn, the historical black district which gave birth to Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights movement, as it contrastingly relates with the characteristics of both the congregation and the church. The chapter then moves onto an observational depiction of the worship ritual on a typical Sunday, with the emergence of a specific structure and diversified roles among the entire assembly. In the third chapter, I then move forward in the particular analysis of the worship ritual and of the musical practices that were uncovered and highlighted during the fieldwork and the subsequent research, as to structure an interpretation of the worship ritual and the specific role of musical practices.

#### **a. Methodology**

I initially approached the field in two different ways: one was to start a regular attendance of worship services on Sundays, in order to both familiarize with the community and to gather material to approach observation of the worship ritual and of the musical practices that were performed there at the same time; the other was to start

to devise sets of questions aimed at investigating the modes of interaction of the congregation with the worship service and the music. In the meantime, I was trying to gain access to the rehearsal of the choirs at Ebenezer, through the intercession of the Director of Worship and Arts, Mr. Keith Williams. But during the months I spent on my fieldwork, the church was undergoing a period of intense activity and stress, also due to the preparations for the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church that would come during the next September; moreover, the Director of Worship and Arts with which I had established a contact during the first month of attendance, quite abruptly left his position to follow a newly dawning recording career, which left the church without a Director of Worship and Arts for half a year, and me without a structured access to the musical establishment. In fact, given the size and level of significance of the church – it is, after all, the historical Martin Luther King Jr. church – informal approach to the places and key personnel of the establishment was hardly feasible, and every contact had to be built through subsequent intercessions. Soon, the frustrated attempts at getting in contact with the administration of the church – also due to the bureaucratic overload that the church continuously undergoes – brought me to rely entirely on worship services as sources of participative observation. After re-organizing the sets of questions as to address specifically the congregation, the ministers and the musicians, I regularly attended worship service on Sundays at Ebenezer for four months, from January to May 2012. During this time, apart from gathering data from both observation and several casual conversations, I was able to tape six different interviews with members of the congregation, three of which with key figures of the church: an assistant pastor, the organist and bandleader, and one of the choir directors.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured form, and the recordings took place around the area – both internal and external – of the Horizon Sanctuary of Ebenezer Baptist church; they varied in length from twenty minutes to one hour and a half. The set of questions I used in these interviews addressed both direct personal perceptions of parts of the worship service, and more conceptual representation of their individual position in relation to service music, belonging to the church, and personal beliefs. The interview with the assistant pastor, Rev. Wortham, lasted for more than one hour and a half, and resulted in a dense interview that dealt with matters relating to the history and ideology of the Baptist church, the structure and social positioning of Ebenezer congregation, as well as detailed information and personal interpretations of the organization and producing process of the pastoral sermon, and the service in general. The encounter resulted to be of particular help, and he also agreed to function as a key informant of the research project, so that I was able to keep contact with him even after I left the United States and started to work on the writing; he would attentively answer and confirm data or considerations that I had not checked or thought about before. The only matter he never fully addressed or specifically described concerned the economic functioning of the church: its social capital, the specifics of the salaries, and the percentages of private and public contributions to the funding of the church. On all the research conducted during this period, I base the observation and analysis contained in this ethnography.

## **CHAPTER 1 – BLACKS, THE SOUTH, ATLANTA**

Within the history of the city of Atlanta lies a conspicuous and pivotal part of the history of the African American community itself. Long before the activity and preaching of Rev. Martin Luther King and of the Civil Rights movement against racial segregation, the city had already become a center of unique features for the development of the African American community, as well as the first city in the United States where the local black community had the opportunity to economically and culturally thrive within the segregated Sweet Auburn district – a cornerstone in the development of black middle-class before the unconditional abolition of segregation and unequal treatment based on ethnicity and gender by the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, all signed by president Lyndon B. Johnson (Graham 1990). To properly place the experience of Ebenezer Baptist Church within the social, cultural and economic context, it is extremely important to address the development of the historical setting that produced it. If the focus of this dissertation is, to a degree, the understanding of specific worshiping practices, and how they are linked to generic sets of musical practices, within the specific boundaries of the Black church, it is of the uttermost importance to address the condition upon which the present day congregation at Ebenezer Baptist church has come to be what it is. The organization and structure of the Black Church as an institution depends heavily on the environment that led to its formation; and we know for a fact that that specific environment was itself a direct product of the introduction of slaves from Africa throughout the middle and latter part of the colonization of North America.

People of African descent brought overseas to the Americas were segregated into closed communities which attempted – and succeeded – to reproduce their own autonomous culture, both through the adherence to their traditional African background, as well as through the embracement of new, alien – at least to them – ideas and ideologies, which ultimately led to the formation of an actual African American community. Thus, some of the roots and foundations of the Civil Rights movement, or the Black Church – which constitutes the central background of this thesis – might as well be found in the historical evolution and progression of those very mechanisms of segregation through which the society that produced them was constituted.

## **1.1 – AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY IN THE SOUTH**

### **a. The slave trade: origins of African American history**

From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward technological improvements and a rekindled faith in human intervention brought European nations to expand outside their historical and physical boundaries: after Christopher Columbus had reached the Americas in 1492, Vasco de Gama rounded Cape of Good Hope reaching the Indian Ocean in 1499, and Magellan lead the first expedition to complete a circumnavigation of the entire Earth in 1522, the world had become much bigger and understandable at the same time. The scale of economic and political opportunity was soon perceived by European powers, which painstakingly began the process of colonization and exploitation of peoples and resources which contributed to our present international landscape. The colonization of

the Americas, in particular, was to be central in the particular development of Europe and some of its major players, among them Spain, Portugal, United Kingdom, and France. The new found continent was rich in space and resources, but it was also a naturally untamed land, and its indigenous people were generally few and not fit for the hard work that was connected with the production and refinement of raw materials, such as gold, sugar, precious timber, cocoa, coffee and cotton. But the oceans were now open to intercontinental sea-faring, and soon it was realized that it would be conveniently cost effective to bring laborers from the Western coast of Africa to the Eastern coasts of North and South America. Allegedly, the first African slaves to set foot on North American soil arrived in number of twenty in Jamestown on 1619, but Spanish colonists had already brought a group of African captives in South Carolina around 1526 (Gomez 2005:98), making it the only real documented antecedent to the widespread enslavement that would have followed from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward. Africans were becoming slaves, detached from their territories, their kinship relations severed and scattered, their culture obliterated by loss and displacement. When we refer to an African American community of any kind, it must be remembered, in particular when dealing with cultural analysis, that it was first and foremost the product of enslavement, coercion and geographical displacement. It was not until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the city of Atlanta acquired its metropolitan shape, functioning as the most important commercial and industrial center of the American South East, as well as becoming one of the reference points for the progression of the Civil Rights movement, but the African American community that is today our focus, is inevitably the cultural product of that same history of slavery and pain. So, even if the actual geographical boundaries of the scope of this particular research lies within a

specific institution, Ebenezer Baptist Church, this institution, formed and fueled by a community of people, is in turn part of a specific ethnic district, Sweet Auburn, one of the current 242 districts of the city of Atlanta, capital of the American South. Therefore, approaching the analysis of aspects of a specific culture – that of African Americans – it is not possible to overlook the processes that brought that specific culture to acquire its peculiar characteristics. And this process began with the establishment of a trade of slaves that would connect the coasts of Western Africa, where slaves would be bought by European slavers from African and Muslim slave traders, with the eastern coasts of the Americas, South America in particular, where these newly enslaved Africans would be tamed and used as the main workforce. The product of the American labor would then in turn leave the New World to fuel Europeans markets, which would then finance the acquisition of more slaves and the exploration and exploitation of new areas of the American continent; “like the inner workings of a clock, the interconnectedness of several global development gave rise to the transatlantic slave trade. Christian-Muslim conflict, international commerce, sugar and the New World incursions were foremost in creating circumstances whereby the African emerged as principal source of servile labor, laying the foundation of the modern world” (Gomez, 2005:59). Thus, throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, colonial America represented one of the major nodes of this infamous Triangular Trade, which ultimately brought the majority of African manpower to be transplanted as indentured and enslaved workforce there in order to sustain the extraction of raw goods and production of resources which would eventually reach the Old World. It is from this specific historical event that stems out the possibility to relate the arrival in North America of the African population with the modern features of the African American

community, from which it directly descends. If this traffic had been limited in scope throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century, from “the second half of the seventeenth century [...] the fast association between African ancestry and slavery was legislatively achieved. By 1756 the African population had increased markedly, numbering some 120,156 and nearly matching the white population of 173,316” (Gomez 2005:98). But the African presence in North America should not be perceived as a unique, homogenous cultural compound. Although, in fact, all the slaves would leave Africa from the major slave ports on the western African coast – such as Gorée, Elmina Castle – African and Muslim slavers would collect slave throughout central Africa. Gomez gives us a more specific estimate of the particular origin of the slave population that reached North America:

Approximately 48 percent of Africans arriving in what would become the United States originated in West Central Africa and Senegambia (27 percent and 21 percent, respectively). Next came the Bight of Biafra (19 percent), Sierra Leone (17 percent, including the Windward Coast), the Gold Coast (12 percent), and the Bight of Benin (3 percent). Those from the Bight of Biafra were numerically dominant in Virginia, whereas West Central Africans were the majority in South Carolina and significant in Georgia. Senegambians were numerically superior in Maryland and Louisiana, followed (in Louisiana) by those from the Bight of Benin and West Central Africa. Senegambians were substantially represented everywhere, as were those from Sierra Leone (except in Louisiana). Of those imported, males constituted 68.7 percent and prepubescent children 19.6 percent” [2005:100].

It could be interesting to delve more specifically into why such ethnic distinctions in terms of specific geographical origin within the African continent related so particularly and consistently to relocation within the North American continent. Along with slaves, from Africa came also a vast new array of crops, which originally constituted the main diet of Africans during the transatlantic deportation, but that soon found their way into the American South cuisine of whites, and beyond. Rice, okra,

peanuts, black-eyed peas, kidney and lima beans, along with cotton, indigo and tobacco became the main plantations to be developed in the Southern part of North America: Africans were pivotal in this process of agricultural and economic expansion since they not only provided the workforce that would have actually run the plantations, but because they were ethnically chosen in order to provide their own traditional knowledge of those crops that were to be developed on American soil. American planters were most certainly “familiar with rice, cotton and indigo production in Africa and were often able to relate the various African ethnic groups to the types of cultivation found in Africa. [...] [They] knew and understood cultural backgrounds, and with the expectations of using agricultural knowledge and skills on the North American plantations, for example tending cattle, fishing, boating, house service, and blacksmithing” (Holloway 1990a:18).

#### **b. Formation of a new community: African retentions and enslavement**

American slaveholders had an interest to acquire specific African ethnic groups to relate to their own economic interest, which was based on the designated production of the areas they occupied. Soon, this pattern led to a distribution of African slaves throughout the American South in cultural clusters that were consistent in ethnic origin and labor function. As we have seen before, most of the Africans that reached North America came from West Central Africa and Senegambia, which represents two of the largest and most relevant cultural areas of the African continent, respectively of Bantu language and of Mande and Wolof languages. But while Bantu people, mostly coming from Angola and Congo represented a much more homogenous culture, its traits identifiable clearly within the recent history of the dominating powers of those regions

– the Kingdom of Kongo, the Kingdom of Ndongo – Mande and Wolof people shared common root languages but not such a strong cultural or behavioral background. Joseph E. Holloway has been attentively following these patterns in order to precisely define the exact origin and impact of African influences over African American culture. It is of particular interest a chart (**Figure 1**) showing the destinations of different African ethnic groups in different employment areas, and cultural affiliation of each ethnic group. Although Africans from Mande, Akan, Niger, Cross and Mano River were employed in great numbers, they also tended to live in a much closer

Occupation	African Ethnicity Preferred	Culture
House servant	Mandingo	Mande
	Yoruba (Nagoes)	Cross River
	Dahomean (Fon), Fanti	Akan
Artisan	Bambara, Melinke	Mande
	Whydah, Pawpaw (Popo), Coromantee (Asante-Fante)	Akan
Rice cultivator	Temne, Sherbro, Mende, Kishee (Kisi), Papel, Goree, Limba, Bola, Balante	Mande
	Vai, Gola, Bassa, Grebo	Mano River
Field slave	Calabar, Ebo (Igbo), Efik, Ibibio	Niger Delta
	Cabinda, Bakongo, Malimbo, Bambo, Ndungo, Congo, Balimbe, Badondo, Bambona, Luba, Loango, Luango, Umbundu, Ovimbundu, Pembe, Imbangala	Bantu

Data from U. B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (New York: D. Appleton, 1940), 42; Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1929), 190; and Daniel Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization* (New York: Knopf, 1946).

**Figure 1** – North American slaveholders’ preference in African slaves (Holloway 1990a:31)

contact with slaveholders, and in smaller groups, especially artisans and house servants; it was inevitable that repression was stronger upon them, and possibilities for community building under slavery scarcer.

Field slaves, on the other hand, were in vast majority of Bantu culture, and, moreover, tended to live outside in the fields and in much greater numbers; they tended to be left more to themselves than their other counterparts, and, given their stronger cultural homogeneity, were in the end capable of rebuild an internal cultural pattern. “Enslaved Africans, not free to openly transport kinship, courts, religion, and material cultures were forced to disguise or abandon them during the middle passage. Instead, they dematerialized their cultural artifacts during the middle passage to rematerialize African culture on their arrival in the New World. Africans arrived in the New World capable of using Old World

knowledge to create New World realities” (Holloway, 1990b:39). Following Holloway it can, thus, be argued that one of the most relevant outcome of the enslavement of Africans in North America was the formation, over centuries, of the African American community as a cultural entity of its own. The institutions that this culture enacted and keeps on reenacting have to be considered also in the light of the African retentions that, in part, influenced and produce them. And it is extremely important, especially when referring to the religious institutions, of which the Black Church is one of the major, as well as the background for this research. Nevertheless, it is not until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the end of the slave trade that such institutions actually were shaped in forms closer to that of our present analysis. The path that led to that outcome was one of painstaking community building attempted and achieved in the secrecy of the enslaved repression. But even if, “despite the hardships of slave life, many American slaves developed families and communities” (Conniff and Davis 2002:53), so that “although masters shaped slave lives through work demands, importation patterns, and labor organization, slaves created their own social organization” (53), the frustration deriving from this specific history of unequal treatment in the United States deeply influences the grounds upon which these communities shaped their cultural and social codes, to the present day. And this is even more relevant if one considers the diffusion, and perceived morality of slave regimes within the dominant population of the United States that produced them. As far as North America is concerned “black bondage infiltrated every colony from the northern reaches of Massachusetts Bay, which would become Maine, down to the southern border where Georgia stood as a buffer against the Spanish in Florida” (Conniff and Davis, 2002:67), even if throughout the mainland various types of slave

regimes developed upon differences based on type and mode of production, geographical characteristics of the place, and pace of settlement, “as evolving regional economies developed different labor needs and demographic draws” (67). In the northeast, Virginia and Maryland had developed tobacco production since the latter first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century where blacks were heavily employed, while in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and the New England slaves would usually serves purposes of domestic, farm and general purpose labor. In Georgia, and the Carolinas, on the other hand, rice and cotton production on a plantation structure was what concentrated the bulk of enslaved black labor. Thus, along this diverse array of economical configurations, “African cultural patterns predominating in the Southern States clearly reflected the specific cultural groups imported into the United States. That is, the Upper South tended to be populated by Africans from West Africa, and the Lower South by Africans from Central Africa,” where the Lower South, often dubbed as Deep South, included South Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia.

### **c. Georgia at the end of slavery: modernization and demographics**

Given the fact that the slave trade was mainly related to the production of sugar, the actual numbers of enslaved African that reached British North America – where sugar plantation did not exist – was in proportion significantly inferior to those related to Latin American colonies. Before the American Independence in 1776, the Thirteen Colonies of Great Britain received only 45 out of every 1000 of enslaved African that would reach the Americas (Conniff and Davis 2002:123). Concentrating on our focus, “Georgia, founded in 1732 as the last of the mainland colonies, added to the demand for slaves after forsaking its founders’ initial ban on African labor,” so that “by the late

1750s [...] was importing shiploads of slaves” (125) through its ports. If the Southeastern region – often dubbed “low-country”, for the presence of large areas of sea-level plains – represented an area uniquely fit for the settlement of plantation based agricultural production of cotton, which demanded the highest rates of slave labor, before the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Northeast was the region that reported the highest percentage of deported Africans: in 1750, Virginia had a percentage of black population of 43.9 percent over the total, and Maryland of 30.8 percent, while Georgia only of 19.2 percent. Other southern states had higher rates, like South Carolinas with 60.9 percent and North Carolina with 27.1 percent, but the general tendency followed this pattern (Conniff and Davis 2002:126). It was not until the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 that the tendency in African American demographics started to shift. Before 1807, slaves were brought into Georgia mostly through ships that would dock at the harbors of Savannah and Augusta, but with the impossibility of bringing more slaves from Africa or the Caribbean, North America became an exception for being, along with “Barbados and one or two smaller areas [...], the only regions in America where the slave population experienced high rates of natural increase. Between 1800 and 1860, the U. S. slave population increased from about one million to about four million and had become a very effective substitute for the slave trade,” while by the same time they were “producing over half the global exports of raw cotton” (172). As slavery progressed as an institution in the United States beyond the abolition of the slave trade, the slaveholding society of the American South became the major promoter in the establishment of criteria of unequal treatment for colored people. First and foremost, Atlanta was in fact – even if just for four years – a city within the Confederate States of America, which would oppose the federal rule of the Union

during the American Civil War, from 1861 to 1865, representing one of the major theaters of the final part of the war. There would have been no Civil War if not for the ideological commitment of certain groups of individuals against the institution of slavery. After the defeat of the Confederacy and the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States had been voted by Congress and signed by president Abraham Lincoln, all slaves had officially been permanently and universally emancipated, but the perception and reality of inequality was not yet through, especially in the South. In the aftermath of the Civil War, at the same time, cities such as Atlanta began to be the recipients of impressive numbers of migrants from the rural areas of the country, among which a now greater percentage of individuals than in the previous century was black. Blacks were now no longer bound by law to the premises of their workplace, their lives being for the first time in their American history free from their former masters will. This also meant that they were able to move around the country, in search for work and opportunities. Thus, the definite establishment of railway connections between Atlanta, the adjacent counties, and the other states, not only meant an increase in the rates of commerce, and, consequently, industry – factors which would ultimately lead to the exponential growth of Atlanta into the largest metropolitan area of the Southeast – but brought also an increase in the flow of African Americans throughout the country. To a degree, metropolitan areas came to be some of the major theaters where the conceptualization of the racial conflict between blacks and whites developed.

## **1.2 – ATLANTA: RAILROADS AND THE SOUTH**

### **a. Atlanta, the original site**

A Creek Indian trading post with the name of “Standing Peachtree” or “Standing Pitch Tree” was located approximately where the Peachtree Creek meets the Chattahoochee River, in the northern part of the state of Georgia. If knowledge of the existence of this native settlement dates back to at least 1762 (Garrett 1969:8), it was not before 1812 that Fort Peachtree was built by white pioneers as the first settlement of the area which would host the city of Atlanta. By 1821, both the Creek Indian and Cherokee tribes who populated the region had been forced out, by both lawful and unlawful acquisition of the land they resided in. Decatur, the first real white settlement of the area, was thus established in 1822. From this moment onward the development of Atlanta is inevitably tied to the establishment of the railroads which would connect the eastern part of the state of Georgia to the American Midwest – Illinois, Missouri and Ohio in particular. Works for the construction of a Georgia Railroad which would arrive to Augusta began in 1836 on a location south-west of the Decatur settlement, after a vote of the Georgia General Assembly. Workers and engineers of this early stage of development of the city would start to address the station by the name “Terminus”, as to refer to the implicit nature of the place as “end” of the rail tracks. The Georgia railroad became operative in 1845 and by 1846 the Macon and Western railroad – which had already been built to connect Macon to the port of Savannah – was extended to the west so to actually end at “Terminus” station. Housing for the workers and their families where needed, as well as storage facilities to back the train and commercial traffic, so that by the final stages of development of both the Georgia

and the Macon and Western railroads, the site surrounding the station had grown into an actual town, which first took the name of Marthasville, in 1842. But with the definitive completion of the railroads, J. Edgar Thompson, Chief Engineer for the Georgia railroad proposed that the town be renamed into “Atlantica-Pacifica”, as to refer to the pivotal role that that new railroad hub would have in connecting the Atlantic with the Pacific Ocean. In 1847, after the proposed name had been shortened by the residents, the town of Atlanta was finally incorporated.

### **b. After Civil War: the railroad and black labor**

The fact that the city that would grow out of this particular history was entirely built around a railroad hub is not of secondary importance. From the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, on railroads depended the destinies and lives of a very heterogenic variety of people, for “the potential for employment either with the railroad or with some of the industries that grew up along its lines—such as mining and timber—drew a diverse array immigrants” (Lancaster 2011:432). Railroads represented one of the most important possibilities for individuals to find work and opportunities, but at the same time they were at the center of commercial route planning and provisioning on which early groups of private wealthy individuals and banks would gamble their odds – thus influencing the very structure of the state that was being shaped out by these groups of people. Atlanta represented the embodiment of this *imagined* capital, and thus the importance of its development out of the railroads can tell us something about the development of certain aspects of its later social history. Both the ports of Augusta and Savannah had been finally, efficiently, connected to Atlanta, and from there onward into the Midwest and

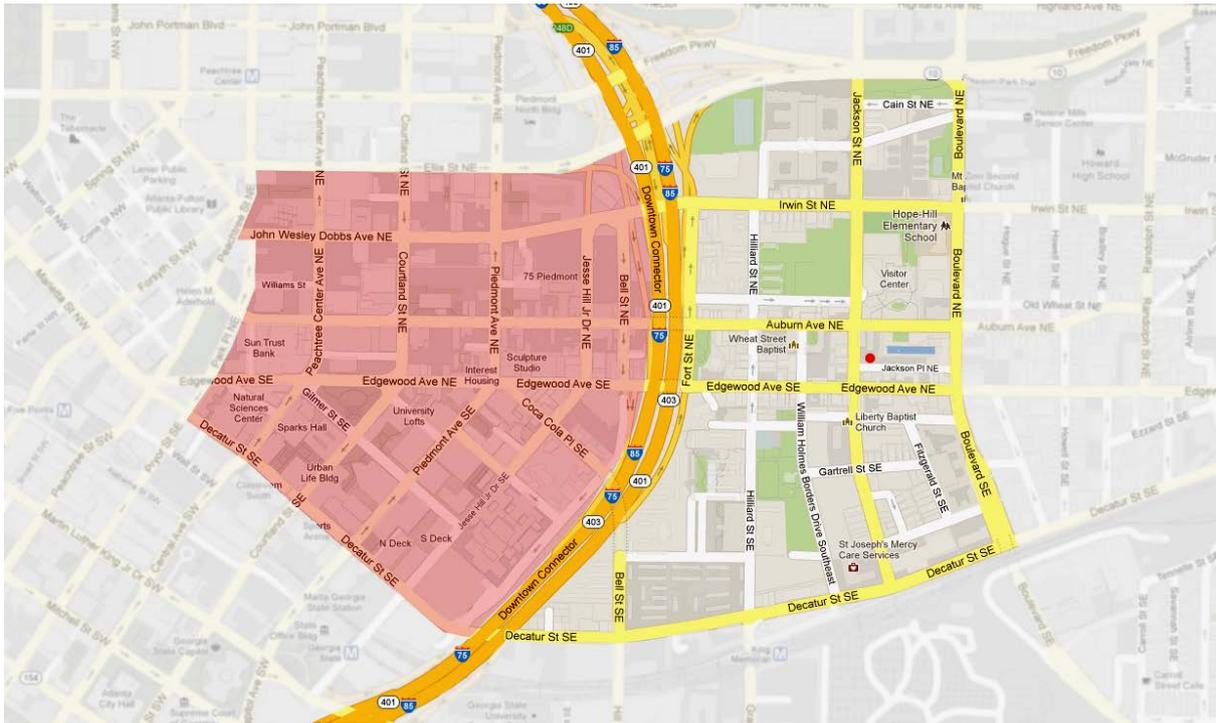
Northeast; the ports that had been the principal receivers of slaver cargoes from the Caribbean, South America, and Africa, were now providing fast and regular access to the goods and materials that were needed for the development of the modern industry in specific points of agglomeration – like Atlanta. In turn, the industrial progress of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century allowed for an unexpected, exponential technological development which raised the overall quality and expectations of life in an unprecedented way. But this very process needed manpower in order to be perpetuated, manpower that was abundant throughout all the centers of demographic aggregation whose establishment preceded chronologically that of Atlanta, such as Macon, Augusta, Savannah. The railroads granted the possibility for both the raw goods and manpower to swiftly move from the periphery to the center of this area of development, while in turn providing back to the periphery access to refined goods, trade and technical innovations. Migration from rural areas to the growing cities begun in its massive proportion with the definitive establishment of railroad connections throughout the United States – the first transcontinental railroad, the Union Pacific, was completed in 1869 – which preceded of several decades the commercial diffusion of car transportation. After centuries of scattered, honeycomb-like expansion over the North American continent, population of all ethnic descent began relocating around the country moving in the areas surrounding the centers of local growth, like cities – a flow which has not yet stopped, even if it has changed in intensity and shape. African Americans were no minor part of the migrating population, constituting the bulk of it, and being the first to be tantalized by the expectations of a better future. After centuries of slavery, Blacks, now free men, were being given the opportunity of working their way out of a segregated misery by their former slavers, their work being paid, not extorted. An

opportunity that many of them followed, and which led most of them to constitute the main workforce in the railroad construction and in the industries that were directly related to the sector, iron mining and timber cutting.

### **c. Development of Metro Atlanta and the Jim Crow laws**

The positive progression in the increase of black population throughout the South had its peak during the two Great Migrations after the World Wars. During the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century, approximately eight millions of African Americans left the South<sup>1</sup> to relocate elsewhere, of which five millions only between 1940 and 1980 (Gregory 2009:20-21). Destinations would usually be those states that offered “a better standard of living and freedom from southern Jim Crow restrictions” (19), like California, and the state of New York. Nevertheless, and to a degree, thanks to that very increase in railway mobility – which through a constant increase in temporary population, due to the presence of the railroad hub, brought to a directly proportional expansion of the stationary population of the city, and consequently, of the metropolitan area – the 20<sup>th</sup> century found Atlanta as a growing center of interstate connections, and the factory workforce that was inevitably drawn into the city was mostly composed of people of African descent. More precisely, from the data gathered by Gregory (2009:25), around 1970, more than 75 percent of the black males residing in Metro Atlanta was born within Georgia. But apart from comparing these inverse tendencies of interstate and rural-urban migration in the South, it is fundamental to always acknowledge the relevance of the humanitarian issues concerning treatment of African American

<sup>1</sup> For the definition of South I am here following the U. S. Census Bureau’s definition of the District of Columbia and sixteen states (Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia).



**Figure 2 – Sweet Auburn district:** the map shows the present district on the right of the orange Downtown Corridor highlighted in full colors. The area left of the Downtown corridor, highlighted in red, represents the area over which the district extended until the 1950s, and which gradually became part of the Downtown district. The small red dot represents the position of Ebenezer Baptist Church.



**Figure 3 – Sweet Auburn district in the context of Atlanta City**

descent in the United States. The Jim Crow laws that were established at local level throughout the United States, particularly in the South, perpetrated the principles of unequal treatment that were previously upheld by the slave system. Segregation on the principle of “separate but equal” became the founding principle of southern societies, which consisted on a *de facto* infringement of individual civil rights based on ethnicity. White leaders of the communities would, thus, operate in constant protection of privileged rights for white citizens until 1965, in the public sector as much as in the private enterprise, as we will see it happen in Georgia, and Atlanta in particular. Considering its positioning in the very heart of the past slaveholding society of the Southeast, and the relevance of phenomena of social aggregation within urban context, Atlanta represents a unique scenario for the analysis of the racial issues upon which the very planning of the city districts, and the consequent accommodation of racial groups within them was conducted. Ebenezer Baptist Church congregation was, in fact, constituted within a very specific district of the city of Atlanta, with very peculiar features which will help in the understanding of some of the present day issues that characterize the dynamics of the black community that is hosted there.

### **1.3 – SWEET AUBURN DISTRICT**

#### **a. Development of Sweet Auburn District**

Ebenezer Baptist Church is part of the compound of the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site. The entire site lies within another eminent milestone site of the city of Atlanta, the Sweet Auburn District, a neighborhood that develops along Auburn

## Anchor Institutions Surrounding Auburn Avenue

### Legend

- Auburn Avenue
- Interstate
- MARTA
- Georgia State University
- Grady Hospital
- Wheat Street Baptist
- Big Bethel A.M.E.
- Ebenezer Baptist
- The King Center

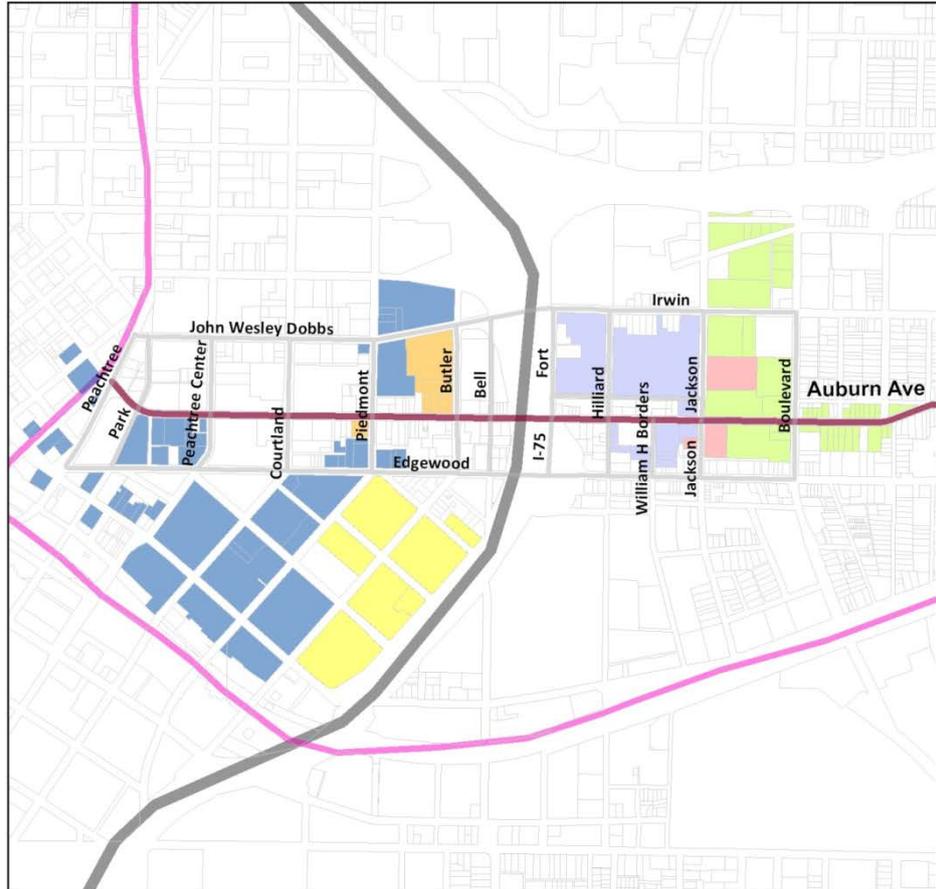


Figure 4 – [Clark 2011:55]



Figure 5 - Big Bethel AME Church

Avenue – previously known as Wheat Street – in the eastern part of the city, which became a National Historic Landmark District in 1974. Today the neighborhood might not seem to host any signs of a thriving community, but its past is of a very different kind. The very existence of institutions like Ebenezer Baptist church, or of leading figures such as Martin Luther King himself was founded upon the richness of social network of interactions that African American were capable of building even within the limited boundaries of the district where they were segregated. A Fortune magazine article in 1956 defined Auburn Avenue as “the richest Negro street of the world” (Hughes:248). John Wesley Dobbs that dubbed the street as “Sweet” Auburn<sup>2</sup>, referring to both the dynamic cultural and economic life of the street, as well as to a poem written in 1770 by Oliver Goldsmith, “The Deserted Village”: “Sweet Auburn! Loveliest village of the plain / Where health and plenty cheer’d the laboring swain” (Clark 2011:18) Dobbs, a civil servant and political leader among the community of the district, was often considered as the unofficial “mayor” of the district during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Individuals like Dobbs would represent the spirit of the community that developed in the district from the beginning of the century, consistently committed to the preservation and bettering of the community in spite of the unequal treatment based on race, and of the constant *de facto* deprivation of many civil rights. In his Fortune article, Hughes reports of the efforts of all these individuals to provide social and economic development for their community, and of how these efforts led to the establishment of successful financial enterprises such as the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, the Citizens Trust Company, or the Mutual Federal Savings and Loan Association, which functioned as “guardians of African-American economic

<sup>2</sup>National Park Service Atlanta. Sweet Auburn Historic District; <http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/atlanta/aub.htm>



**Figure 6 – Sweet Auburn District: Wheat Street Baptist Church**



**Figure 7 – Sweet Auburn District**

dignity” (Henderson 1990). The role of financial institutions was in fact pivotal in supporting the variety of business that had been established on Auburn Avenue throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was actually for the very fact that “many of these businesses were founded during the nadir in race relations in the city, [that] they are considered illustrative of the African-American's ability to survive and prosper despite rampant racism and a host of economic and social restrictions” (Henderson 1987:216). At the same time, after the end of the Civil War, the Reconstruction era brought with it goals of racial stability and integration all along the country, and even if the South gradually moved to a racist and segregationist stance toward the black population – which was however followed by the entire country – black enterprises had been greatly encouraged as a means sustaining the now freed African American community with jobs, monetary and social capital. The first settlements on the area where the district now lies, in fact – the first urban expansion to the East side of the Downtown district – quickly developed during the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, along the same wake of railroad construction that brought to the establishment of the Georgia Railroad that connected Atlanta to Augusta. But it was not until after the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906 that the neighborhood started to constitute as a black district, its fame growing among the interstate community of African Americans from then onward. In 1906 Atlanta had already acquired its status as the absolute urban reference point for the entire South, and as such it also represented the cradle of Southern inter-racial contact, since the growing population would be increased by a variety of ethnicity, among which African Americans were undoubtedly a significant part. This also meant that at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century whites would have to compete *along with* blacks for jobs, housing, business opportunity, and votes,



Figure 8 – Sweet Auburn District



Figure 9 – Sweet Auburn District

something which was utterly new for a society whose recent history was that of a slaveholding regime. And in fact, when the 1906 gubernatorial<sup>3</sup> election came, Michael Hoke Smith and Clark Howell, both competing for the office, felt that the black population could actually threaten their candidacy in favor of the other. Thanks to the fact that they both run local newspapers – the Atlanta Journal and the Atlanta Constitution, respectively – they managed to use their influence to run a campaign promoting racial fear against the African American population in the hope of disenfranchising black voters. The campaign was run over a prolonged period of time, but on the morning of September 22, 1906, when both newspapers – along with others – reported of several alleged assaults of white women at the hands of black men, a white population of thousands gathered within hours in the heart of what would soon be the Downtown district, around Five Points and Decatur street. The crowd soon turned into a ferocious mob, and by the end of the day, between 24 and 40 black individuals had been publicly murdered. Racial violence spread throughout the city, and the segregation patterns started to be outline in a new form, after the slave regime ended. After the riot “subsequent solidarity and segregation fostered a sentiment among African-Americans to consolidate their communities. Auburn Avenue was one such neighborhood, and the gradual influx of African-American residents triggered the ‘white flight’ from the area” (Clark 2011:16), so that by 1909, the district was only inhabited by black residents. It can be argued that the process of racial segregation within a precisely bounded area actually helped the community to consolidate socially and economically, to a degree that allowed for long-standing institutions like churches,

<sup>3</sup> The gubernatorial elections would assign the office of Governor of the State of Georgia, the highest executive office in the State and the executive representative of the Sate at a federal level. In 1906, Atlanta represented one of the richest pools of voters of the entire State of Georgia, thus, the outcome of the elections at city level would definitively influence the overall results of the consultation.



**Figure 10 – Sweet Auburn District**



**Figure 11 – Sweet Auburn District**

to function as incubators of businesses and community services, resulting in a “self-contained community that could provide opportunities for the complete economic, social, spiritual and cultural needs of its residents” (Clark 2011:18).

The white governance of the city constantly tried to disturb the patterns of social development of the African American community, mainly through limitations in housing opportunity and access to services that effectively created segregated zones throughout the city so that by the “1960s, Atlanta was becoming more segregated in terms of spatial patterns and housing at the same time that lunch counters, public facilities, and schools were being integrated. The white leadership's desire for racial stability in order to enhance economic development resulted in some cosmetic changes but left the city with deep racial divides” (Bayor 1996:XV), during the very climax of the Civil Rights movement, a consideration of no minor importance within the process of constitution of the modern African American community. Considering the behavior and characteristics of the black community in Augusta, Georgia, Allen describes, in fact, how there, “as elsewhere in the southern United States, the African-American community's access to the political process and to educational and economic opportunities was severely limited by both legalized and de facto segregation” (2007:81). As much could be said of Atlanta, which was the originating influences of what “in the early part of the twentieth century occurred in the context of social and political frustrations [...] experienced by much of the black population across the southeast” (81). As Allen proceeds in the description of professional successes – even if moderated by the oppressive environment in which they existed – we acquire awareness of at least a second relevant experience within the limits of the state of Georgia, as much as the African American communities could be concerned. The

Sweet Auburn district has reportedly been established as a reference point for the African American socio-economic development (Clark 2011; Kusmer and Trotter 2009; Pomeranz 1996; Bayor 1996; Henderson 1990, 1987), which ultimately led to the formation of a class of individuals capable of exercising strong leadership, and capability of community-building, in coordination among groups. If not for this specific local inclination, in rare places like Atlanta and Augusta – as well as others, in other Southern states – a reality such as that of the Civil Rights Movement could have never existed. Segregated neighborhoods such as Sweet Auburn came out of the need to displace the black population dispersed through the city in delimited areas as to control and suppress their capability to influence society at a greater level. But in doing so, the white, dominant community provoked a response to this climate of racial discrimination which configured “the distinctive effort of black businesspeople [...] [as] consistent with the spirit and philosophical ideals of racial solidarity and self-help” (Henderson 1987:216). Sweet Auburn was thus one of the trying ground of the social networking based on community help for and African Americans out of which the Civil Rights movement was born, and it was through entrepreneurship that basic economic emancipation was obtained, and then distribute to fuel the district activities. The process of racial segregation that led most of the African American community the relocate in the Western areas of the city – as far from Downtown and Midtown as possible – would intensify the need for racial solidarity upon which the community maintained itself. As we will see later on, certain institutions, such as the Black Church, were pivotal in the day to day organization of such community, often representing the principal environment in which the entire black community would gather, and have the opportunity to interact.

## **b. Racial zoning**

The first ordinance of “racial zoning” in Atlanta passed in 1913, and several others followed, until the Supreme Court of the United States declared segregation ordinances embedded in public policy unconstitutional in 1922 – the process of total civic emancipation kept progressing at a federal level regardless of patterns still fixed in place throughout the South. It was at this point that in “the city moved to the tactic of citywide comprehensive zoning, which included separation of the races. Racial designations for city areas were discussed not in terms of a segregation ordinance but rather in terms of land uses, building types, and tenant categories that Atlanta's white leaders felt could legally bypass the court ruling” (Bayor 1996:54), while at the same time materially leading the black population into forced choices. Nevertheless, the district was capable of organizing itself into the functional and interdependent community that would fuel a thriving business center for the African Americans of the entire city. It was inside Sweet Auburn that blacks that lived in, or passed through Atlanta could find lawyers, insurance companies, accommodations, churches, schools, and many other services that could suit them. This tendency in the inclination and qualification of the neighborhood remained constant until the 1950s, when projects of renewal of the Central Business and Downtown districts, along with the planning of highways, and expressways, presented the possibility of reshaping the racial organization of the metropolitan territory. Blacks were to be moved to the western part of the city, leaving the eastern part they had historically inhabited, free for the development of the Downtown area of the city. When most of the people I related to while researching confirmed me that they would come from other parts of the city and the metropolitan

area – some even from other counties – I was able to form the assumption that most of the congregation does not come from the Sweet Auburn district anymore. When I asked Rev. Wortham, a pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church, about these observations I had gathered he was very precise in defining his opinion on the impact on the district of the construction of the Downtown Connector, the concurrent section of Interstate 75 and 85, through the center of the city, between the late 1950s and the 1970s:

**Rev. Wortham:** The whole Sweet Auburn district, this was one the most grown district in the city, in the south. And then... then the build that Interstate, and that changed everything. Because what it did, what the Interstate did was that it cut right through the community, and that was around the same time when you begin to have suburban flights. [...] from 1950s through 1970s, 1980s, that good thirty year period, you might have begin to see some of the dynamics of this neighborhood begin to shift and change. Because what the Interstate did was it broke, it kind of split Auburn Avenue in half, almost, in a sense. [...] And then what happened is that, when suburban area began to pop out, so you began to have everybody do the suburban flight, so everybody start to leave the city, and so when you leave the city, that's when the drugs start to infiltrate the streets and all those other things and yadadada.

There is a precise connection in Rev. Wortham perception between the influence of the Interstate over the life of the district and the move to suburban neighborhoods of the population, which led the district to decline. Beginning with 1950s, the area surrounding Auburn Avenue was the object of several plans that would have inevitably destroyed the socio-economic environment, but this process was constantly opposed by the population of the district. When the realization of the I-85, I-75, and I-20 expressways was being defined, “black leaders were influential in getting the north/south expressway moved a few blocks east when it threatened to cut through the blackowned Atlanta Life Insurance Company on Auburn Avenue and virtually destroy that street—a major close-in retail section for Atlanta's blacks,” even if “black influence was limited in regard to the highways: the highway still cut Auburn Avenue,



**Figure 12 – Sweet Auburn District: Interstate Bridge**



**Figure 13 – Sweet Auburn District: Interstate Bridge**

although in a less damaging place. Nonetheless, this retail area, clearly hurt by being cut off from many of those who patronized its stores, never recovered. Again, the destruction of black neighborhoods and the negative impact on Auburn Avenue was in line with longstanding city policy” (Bayor 1996:74).

Today the neighborhood is probably at the doorstep of a new process of gentrification, which will reshape the relation of the church with the surrounding community, but present members of the congregation still represents an upper-intermediate social class which is not reflected in the actuality of the area. And it is to this very congregation, within this particular background that Ebenezer Baptist Church purpose statement addresses: “Ebenezer Baptist Church is an urban-based, global ministry *dedicated to individual growth and social transformation* through living in the message and carrying out the mission of Jesus Christ” (emphasis added). It could be possible to read in this statement the importance of the representation, for the worshipping community, of a continuity with the legacy of the Civil Rights movement, even if detached from the historic relevance of the church within the neighborhood, since the neighborhood itself has today no relevance of its own. All this being said, it is for the worship of Jesus Christ that the congregation, the clergy, and the musicians participate to enact the religious service. But this religious commitment is inevitably perpetrated throughout a complex economical establishment upon which the church relies entirely, mostly fueled by the willing individual contributions of the members of the congregation. It is also true that any consideration of the cultural characteristics of this perception of spiritual involvement, as it influences musical practices and reflects on the economical level of Ebenezer Baptist Church environment, has to first consider

a close examination of the institution it represents. The Black Church can in fact be considered as an institution with precise characteristics that, over time, influenced the overall experience of the Church in United States, through precise sets of practices enacted and reproduced during the worship service. But first and foremost, the Black Church was one of the most relevant expressions of African American culture, connecting many aspects of the black cultural experiences as they evolved from both African retentions and the experience of racial discrimination in the New World.

#### **1.4 – THE BLACK CHURCH**

Before 1990, when Lincoln and Mamiya committed in the drafting of their *The Black Church in the African American experience*, no other comparative, historical and sociological study of the Black Church as one of the expressive focus of the African American culture – had been brought to light. Apart from being the first work to consider the African American religious experience in the United States without extrapolating it from the broader context of American Christianity, Lincoln and Mamiya study concentrated on the possibility of gathering in depth analysis of the phenomenology of religion within Black churches, as well as historical and statistical data, with the goal of a social description of the phenomenon. As far back as 1897, W. E. B. DuBois, firmly affirmed the exceptionality of Black churches as focus of participative social interaction: “in origin and functions the Negro church is a broader, deeper and more comprehensive social organism than the churches of white America [...] [It] is not simply an organism for the propagation of religion; it is the centre of the social, intellectual and religious life of an organized group of individuals” (DuBois

1897:181). DuBois, a free black from Massachusetts, and one of the first advocates of African American freedom was the first scholar to realize how central the church was among African American communities, given its function of social and economic coordination within urban groups of black people for whom the church was the only semi-structured organization they could look up to. DuBois premise, in the consideration of the dynamics of the “Negro” church, allow us to look at it as an institutions of precise and intense social and economic value. We use the term “the Black Church” as “sociological and theological shorthand reference to the pluralism of black Christian churches in the United States” (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990:1); but it was not until the 1960s that the terminology arose to common use, its antecedent being that of “Negro Church”, as shown by DuBois excerpt. If one could say that every African American is a member of the Black Church, it is generally acknowledged that when referring to the Black Church within the context of academic research, we are actually referring to those independent, historic, entirely black denominations<sup>4</sup> that were founded after the establishment of the Free African Society of 1787. The society, which began its activity in Philadelphia after the efforts of Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, two free blacks, was the first mutual aid society created by and for African Americans. It is interesting to note that one of the first large scale project embarked into was the establishment 1794 of a church for African Americans and run by such, the Mother Bethel AME Church of Philadelphia. From that moment onward, similar churches started to rise throughout the country, with greater numbers in the South than

<sup>4</sup> With the term “denomination” we refer to a specific subgroup within a particular religion, which normally operates under the same name. With reference to Christianity, denominations are all those identifiable religious movements or bodies which maintain a specific interpretation of Christian under a common denominator. While European Christian denominations are few, such as Anabaptists, Anglicans, Methodists, and so forth, in the United States there is a much diverse variety of Christian denominations, which during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century constituted in institutionalized bodies with coordination prerogatives over the associated churches around the country.

in the North. As slaves, African Americans were often part of their master's intimate life and culture, and as such participated in their religious life, even if, in spite of the inner egalitarianism of Christianity, they were often not even considered as human beings. But no matter how deeply they could be kept close to white culture, blacks were not free to express, or publicly develop their own cultural traditions. But this did not mean that slaves restrained from secret association: they were capable of holding their own secret worship services in the woods right outside the plantations, or even in their own quarters sometimes, if distanced enough from the premises of their masters, a phenomenon that E. Franklin Frazier, another historic black scholar, has defined as "invisible institution" (Frazier 1974:23). The clandestine nature of this institution reflects Scott's (1992) concept of "hidden transcript" which "does not contain only speech acts but a whole range of practices" (14). After all, "every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a 'hidden transcript' that represent a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant" (Scott 1992:xii), and in fact we see it replicated within the "invisible institution". However, after the Civil War and emancipation, it was fairly predictable that what had to be kept under secret could finally be openly embraced, and, in fact, it is exactly what happened. Born under slavery, the Black Church was finally able to formalize its presence, and thus acquire a status of recognition. But this genealogy of secret and differentiation has to be looked upon with more attention. There should have been apparently no reason for slaves to worship the Christian God and its incarnated son Jesus Christ apart from those masters which originally imposed that very doctrine over them: the rites should have been the same, coherently with the denominations they were part of, Baptist, Methodist, or any other else. This leads us to the concept of a differentiated "black sacred cosmos", as

Lincoln and Mamiya defined it (1990), which originating from an African American perspective over historical reality, entailed identifiable and precise difference in the interpretation of religion by blacks. It is true that African slaves, from the earlier periods, received Christian religion from the masters who were enslaving them; it is also true, though, as we have seen before, that Africans deported in America were also constantly in the process of re-materializing their own traditional African culture inside a new context, from which they were able to take as much as they gave, even if this process was not reciprocated, or not even acknowledged by their masters. The great majority of slaves in North America came from Mande and Bantu cultures: many scholars in the field of African American studies affirm that within these cultures – and especially Bantu population – the entire world is perceived as sacred (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Holloway 1990a, 1990b, 1990c; Washington 1990). Starting from this basic distinction, some specific sacred objects or figures acquired particular relevance in their worldview: slaves would perceive the entire reality, as well as their experience, as part of a sacred continuum which had no solution of continuity, thus the assimilation of western religion was an inevitable choice as much as it was obvious. In this scenario, concepts like liberation, salvation, and freedom acquired a much more complex and stratified meaning, stemming directly from their experience of slavery. For this reason, for instance, in the Black Church a strong relevance is given to the Old Testament, with particular regards to the tribulations, displacement, and enslavement of the Jews, which resonated of the experience of slavery and segregation: “The direct relationship between the holocaust of slavery and the notion of divine rescue colored the theological perceptions of black preaching in a very decisive manner, particularly in those churches closer to the experience” (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990:3). Therefore,

there is a much stronger preference in envisioning a direct intervention of the divine in history, instead of an abstract perception of God as transcendent entity. It is in fact following this path of interpretation that we also find in Black churches a definite predominance of the figure of Jesus Christ, who epitomizes more than anything else the intertwining of the human and the divine, and that, with the history of his passion, was again an extraordinary reference to the personal experience of violence lived by the slaves, for which only the perspective of salvation in the Realm of God could alleviate the pain. Freedom was another concept which acquired a much stronger relevance in the African American experience, and again for obvious reason, since “during slavery it meant release from bondage; after emancipation it meant the right to be educated, to be employed, and to move about freely from place to place. In the twentieth century, freedom means social, political, and economic justice” (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990:4). It has also to be specified that the value of freedom for blacks was not primarily understood as the right to define one’s individual self and destiny, but on the contrary, the actual freedom from anything that would obstacle one’s responsibility to God to entirely embrace the divine. And in fact, another relevant concept within the Black Church is that of conversion, or “rebirth”. To be baptized, to enter a specific congregation means to actually be reborn as new Christian, and true disciple of God, a child among children of God, whose rights and responsibilities in front of God equaled that of any other brother or sister. It can be seen in this last reference how again aspects of African American history – in this case the perpetuated experience of unequal treatment – would acquire religious significance. It is possible to delve much more in depth in the close examination of the “black sacred cosmos”, but since our interest is specifically related to Baptist denominations, we will postpone to later

chapters the specific details entailing Black Baptist Churches and the Afro-Baptist ritual, as it is referred to. But before introducing the historical context of Ebenezer Baptist Church foundations, it is important to highlight, in regard to what has been discussed to this point, how “the core values of black culture like freedom, justice, equality, an African heritage, and racial parity at all levels of human intercourse, are raised to ultimate levels and legitimated by the black sacred cosmos” (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990:7). This last consideration allows us to trace a direct connection with some particular African perceptions of a world where there is no distinction between sacred and profane; the consequent integration of cultural values into sacred values, ultimately makes this very distinction irrelevant. This idea will specifically be of great relevance in the later close examination of the Baptist ritual. But before moving to the ethnographic research which is the core of this thesis, it is important to finally properly introduce the main context of the object of this research: Ebenezer Baptist Church.

## **1.5 – EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH – HISTORY AND ORGANIZATION**

Ebenezer Baptist Church, a Black Church whose congregation has been active since 1886, represents today one of the most structured churches of Atlanta Metropolitan area – at least in terms of organizational establishment, although larger worshipping communities can be easily found within the area<sup>5</sup>. In the area of the Sweet Auburn districts itself there are two other important worshipping centers which is worth mentioning: Big Bethel AME Church, a black Methodist church founded in

<sup>5</sup> Atlanta Metropolitan area hosts the First Baptist Church (Atlanta, GA) and the Peachtree Presbyterian Church, both among the largest churches of protestant denomination in the United States of America. With respectively, approximately, 16.000 and 9.000 members, these two churches represent the largest worshipping community of Atlanta Metropolitan area (Lindner 2011).

1847, and Wheat Steer Baptist Church, founded in 1870. If both these churches contributed substantially in the original shaping of the district – Wheat Street Baptist was located on the eponymous street which became Auburn Avenue in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – they also historically precede Ebenezer. In a thriving neighborhood such as Sweet Auburn, the presence of so many churches might seem peculiar, but it is on the other hand very predictable, given the central role that the Black Church, in its institutional and cultural capacity had over the formation itself of an African American community. Thus, this was the very case of Sweet Auburn and Big Bethel AME Church, first church to be established and largest congregation of the neighborhood up until the 1970s. But Ebenezer was a much smaller community in its beginning, and less significant in the original shaping of the district than other churches like Big Bethel. Its expansion is to be found later on in its history, and in direct connection with the activism of both Martin Luther King Sr. and Jr.

Ebenezer was founded in 1886, by a Rev. John A. Parker. Rev. Parker was a former slave, and the church was to serve as a haven for many African American that in the aftermath of the Reconstruction era were gradually moving inside the city. The first building where the church was originally created was a small, rectangular storage facility of box-like features which loomed on Airline Street, NE. but it was under the leadership of Rev. Adam Daniel Williams that the church experienced a drastic move forward to progressive growth. Rev. Williams succeeded to Rev. Parker in 1894, and through his efforts, the congregation acquired 65 new members during the first year of his tenancy, and by 1896 it had already moved to a structure that was built by the congregation itself on McGruder Street – which would later become the site of the Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church. For space reasons, the congregation had to move again into

another bigger site on Bell and Gilmore Street by 1900. The building they acquired had previously hosted the Fifth Baptist Church; the acquisition of the building was paid 2,500 USD, and with it came also the acquisition of what was left of the congregation of Fifth Baptist. The Sweet Auburn district was beginning to be defined, and the church was already within its old boundaries, but the congregation kept on growing out of the worshipping spaces they acquired. Beginning with 1912, plans for a site of dimension conspicuous enough to host the growing congregation were laid out: the planning and foundation building of the Heritage Sanctuary of Ebenezer Baptist Church, at 407 Auburn Avenue lasted for two years. While the basement of the sanctuary was being built, the congregation was hosted into a storefront building at 444 Edgewood Avenue, only to move in the said basement in 1914. The Horizon Sanctuary was later completed in 1922, finally providing a place that suited the needs of the congregation that built it. Some years later, in 1930, Martin Luther King Sr. took the place of Rev. Williams as pastor of the church, beginning a relation between his church and his family that would never completely cease. Martin Luther King Jr., became in fact co-pastor to his father Martin Luther King Sr. from 1960 until his death in 1968. The figure of Martin Luther King Jr., and more generally the role of the King family within the development and aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement were pivotal in the growth and characterization of the church as one of the most representative African-American churches in the country. The influence of the Civil Rights Movement in the development of Ebenezer Baptist Church should not be perceived only in terms of symbolical and representative importance – aspects whose significance is still of uttermost importance within the framework of an ethnographic research focusing specifically on the close examination of characteristics of

worshipping practices within the context of Black Churches. After the death of Martin Luther King Jr., in fact, his wife Coretta Scott King along with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference<sup>6</sup> (SCLC) worked to establish the area encompassing the original site of Ebenezer Baptist Church (today Heritage Sanctuary) as well as the site of the grave and of the birthplace of Martin Luther King Jr. as a site of national relevance, to follow on the legacy of Dr. King. The site was first listed as an historic district by the U.S. National Register of Historic Places on May 2, 1974, obtaining listing as a national historic landmark district by May 5, 1977 (National Register Information System). Ebenezer Baptist Church was a pivotal reference point during the development of the Sweet Auburn district as the first African-American neighborhood in the south-east of the U.S. to organize itself internally as to promote institutions and professional as well as commercial activities to serve and sustain African-American citizens whose necessities were hindered by segregation regulations. If this historical background was undoubtedly a concurrent cause for the site being raised to a national landmark status, its ties to the civil rights movement and, in particular, the figure of Martin Luther King Jr. were probably even more substantial, during the bureaucratic process. When the site, encompassing an urban area of 22.4 acres (91,000 m<sup>2</sup>), approximately enclosed by Irwin, Randolph, Jackson, Edgewood, and Auburn Avenues was declared national historic site in 1980, by U.S. Congressional legislation, plans for the King Center building – which would host Dr. King’s grave – and of the Visitor Center building had already been laid out. The two constructions would be completed, respectively, by 1981 and 1996, becoming the

<sup>6</sup> The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) is a Non-Governmental Organization, headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia. It was originally founded in 1957 by Martin Luther King Jr., who led it until his death in 1968. Along with the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the SCLC was one of the most relevant and influential organizations supporting and coordinating the civil rights movement.



Figure 14 – Horizon Sanctuary, Ebenezer Baptist Church



Figure 15– Historic Ebenezer Baptist Church building (facing the Horizon Sanctuary)



**Figure 16 – Horizon Sanctuary, Ebenezer Baptist Church**



**Figure 17 – Horizon Sanctuary, internal detail**

devoted host places of civil right movement-related activities, exhibitions and events, as well as functioning as promoters of research and recreational centers tied to the African-American community spread around the neighborhood and the city. Although since the retirement of Martin Luther King Sr. as senior pastor in 1975, the congregation associated with Ebenezer Baptist Church had started to grow significantly in numbers under the guide of Rev. Dr. Joseph Lawrence Roberts Jr.; so that by the end of the 1980s the congregation was almost nearing the 2000 members. The transition to the Horizon Sanctuary – a construction of trapezoidal layout, with a triangular dome-shaped roof – was completed in 1999, brought Ebenezer Baptist Church to its present site and shape, a temple around and within which the contemporary congregation, now surpassing 3000 members, has a suitable space for worship.

But Ebenezer Baptist Church is a much bigger entity than its congregation and its buildings. The mere organization of day-to-day activities requires a dense administrative establishment – not to mention some exceptional periods during which the church embarks in bigger projects that shares with other institutions like the Council of Atlanta, the Georgia State University and the University of Georgia, Athens, as well as with the Conventions to which it adheres. With a Church Administrator, who coordinates the entire economic and operational activities, and six Department Directors, who serves in Accounting, Worship Arts, Membership Services, Executive Operations, Reception, Membership Records and Bookstore, the church can count on a fixed base of more than a hundred employees. To this we may add the ministerial staff, as well as the musicians, chorus members, and volunteers from the congregation that serve during daily activities and week-end services. The entire establishment works

under the control and guidance of the senior pastor, Rev. Dr. Raphael Gamaliel Warnock, who also leads the Board of Directors – which comprises all the top tier positions of each Department. The church is as much a worshipping community as it is a multi-versed economical establishment, and my specific interest in the process of my research, was to establish the degree to which the reproduction of certain worship practices serves in the building and perpetuation of the congregation itself, and to what extent such practices influence the economic development of the church establishment.

## **CHAPTER 2 – EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH**

### **2.1 – Ebenezer in Sweet Auburn: community and congregation**

A reference to a Church is always, inevitably, a reference to its congregation. In the English language – and in general in the Germanic languages family – the word “church” finds its roots in the Greek word κυριακή, an adjective that literally means “of the Lord”, thus shading the term with which we refer to the congregation of Christian worshipers with a direct reference to the belonging of such worshipers to the divine they pray to and are created by. But within Neo-Latin, or Romance languages – such as the Italian “chiesa”, the French “église”, or the Spanish “iglesia” – the etymological root, if still from ancient Greek, comes from another word, ἐκκλησία, which literally means “assembly”, “meeting”, “congregation”. The church is, thus, within the context of certain traditions, in direct connection with the community of people that constitute the worshipping congregation, which not only conceptualize the focus of the institution around the body of participants that enact the cult, but refer to the congregation as the place where, both physically and spiritually, the presence of God can be perceived, worshipped and praised. This linguistic reference can be of great help in defining the centrality of the role of the congregation within the Black Church, even if not geographically consistent. American Christianity was in fact rooted in those protestant Anglo-Saxon traditions which gave more relevance to God omnipotence, instead of focusing on the relationship between the worshippers and

their path to salvation. But nevertheless, when confronting a religious topic rooted in the context of a Black Church, the role of the congregation will always be central and pivotal both in the analysis of the worshipping ritual, as well as in the organization of the establishment that sustain the cult. As we have already seen, in fact, it is directly from the need of groups of people, larger urban or rural communities that the very first Black congregation came to be. The congregation is thus at the heart of the Black Church, since it is from the needs of the various congregations that over time the reshaped cultural and spiritual environment of a black church came to be. Ebenezer is no different from any other black church, in this regard: it is therefore from a brief analysis of the community and the social environment that surrounds Ebenezer that we will start the process of close examination of the worship service.

#### **a. Community: Sweet Auburn social environment**

While researching on site, before and after services on Sunday, and in other occasions and events during other days of the week, I was able to gather a significant amount of data, from random occasional chats, as well as from the interviews, relating to the fact that most of the present members of the congregation live outside the “Sweet” Auburn neighborhood. This information strongly links with two other notions which came about from the two months of observation, one relating to the socio-economic status of the members of the congregation, the other relating to the present social condition of the Auburn district outside the boundaries of the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site. When moving west on Auburn Avenue, leaving Ebenezer Baptist Church at the back to proceed towards Downtown Atlanta, the landscape surrounding the sidewalks becomes progressively less welcoming; the walls



Figure 18 – Sweet Auburn District: conditions



Figure 19 – Sweet Auburn District: conditions

of some abandoned building are scraped with graffiti and layered flyer, while other buildings still show signs of activity, hosting dry cleaners, grocery shops and diners. From the area surrounding the Interstate 75/85 bridge, which cuts the “Sweet” Auburn district in two, perpendicular to Auburn Avenue, signs of abandonment and negligence are clearly shown; a significant community of homeless uses the bridge as reference point for their daily roundabouts, most of them probably attracted by the activities of the several churches present in the area, Ebenezer Baptist among them. The same observation can be done also concerning the area south of the church, comprised between Auburn Av. and Decatur St., connecting the sanctuary to the King Memorial MARTA station; these consideration relates not only to the outer appearance of the neighborhood, but also to a matter of sheer security, which cannot be ensured after sunset, as some of the neighborhood officers confirmed in several occasions in random conversation with me. These evident signs of degradation, shown by the surroundings of the National Historic Site, strongly disagree with the overall well-off appearances of the members of the congregation, as they approach the Horizon Sanctuary for Sunday service. From the 1950s, in fact, the process of reorganization of residential and business districts of the city which started on the premises of a yet segregated society brought the Sweet Auburn district to a progressive decline, as we have already seen. The original intention of the administrators of those, and even subsequent times, was to relocate the African American community – and its “business” district – from the East to the West side of the city, in order to leave the Auburn Avenue area free for the expansion to the East of the adjoining Central Business district. The complete removal never had any success, and the Civil Right movement era that concurrently began, left the white administration of the city with a much more limited scope of action, in



Figure 20– Sweet Auburn District: conditions



Figure 21 – Sweet Auburn District: conditions

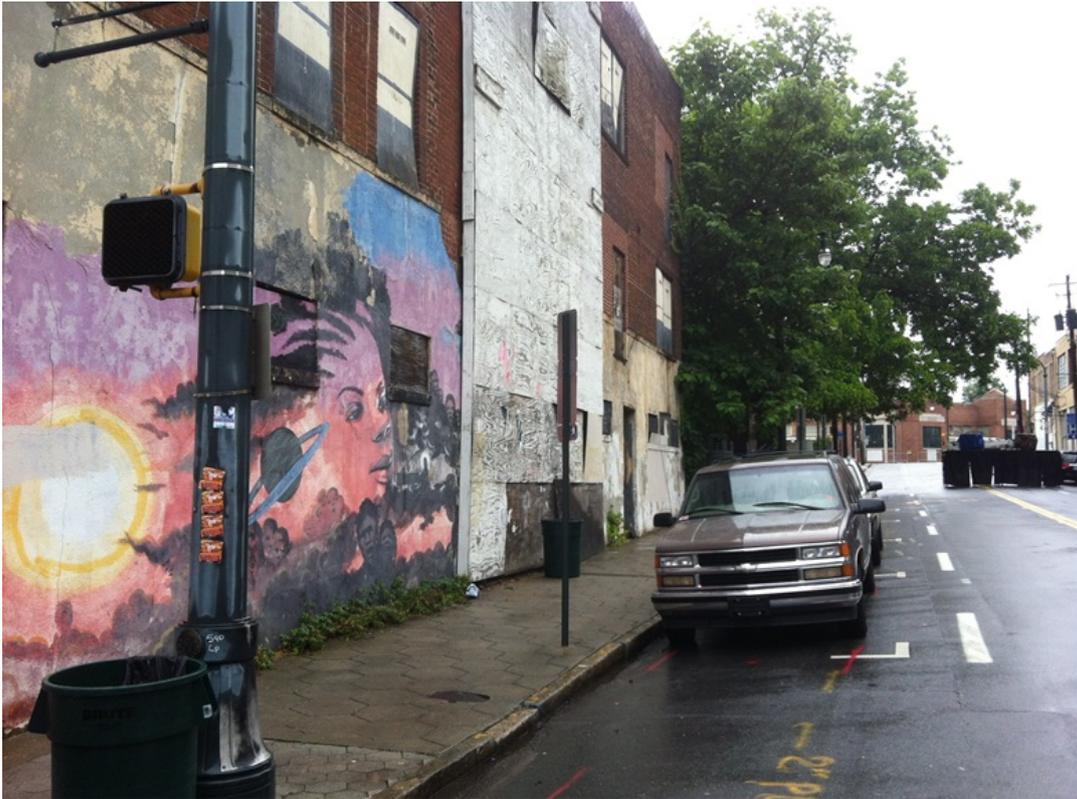


Figure 22– Sweet Auburn District: conditions



Figure 23 – Sweet Auburn District: conditions

regard of urban planning, since there was already enough unrest to cause grave commotions, even without the intended demolition of the Sweet Auburn district – as it was originally prescribed by the city’s “Up Ahead” revitalization plan of 1952 (Clark 2011:22). But even if the definitive disruption of the district and total disbandment of its African American population was averted, the neighborhood did dilute its economic self-sufficiency and power, and throughout the 1970s and 1980s, a huge portion of its black population moved to the West End, in many of the cheaper housing projects that were being developed. Indirect economic pressure substituted direct normative action, but the result was still a progressive decrease in business activity and variety, increasing degradation and general demographic downsizing. Jesse Clark, who is the current executive director of the Historic District Development Corporation, as well as an urban planning and community development scholar at Georgia Institute of Technology, provided a detailed description of both the social, demographic, economic and structural conditions of the Sweet Auburn district. Cross referencing data from the Atlanta municipality and the U. S. Census bureau, Clark gathered a series of graphics that provide a reliable and comprehensive source of data to establish the socio-economic conditions of the Sweet Auburn district. To Clark, the “spatial patterns of socioeconomic disparities along Auburn Avenue” are directly and inextricably linked with the “lack of employment opportunities [that] correlates with higher vacancy in commercial properties and a decreased level of personal disposable income,” which in turn “fails to generate demand for new business creation” (2011:13). **Figure 24** shows the area of the Sweet Auburn district divided into census tracts, while **Figure 25** relates those tracts to the median income of its population as of 2000. First and foremost, it is interesting to note how, tracts 19, 28, 33, which the Interstate

### Census Tracts Analyzed

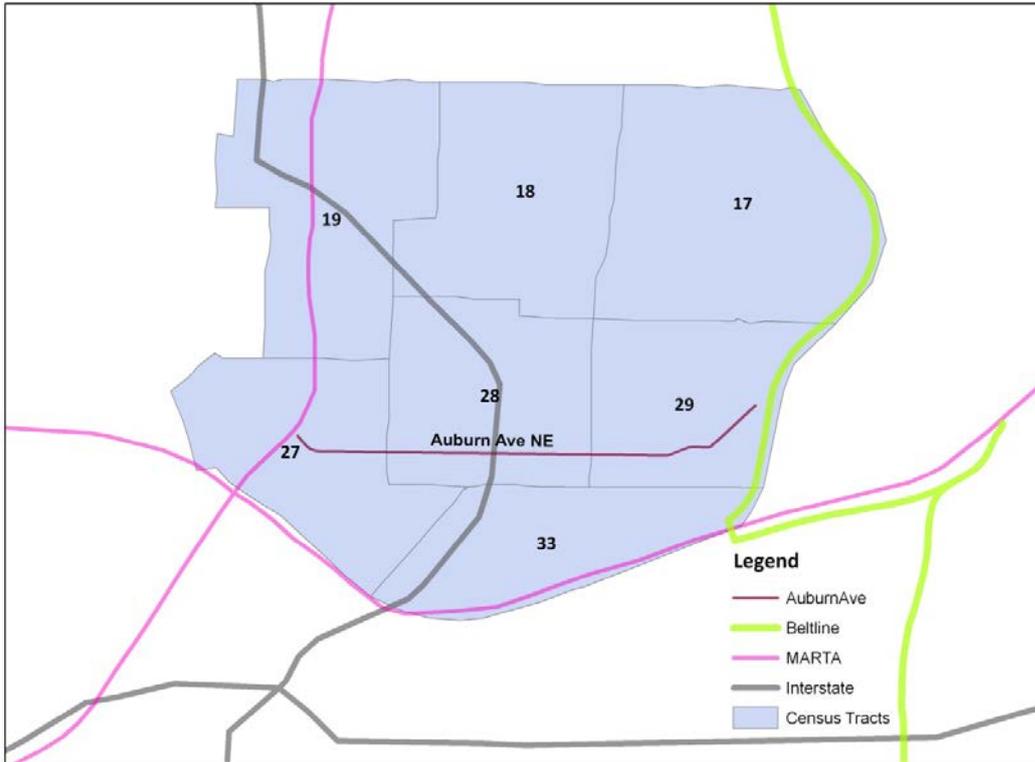


Figure 24 - [Clark 2011:8]

### Year 2000 Median Incomes by Census Tract

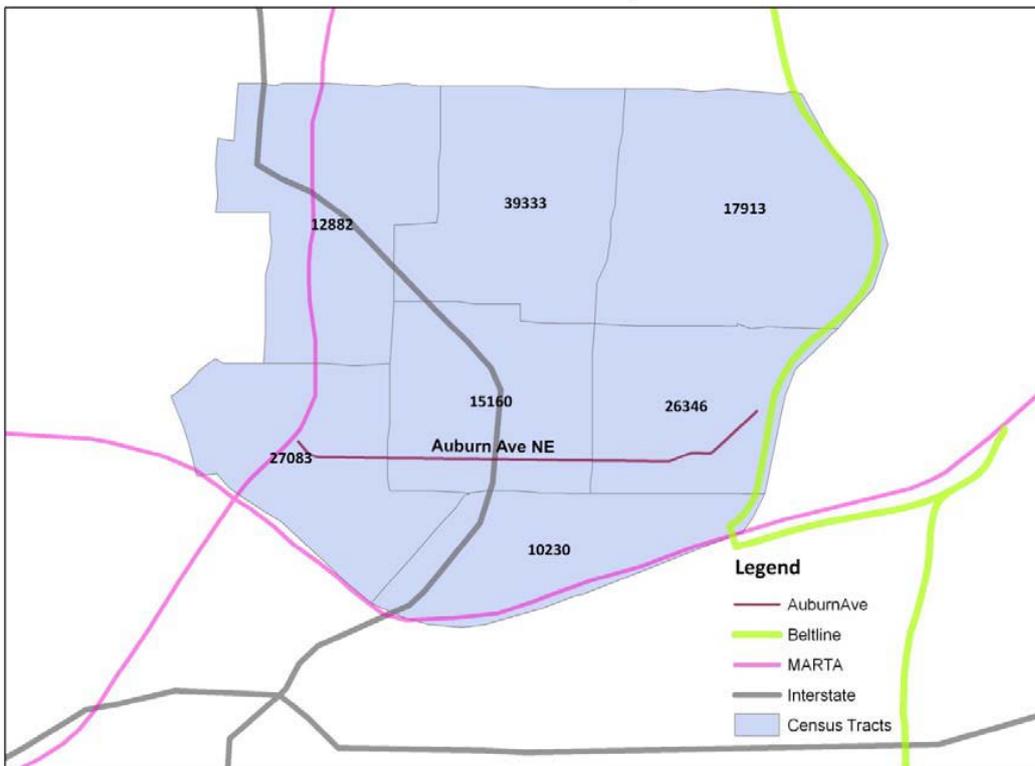
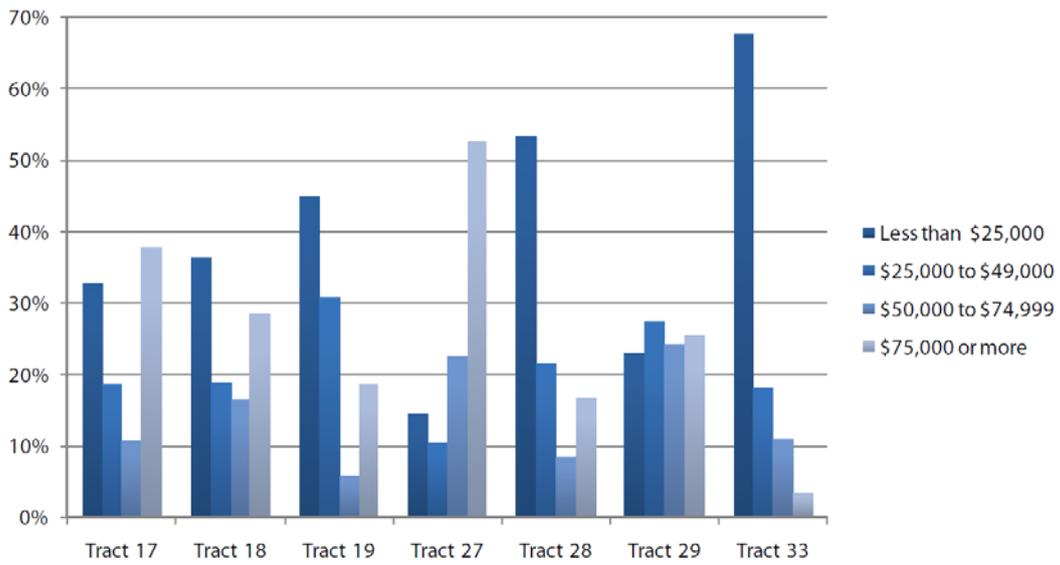
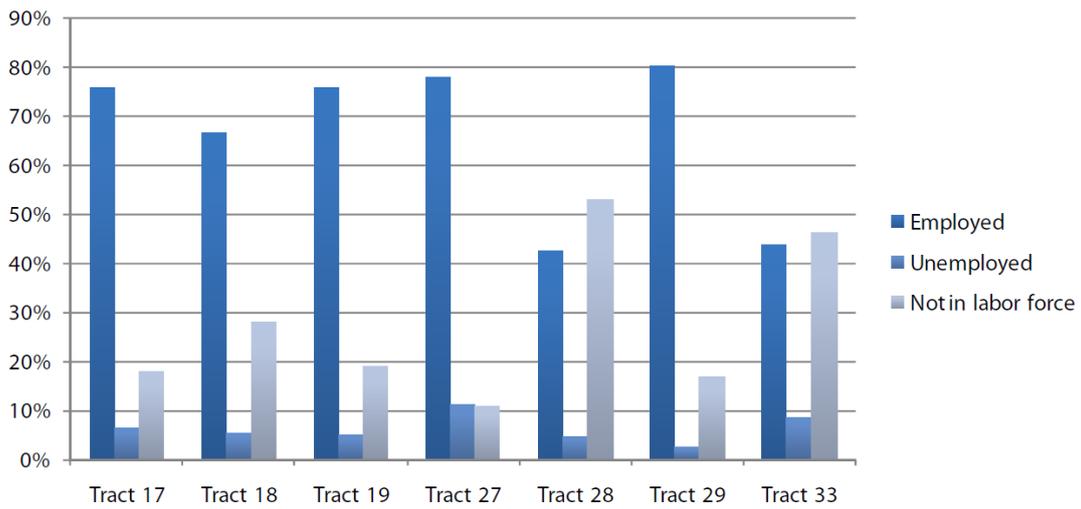


Figure 25 - [Clark 2011:9]

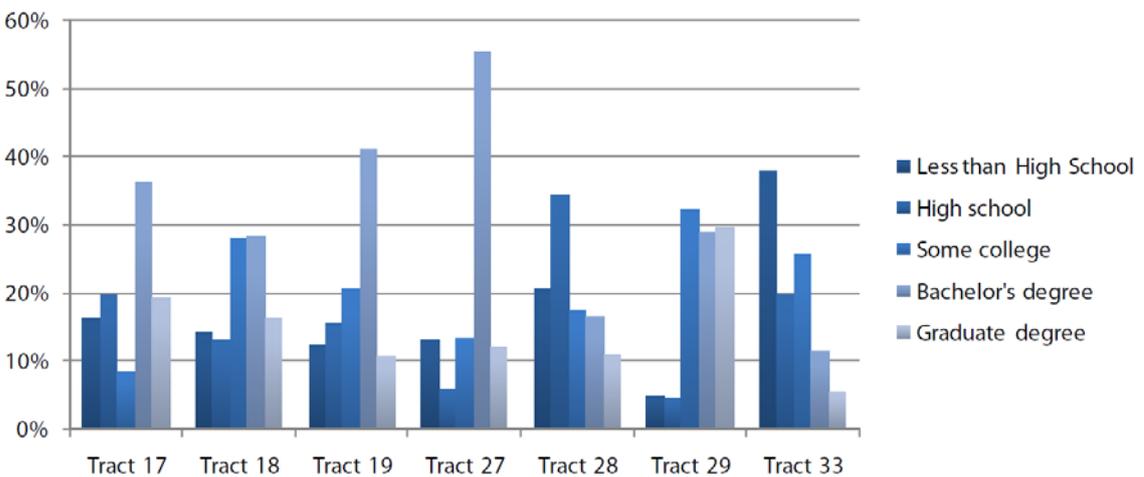
cut through in halves also present the lowest median incomes, exactly as if it had “cut right through the community”, as even Rev. Wortham pointed out (see Ch. 1), thus allowing for a total socio-economic disruption, that today data and analysis confirm. On the other hand, tract 29, which almost entirely coincide with the premises of the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site – where Ebenezer Baptist Church is located – presents one of the highest median income rates of the area. But there are more figures to take into account. Data from the 2005-2009 American Community Survey, cross-referenced with the income indexes for those same census tracts – which count an approximate figure of 16,400 residents as 2000 Census – show variations that are consistent with a profoundly diverse and differentiated nature of the district in terms of socioeconomic characteristics. **Figures 26, 27, and 28** present data concerning, respectively, particular income distribution, employment status and level of educational attainment for those same tracts. While tracts 19, 28 and 33 presents the lowest percentage of income, and educational attainment, as well as the highest rates of unemployment – apart from tract 19, whose employment rate is more within average – tract 29 appears to have the highest level of educational attainment, employment rate and economic distribution. If “the high rates of low-income residents in these census tracts correlates with a high percentage of adult workers who are both unemployed and not participating in the labor force” (Clark 2011:11), then it might be argued that the presence of the activities connected to Ebenezer Baptist Church and the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site offer, to a degree, employment and economic opportunities that serve increase the quality of living condition in that specific tract. Other churches with similar characteristics of institutional and congregational establishment are present within the district – Big Bethel AME Church



**Figure 26 - 2005-2009 Income Distributions. Source: US Census Bureau [Clark 2011:11]**



**Figure 27 - 2005-2009 Employment Status: 16 Years Old and Over [Clark 2011:12]**



**Figure 28 - 2005-2009 Educational Attainment: 25 Years Old and Over [Clark 2011:13]**

and Wheat Street Baptist Church, both in tract 28, respectively to the West and East of the Interstate bridge that cuts the tract into two – but they do not appear to have had any influence on the tract where they reside. This information do not necessarily relates to the particular activities, or contributions of these churches as compared to that of Ebenezer Baptist Church. On the contrary it rather confirms the severe impact that the construction of the Downtown Corridor for the Interstate had on the district, and in particular on those zones that were directly touched by the infrastructural development. Tracts 19, 28 and 33 are in fact those that present the worst physical conditions, the lowest numbers of residents and economic activities; not to mention the function that the Interstate bridges throughout these areas serve as gathering hubs of homeless in search of shelter.

#### **b. Congregation: promotion of personal involvement**

While the degradation of the socioeconomic environment that surrounds Ebenezer Baptist Church speak of a complex, and historically situated progressive depression, which interests both the outer appearances of the district, as well as the actual conditions of the majority of its residents, approaching the Horizon Sanctuary for service on Sunday morning, leaves the bystander with a much diverse impression. Women are dressed with colorful and sumptuous garments, hand gloves and hats of rich fabrics interweaving with each other, while kisses, greetings and random chats are exchanged before service begins. Men usually have a much more somber appearance, but even so, very elegant and refined: most wear suits and ties; many show precious rings and clocks on their fingers and wrists. The perception is that of a very well off class of people, even if there can be no certainty on the actual social and economic

status of the worshippers at Ebenezer Baptist. It was not possible for me to examine church documents relating to the particular residence of the members of the congregation. Church administration stated that those information were foreclosed for privacy reason, and no synthetic compendium of the rates of provenance of the congregation that would preserve the anonymity of each member had been redacted to date. Nevertheless, from almost every random or semi-structured discussion I undertook during my research at Ebenezer, I was able to gather that the vast majority of the congregation would come from outside the Sweet Auburn district, from various parts of the city. This information links directly to the fact that many of the members of the congregation represents in many cases the excellence of the African American civil and political society in Atlanta – entrepreneurs, senators and congressmen, members of the city and state council, judges, board members from many colleges and universities. This is not to say that the entirety of the congregation revolves around elitist principles of aggregation; participation is, in fact, broader than any abstract boundary could define, and many members come from the Sweet Auburn district itself, perpetuating a connection to this particular church that begun long before its economic expansion after the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr., and the Civil Rights movement. Data form the previous paragraph on the distribution of wealth and education within the census tract that hosts Ebenezer Baptist reverberates of the high, transversal distribution of wealth through different social classes that the church establishment, to a degree, facilitates through work opportunities and community help. Everyone who participates to worship service invest his or her resources in weekly offerings to the church, no matter of its social class. It is also true, on the other hand that the degree of economic involvement that participants undertake on a weekly base



Figure 29 - Regular service offering envelope

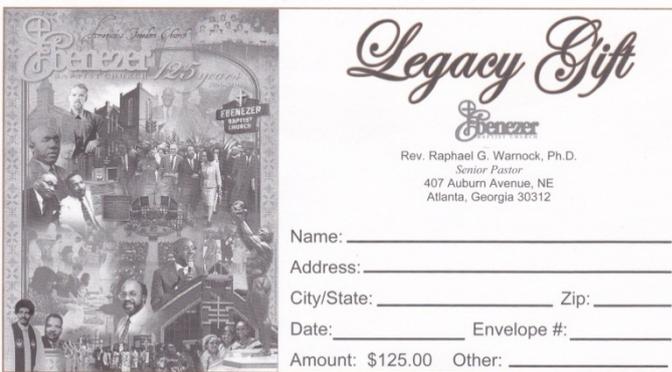


Figure 30 – 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary service offering envelope

speak of an availability of resources that can at least be regularly accessed – it is not possible to produce any specific statement over the income rate of every participants, but it has to be enough to sustain an average contribution of at least 100\$ per week from every individual or family. During every service, in fact – at least

three every week, plus special events – two separate moments are destined to the collection of tithes and offerings, some of which would directly fuel the ordinary activities of the establishment, while others would be directed to specific cooperative and community help activities. Offerings are collected by the ushers, who pass through the benches to gather each contribution, which had been previously put inside a small envelope, provided by the church, that the participant would find on every bench along with the bulletin, the church newsletter and the *African American Heritage Hymnal*. In **Figures 29** and **30** are shown two examples of such envelopes: the first is a regular envelope, one that can be found on any regular Sunday or Wednesday service. It is clearly stated by the predisposed layout of the envelope that the minimum amount that each one is entitled to freely give starts from 50\$, with the possibility of going up to 200\$ – or even more, if one is willing. The offering is described as “sacrificial”, and, the personalization of this sacrifice is encouraged by the predisposed space for the

name, thus providing the church with precise information on the origin of each contribution, and the involvement of its members. The second one is instead for an offering held during a special occasion, the celebration for the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church: as we can see, it is described as a “legacy gift”, thus representing the donation – from a minimum of 125\$, in this case – as a contribution to the very perpetuation of the institution. As we have already seen, the church economy, the funds that are gathered and used for any of the economic involvement of the church – bills, wages, special activities, cooperation, restructuring, expansion – is almost entirely acquired through individual or corporative donations. Again, we do not have specifics on the exact origin of the capital the church can dispose of; in fact, there is not even an official figure of the actual capital. But every activity the church involves itself in is fueled by donations, most of which come from members of the congregation, during service but also outside service – especially for the richest contributions.

Individuals who regularly attend service in a specific church, at some point during the worship ritual – the *invitation* – can decide whether or not to join the church as part of its official congregation. The worship service is open to anyone who wants to participate; but members of the congregation are those participants who have recognized a specific connection with a church, and attend it regularly, other than participating to accessory activities – much like parishioners within the Catholic Church. We will go back to the process and practices through which members of the worshipping community are welcomed within the official congregation of the church, as they take place during the climax of the worship ritual. For now, it is sufficient to say that the congregation that regularly participates to church services is essential to the production of the worship ritual, which in the Afro-Baptist tradition has its core in

the very interaction between the clergy and the congregation. But first and foremost, the congregation is essential in maintaining the church establishment in actual existence, through its donations. Therefore, the way the congregation represents itself through named offerings and is represented by the church establishment through praise of economic sacrifice speaks of the amount of importance that is formally and outwardly given to the congregation involvement in the activities of the church. Every month, Ebenezer Baptist church issues a list of donors, color printed on paper, which is provided to participants to the worship service along with bulletins, envelopes and books of prayers. The Nehemiah Donor's list – of which the one shown in **Figure 31** is a partial example – reports all the donations that the church has gathered during that specific month, organized by amount of donations, which are referenced to the names of all the donors. Nehemiah is a figure around which revolves the Book of Nehemiah of the Hebrew Bible, his deeds being connected mostly to his role as governor, arbiter and fundraiser in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, and the restoration of order, faith and justice within the city. It is therefore a symbol that is easily associated to the economic commitment of the congregation; it is also consistent with the “different degrees of emphasis and valences given to certain particular theological views” (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990:3). The Old Testament has a much stronger influence on black Christian than in generally has within Christianity. Figures such as Nehemiah, or the prophets, heavily participate in the “black sacred cosmos” upon which the spiritual and lay dimension of the Black Church is built, representing the “exciting imagery and the personal involvement of God in history” which related the holocaust of slavery, and its memory, to the concrete possibility of divine rescue (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990:3). The permanence of this collective imagination is replicated in this specific

# Nehemiah Donor list

(As of May 6, 2012)

Last	M	First
<b>Diamond (\$20,000-above)</b>		
Holliday	Y.	Jennifer
Estate of Clarence O Harley		

Last	M	First
<b>Platinum (\$10,000-\$19,999)</b>		
Bryant	S.	Elliot
Farris	King	Christine
Finch		Phillip & Sarah
Jenkins		Mary & Levaughn
Johnson		Senator Leroy
Johnson	Sampson	Marsha
Warnock	G.	Raphael

Last	M	First
<b>Gold (\$5,000-\$9,999)</b>		
Buggs, Ph.D	White	Carrie
Burges	E.	Melvin
Carlisle		Calvin
Cathy		Dan
Cook-White		Dora
Glover	L.	Renee
Johnson		Anita
Jones	A.	Patricia
Marshall		Joseph
Pickens	J.	Judith & Robert
Pittman		Kelvin & Mary Lou
Richardson		Don
Russell		Dan & Daisy
White	Cook	Dora

Last	M	First
<b>Silver (\$2,500-\$4,999)</b>		
Abson	E.	James
Alexander		Willie & Irmogene
Bailey	L.	J
Barnett		Sylvester & Patricia
Boldon	C.	Hope
Brown	L.	Tanya & Toya
Camp		William & Adrienne
Chapman	L.	Clyde & Diane
Domingue		Gerald & Gwen
Edmond		Brooke & Roderick
Hatcher		Kendra
Henderson		Rayna
Howell	Constance	Rosa
Hunter	H.	Jacob
Jackson		Duane & Fleda
Jones	M.	Faye
King		Kendra Hatcher
McDonald		Jermaine & Janelle
O'Neal	K.	Malinda
Palmer		Tanya & Kenneth

Last	M	First
<b>Bronze (\$1,000-\$2,499)</b>		
Adams		Herschel
Adams		Mary
Adams	J.	Ozzie
Anderson		Candace
Anderson		Marion & Barbara
Anderson		Willie & Lizzie
Anthony		Cedric
Bailey		Randall & Jean
Bank		Dorothy
Banks		Lessye
Baptiste		Katie
Barnes	R.	Rosalyn
Barrett	C.	Ian
Belton		David & Ollie
Blanch	G.	Abraham
Bolden		Brunetta
Brinson		Dr. Albert & Mrs. Vivian
Brown	E.	Eileen
Brown		Paul & Vivian
Brown		Toya
Browning		Boyd
Bush, Sr.	M.	Leonard & Emma
Butler		George & Donnetta
Butler	V.	Mattie
Cabral		Mr. & Mrs. Stepien
Camp		William & Adrienne
Christian		Jimmy & Gwendolyn
Clark		Rickey & Michelle
Cockfield		Burnette
Conley	G.	Clarice
Conner		Willie & Vivian
Cook		JoAnn
Cook		Samuel & Sylvia
Cook		Vernon & Sharon
Corbitt		James & Christine
Cunningham		Barbara
Cuvilly		Richard & Jerrice
Daniel		Angela
Davis		Bessie
Davis	K.	Natasha
Dees		Neil & Maxine
Dillard		Clint & Josephine
Drake	W.	Onistine
Ducree		Richard
Echols		Sandra
Evererett	M.	Ashley
Evans	W.	Brenda
Farley		Anita
Farris	N.	Isaac
Ficklin		Bill
Freeman		Kameshia
Gamble		Stephen & Alice
Geer	M.	Tecora
Givens		Virgil
Givens		Yvonne
Glenn	Hollis	Mary
Golden		Stephane
Gravely		Thyrza
Gurley		Alberton & Jennifer
Harper	H.	Delores
Henderson		Angelia
Hider	A.	Shirley
Hightower		Wanda
Hill	Sue	Walter
Hodge		Yvonne

Figure 31 – Nehemiah’s Donor List (excerpt)

case by Nehemiah, to whom the donor's list is dedicated as if to sanction a divine mandate for the collection of tithes and offerings; or at least to conceptualize it within the path to absolute freedom in, and for, Jesus Christ around which the Baptist experience revolves. By any means, the congregation reciprocates the excitement for personal involvement that the clergy prompts with commendations and certifications of faithfulness and loyalty – such as the “50+ Year Members” list shown in **Figure 32**, which yearly reports the longest serving members of the congregation; it is in fact a matter of extreme importance to be part of the congregation, and, thus it is more important to *become* part of the congregation, a process which takes place during the worship service, with the testimony of the whole congregation. After all, within churches of black Baptist denominations, it is the congregation by majority vote that elects its pastor, a tradition that lies in the original history of American Baptism and that has been kept in place to this date. If all pastors are ministers, only with the approval of the local congregation a minister can become pastor of a community (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990:42). It is to the description of the worship ritual and of the relation between congregation and clergy that we will now move, church service being after all the very core of the spiritual life of a community, and the building ground of the connections and relationship that constitutes the living church and its practices.

## **2.2 – THE WORSHIP SERVICE**

The particular historical positioning of Ebenezer Baptist Church, from the end of the Reconstruction era to the end of the civil rights movement, within the broader framework of racial issues in the social contexts of the American south, refers of the



# 50+ Year Members

1. Barbara Ann	Adams
2. Pamala	Aliniece
3. Dorothy	Allen
4. Jean	Allen
5. Barbara J.	Anderson
6. Dorothy	Banks
7. Johnny	Barnhart
8. Shirley	Barnhart
9. Gloria	Beil
10. Gail	Blackmon
11. Claude	Bowden
12. Joanne W.	Bowden
13. John	Brannon
14. Albert	Brinson
15. Marvin	Brinson
16. Mildred Y.	Brown
17. Carrie W.	Buggs
18. Emma Lee	Bush
19. Edward	Camp
20. Gladys Hodges	Camp
21. Albert	Chapman
22. Danny	Chapman
23. Mary	Coachman
24. Christine	Cobb
25. Janice	Colbert
26. Queen Esther	Colbert
27. Leslie	Colier
28. Jean	Cooper
29. Francis	Culbreath
30. Doris	Daniel
31. Bessie M.	Davis
32. Gene	Demons
33. Joyce	Dobbs
34. Loy	Dobbs, Sr.
35. Otistine W.	Drake
36. Lois	Dunlap
37. James	Eley
38. Ruby Dell	Eley
39. Christine King	Farris

40. Isaac	Farris, Sr.
41. James	Ficklin
42. William	Ficklin
43. Godfrey L.	Finch
44. Phillip	Finch
45. Faye P.	Gentry
46. Sondra Y.	Gentry
47. Elise	Gilham
48. Gertrude Greene	Gordon
49. Catherine	Green
50. Richard	Greene
51. Ruth P.	Greene
52. Charlene	Griffin
53. Elbert	Gurley, Jr.
54. Mary H.	Gurley
55. Bobbie Jean	Guthrie
56. Delores	Harper
57. Mary	Harper
58. Eugene	Harris
59. Lacy	Harris
60. Mary	Heard
61. Martha	Hemmans
62. Jeanette	Henderson
63. Donald	High
64. Julius	High, Jr.
65. Gladys	Hodges
66. Eugene	Howard
67. Rose	Howell
68. Oliver	Huff
69. Kenneth	Humphrey
70. Jacob	Hunter
71. Juanita	Ingram
72. Gloria A.	Jackson
73. Leatha D.	James
74. Melissa	James
75. Wilhelmita	James
76. Faye	Jones
77. Irene C.	Jones
78. Marilyn	Jones

79. Mary Louise	Kemp
80. Lonnie	King
81. Naomi B.	King
82. Elsie O.	Knight
83. Josephine	Lewis
84. Juanita J.	Lightfoot
85. Clarence	Lockett
86. Shirley M.	Lockett
87. Patricia Marshall	Marks
88. Joseph	Marshall, Jr.
89. Richard	Mason, Jr.
90. Thelma	McClenton
91. Louise	Merritt
92. Gwendolyn	Middlebrooks
93. Samuel	Nesbit
94. Malinda K.	O'Neal
95. S. Lynn	O'Neal
96. Lewis	Reed
97. Sarah	Reed
98. Delores	Reese
99. Eugene	Roberts
100. Beverly	Robinson
101. Dolores	Robinson
102. Irene Stills	Robinson
103. Laura	English-Robinson
104. Melvin	Russell
105. Dollie Berrien	Scott
106. Paulette Jones	Scott
107. Renette L.	Scott
108. Deborah R.	Shields
109. Ola B.	Sims
110. Ada	Slocum
111. Barbara H.	Smith
112. Gwendolyn Lane	Smith
113. Jackson	Smith
114. George L.	Stephens
115. David	Stills, Jr.
116. Katie M.	Taylor
117. Fernanga	Thomas

March 18, 2012

Figure 32 – 50+ Years Members List

significance this site has for the African-American community of Atlanta metropolitan area. Although Atlanta African-American populations participates in the worship of a diverse array of Christian denominations – Baptist, Methodist, catholic, Episcopalian – Baptist churches affiliated both to the Southern Baptist Convention and to the National Baptist Convention have the largest congregations in Atlanta, a fact which is replicated also at state level. Ebenezer Baptist Church is a member of the Progressive National Baptist Convention and the American Baptist Churches, USA (unincorporated), but even so it maintains its autonomy, like all churches within any Baptist convention. In fact, “it is true that the president of the convention can exercise a certain degree of control over individual pastors through the patronage system of prestigious appointments to various boards and committees. But at the same time, individual pastors have the option of not participating in that arena. The pastors of very large churches, in particular, are able to build substantial power bases in their own right and thereby effect significant change in their local communities, as well as nationally” (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990:43). This concept of inner independence and autonomy involves not only the activities the church undertakes, or the political or socio-economical stances it maintains within its community, but the very organizational structure of the worship service, and the particular interpretations of the scriptures upon which values of religious community are prioritized, thus presenting a total lack of a precise, universal and recurrent liturgy, as it is within the Catholic church. Nonetheless, it is possible to define a basic structure upon which worship service is conducted. Ebenezer Baptist Church offers two separate services on Sundays, the first starting at 8:00 a.m., the second at 11:00 a.m.; an extraordinary service has been held on Wednesdays evenings at 7:00 p.m. in the past two years – the exceptionality of the

event being outwardly stated by the very way the service is referred to: W.O.W., acronym for Worship On Wednesday. As Rev. Wortham pointed out, during our conversation, the structure of the service depends on the purposes and characteristics of each service and pastor, the Baptist denominations lacking a formal univocal hierarchical structure that binds them to a standard liturgy:

**Rev. Wortham:** With Baptist churches being able to stand on our own, we are able to set our own structure, our own protocol, and even if we choose to come together into a national body, like, say, National Baptist Convention, or Progressive National Baptist, even then we all stand alone. And so, with that, when we plan the worship, when we plan the liturgy, Ebenezer will probably look different from Wheat Street, around the corner, now; and so, with that, I can't say that this is the standard liturgy for all Baptist churches, because of the one notion that we are all autonomous, and so every service may look different from each other, but I'm pretty confident in saying that everybody has a base structure they go off with.

Rev. Wortham is a young pastor in his late twenties, from Birmingham, Alabama; he arrived at Ebenezer in 2004 as an assistant minister, and became assistant pastor in 2005, moving in 2008 to the role of coordinator of Youth & College Ministries. Along with Rev. Shanan Jones, coordinator of Public Relations and Community Affairs, they represent the two most important members of the clergy at Ebenezer, after the senior pastor Rev. Dr. Raphael Gamaliel Warnock. It is them who mostly contribute in the planning and organization of services, whose structure can be broadly synthesized as follows:

(1) *Prelude* to service: while people are still gathering and sitting at their places, a minister – usually among the assistant ministers – introduces the program of the worship service, while the designated chorus enters from the back of the sanctuary and takes place in the chancel that confronts the sitting congregation;

(2) *Call to worship*: the chorus performs introductory gospel or spiritual songs, while the congregation still takes its place;

(3) *Affirmation and invocation*: at this point, the standing congregation performs along with the chorus and ministers a hymn chosen from the African-American Heritage Hymnal, then the pastor who will deliver the sermon during that service addresses the congregation for the first time;

(4) *Choral worship*: the chorus performs a song from the repertoire chosen for each day;

(5) *Welcome and life at Ebenezer*: at this stage of the service – usually well into the second half hour – the pastor addresses events and activities related to the church and the community, then welcomes the visitors who are present, while the chorus performs again another song from the daily repertoire; exceptional announcements, or remarks from visiting pastor and ministers usually take place during this phase of the service;

(6) *Inasmuch offering*: this is the first (of two) offertory, specifically intended to directly support actions in favor of poor and indigent people of the community and the district; while the ushers gather the offering, the chorus performs another song.

(7) *Pastoral prayer and sermonic selection*: the pastor addresses matters and problem relevant to the community, then the chorus performs the sermonic selection, a song that functions as an introduction to the sermon.

(8) *Sermon*: this is the time when the pastor finally preaches the gospel to the congregation; it has to be considered as the central and most important part of the worship service.

(9) *Invitation*: after the sermon, the pastor addresses the worshippers, inviting non-member to join the congregation, or non-believer to be enlightened by the divinity.

(10) *Tithe appeal*: this is the second offertory, specifically intended to fuel church establishment and activities, during which the chorus performs another song.

(11) *Benediction*: this moment represent the conclusion of the service, and usually consists of final remarks from the pastors, while the chorus performs one more song; the end of service is reached when the standing congregation, along with ministers and the chorus performs the closing gospel “Total praise”, which regularly recurs in all services, with few exceptions.

As this base structure begins to reveal, a great part of the service consists, utilizes, or relies on music, to the degree that a specific Director of Worship and Arts is appointed within the church – as in most Baptist churches – whose role is specifically to coordinate the organization of musical service in coordination with the pastors. Ebenezer can count on the regular attendance of a set of five musicians playing the piano, a Hammond organ, a bass guitar, an electric guitar, a set of drums and a set of percussions, while there are four different choruses that alternate week after week. The M. L. King Jr. Senior Chorus, the J. L. Roberts, Jr. Men’s Chorus, and the Voices of Ebenezer Chorus are all directed by Maurice Seay, while the youth chorus, Voices of a New Era is directed by a collective of young ministers. The complexity and variety of

this musical “establishment,” demonstrates the prominent, overt importance that music has in the construction and delivering of worship services, as the words of many members of the congregation have confirmed.

Melissa, a chorus singer and secretary at the church, whom I first interviewed after a Sunday service, highlights with precision and pride the perceived relevance of a qualitatively high music contribution within the worshipping environment at Ebenezer, when asked about how would service change at Ebenezer without music:

**Melissa:** Oh, this church? It would be... [she pauses] ...it would be very difficult, because we are a musical people, so, I can't imagine no music...

**Giorgio:** When you say people, you are thinking about...

**M:** The members...

**G:** The members of this church?

**M:** ...and the community, yes. We expect it, we are known for having music, so I can't imagine that not ever happening here [she laughs]. (emphasis added)

The comment Melissa offers, is relevant because of the perspective that offers us on the role that music firstly has in influencing the representation that the congregation has of itself. This observation ties directly with the words of Sam, a young minister and director of the youth chorus, Voices of a New Era. When asked to comment on the perspective he was offering about how music is functionally tied to the structure of the service, as effectively shaping the entire process and experience, Sam pauses, opening his arms in an encompassing gesture:

**Sam:** The entire process and experience... The musician is probably the second highest paid person in the church, after the pastor.

**Giorgio:** You mean the musicians that play the instruments, like the organ, piano, the drum and so on?

**S:** Yeah, and also the singers, the worship leaders. Usually there's one worship leader, and then the rest of the people, most of them volunteer; but they hire somebody to be the worship leader which is key [...]. Usually the highest paid people in the organization is gonna be your pastor and the musicians, your Worship and Arts director, because they go hand in hand. That's your foundation of any church.

**G:** So also in terms of economic planning for the church is very important to think about this.

**S:** Oh yeah. I mean, everything is, you know, you probably have hired musicians before you hire a secretary.

The degree of economic commitment that the church undertakes, could speak by itself in regard to the relevance of musical performance within the worship ritual. But what these observations prompted me to note was how music could be considered as a catalyst of certain patterns of behaviors and expectations produced by the congregation that would be pivotal in the progression of service toward an ideal climax.

#### **a. The “Holy Spirit effect”**

While commenting on the structure of service in relation to the autonomy of congregations on matters of liturgy, Rev. Wortham pointed out something I was not intending to look for:

**Rev. Wortham:** So we have a base liturgy that we will follow; and so we know that we are going to do prayer at this moment, we are gonna sing a song at this moment, we are gonna have our welcome at this moment, we are gonna have offering at this moment but even then there still is the flexibility, and I think a lot of times people may attribute it to the black churches, that flexibility... I would say the “holy spirit effect,” let me call it like that, whereas that even if we have a structure, we are still flexible enough to know that God can do something different in the service, that a move can happen so that, ok, we might not need to sing this song because there’s a certain spirit in the church, and we may need to move here at this moment, we may need to do this at this moment. And that’s the responsibility of the clergy, of the celebrant of service, who is usually the senior pastor. And he will kind of know, ok, I might wanna do it a

little bit different here, and that's something that he will know, he will catch it and just go with it. And that's the flexibility. We have our goal, our goal at Ebenezer is to do service in one hour and a half [...], we wanna try to have the best possible worship that we can in that time span. Now, we have our structure, but then if something happens within that structure, that's fine.

Rev. Wortham's words describe a divinity that is capable, and willing, to directly interact with the congregation assembled in the church for service. The pastor will have the responsibility of devising the most appropriate structure to address certain issues that he considers relevant. But this presupposition will have to be backed by his congregation, inside the church, during the worship ritual. God intervention is depicted by the reverend words as affecting directly the entire body of the community that, provoked by the divine, will give away "a certain spirit in the church". A spirit that is duty of the clergyman to interpret, thus adapting his plan to God's plan. The congregation is considered as an entity that supersedes the individual: it is the state of the congregation that will influence the individuality of each member. In this regard black Baptist interpretation of spirituality and participation to the worship ritual is very distant from the Catholic interpretation, which puts its entire relevance on the personal, interior, invisible path of the individual. Inside a black church, emotions are brought out of the body, not kept inside: it is a matter of empathic connection between who preaches and who receives the preaching, a distinction that can even occasionally be blurred, since as much as the congregation follows the pastor, it is sometimes the pastor that has to be *flexible* enough to adapt his preaching to the spirit of the congregation. I had been trying to relate musical practices directly to a specific pattern of en-action and reproduction of identity, within the African-American community at Ebenezer; but the concept of *flexibility* the pastor used, implicated a different kind of connection with the musical practice, if considered in the light of the sense of

belonging to the congregation that every member of the community I spoke to would feel and discuss. Identification as member of the church would be prior to any other – even the acknowledgment of the importance of music would come after the explicit statement of belonging to Ebenezer congregation. In its spiritual, religious, and physical dimension, the congregation has the priority, as Melissa would specify when prompted to comment on the personal importance that attendance had for her:

**Melissa:** For me? Oh, is very crucial, I can't sleep at home on Sunday, there's just no way. Unless I'm just drained, that is the only time, if I'm sick, especially if I have a fever, I won't share that blessing with anybody else [she laughs]; I will keep myself at home, but as far as, you know, sleeping in because I'm tired? My feeling is, if the Lord gives me strength six days a week to get up and go to work, I can give him one day on Sunday to go to church. It's just... that's ridiculous to me, "I'm tired;" but I'm tired every day! If it was a workday, I would have to get up and go to work.

**Giorgio:** So, you think this in terms of debt?

**M:** Yeah, yeah, to Jesus Christ and to the community. [...]

**G:** So, why do you go to service?

**M:** Oh my goodness, uhmm, I come to church to get my refill for the week. I might have a car, but I'd still have to come back and fuel in for the week, for the world [she laughs]. That is the best way I can describe it.

The debt Melissa feels to have with the community speaks of the significance that worship has, in the eyes of the members of the congregation, of a community practice, rather than a personal involvement with the divine. It is in the interpersonal relation with members of the congregation that the worship ritual acquires its meaning and power as a cultural practice, which is not a merely symbolic declaration of religious belonging. It is inside the very grounds of the church, during the worship ritual that the individual feels his or her association with the community; a sense of belonging which constitutes the very collective identity of the individual, which is painstakingly built

through attendance to service. To Melissa attendance to service becomes a *necessary* practice, as if answering to a physical primary need. Her perception of debt towards the divinity, is immediately reflected and enhanced by her perception of debt to the community she belongs to, which concretizes the perception into an actual drive to participate and be active part of the worship service, every Sunday. And Sam offers another comment that echoes this same representation of attendance to service as a *necessary* act, which draws onto an even more concrete analogy:

**Sam:** [...] And so, a lot of time I think the whole purpose of the environment is, uhmm, I would like to say it like this: sometimes the church could be considered a hospital, a hospital for the sick in spirit; and so people come to church looking to be healed, looking to feel better, looking, you know, just as a hospital would do; and so you have so many different people that are in the church, that come pretty much for the same reason we all come. Some of us are already well, you know, but we just, I guess we are coming for our checkup, you know what I'm saying? [laughs]

As a sick man would need a doctor with his nurses, so a member of Ebenezer would need the church – whose doctors and nurses would be, respectively, the ministers, and the musicians and singers, following Sam's analogy to its end. The connotation with which both Sam and Melissa define their relation to the church, and to worship service in particular is that of a primary need, a *necessity*. Melissa envisions it in terms of fossil fuel, as it is fundamental for a car, or a machine to function; to Sam *necessity* to attend to service is expressed as a basic medical need. In both cases, the perceptions refer to condition of inevitable, necessary drive to regularly attend worship service, which consequently ties them to the congregation to which they belong, while constituting the very collective identity in which they will identify themselves, and to which they will feel attached and dependent to. Henceforth, it could be this very sense of *necessity* perceived by members of the congregation that the pastors might be trying

to address, when planning a service as well as delivering a sermon. In any case, the community appears to have a direct influence on the physicality of the individual, as if inscribed within the body of the worshipper, on one hand sustaining him and fuelling his spiritual needs, on the other hand bounding him to the responsibility of reciprocation.

What Rev. Wortham would define as “holy spirit effect” with reference to the possibility of divine intervention within the boundary of the worshipping ritual, might also be seen as an internal goal the preacher sets down to reach, targeting the congregation sympathetic charge with a certain sets of practices, which manifests with various aspects in the intertwined structure of music, prayer and preaching of the service. Using this framework, empathy is a key emotion to address and provoke within members of the congregation, and music is perceived as a unique vessel of complex and sympathetic emotions, as Jane points out:

**Melissa:** The music is also a part of the ministry, because a lot of people get more out of the singing [...] so it's an individual thing, but it all comes together as one.

Looking back to the months of attendance at service, the relevance of music as a focus of dense emotions for the members of the congregation resonated from the very flow of the worship ritual. The first days I would attend service at Ebenezer – often remaining for both Sunday services – the bystanders spotting me while approaching the Horizon Sanctuary would note my presence with glances, random waving hands, and small talk, almost immediately recognizing me as a non-member of the congregation, a visitor. Before I could completely enter the sanctuary I would be stopped right after entering the narthex of the church by a woman in her late fifties,

who would gently ask me where I come from and then welcome me inside the church. The hostess is part of the staff of Ebenezer Baptist Church, where, given its role as an important reference point for the African American community within and outside the Atlanta metropolitan area, the presence of visitors and non-members of the congregation is not an uncommon event – at least in the perception of the hostess. After a couple of weeks my presence on church grounds was established, and I would not be stopped by church staff anymore; but I would always be noted by the congregation<sup>7</sup>, which would spot and glance randomly at me while proceeding inside the church. The interior of the Horizon Sanctuary consists of a single nave that replicates the trapezoidal layout of the building. Access to the nave from the narthex is provided by four large glass doors, which allow vision of the nave even from the outside. The nave progressively shrinks its width, so that the entire apsis hosts the sanctuary, where the altar and the choir stands are placed. Benches cover the entirety of the nave, as well as a suspended second story opposite to the sanctuary, right above the entrance. I usually take place on one of the bench of the middle central section of the nave. People would pour in from the outside, chatting their way to their recurrent places with friends and bench neighbors. When the choir, ministers and pastor Rev. Dr. Raphael Gamaliel Warnock come the congregation would be *called to worship* with powerful and joyful songs, usually from both a classic and contemporary gospel repertoire. The excitement provoked by the loudness and power of the musical ensemble mingles with the chaotic murmurs that accompany the congregation setting down to place, in an overall jubilant and expectant setting. By the time the pastor calls

<sup>7</sup> Even if Ebenezer Baptist Church is a black church, this does not mean that the congregation is only constituted by black people. On the contrary, given also its fame and historical status, there is always a small percentage of white people and other minorities that take part in the service or that are even members of the congregation. However, the stark contrast produced by a white European approaching the grounds of the sanctuary for the first times would still be noted.



**Figure 33 – Horizon Sanctuary, participants approaching the church before service**



**Figure 34 – Horizon Sanctuary, participants taking their seats**

the invocation, the response from the congregation is apparently less participative, slowing down while the music fades out. While the chorus performs the *choral worship*, and welcome gospel or spiritual of choice, more people come inside the sanctuary: most of the people actually come within the first forty-five minutes of the service, the very beginning of the service being thus apparently open to flexibility, at least in the perception of members of the congregation. The pastor and ministers stand at the altar, backed by the mass of the chorus, the limits and boundaries between them and the congregation clear and precise – the pastor, ministers and chorus on one side, facing the members of the congregation on the other side. Throughout the choir performances, the doors that connect the nave to the narthex are left open, so that latecomers can take their place. When the pastor starts addressing the congregation though, the doors are immediately closed, and a circle of people holding their hands is formed to encompass the congregation while the pastor preaches. The people forming this human circle, the ushers, are members of the congregation themselves, even if they all wear a black outfit and white gloves, as they attend to the needs of all the participants to the service. But the more the service moves forward and more people arrive, the more the level of empathy among the whole congregation rises in intensity. The chorus acts as a background for the pastor, in a system of call and response which is emulated within the structure of gospel and spiritual hymns and songs, performed by the chorus itself. The congregation is also part of this system of call and response with the preacher, although on a significantly different level. After the tone of the service is brought down by the *sermonic selection*, which usually features a choice of songs tuned on a more intimate sense of reflection, less exhilarating in tone and experience, the pastor starts his sermon, which usually lasts for more than half an hour. The

progression of the sermon apparently follows a principle of climax/anti-climax structure that tends to a propelling closure of the entire service. The responses to the preaching sprout from the congregation in a variety of manners, during sermon: people would raise their hands, sprint up in excitement, close their hands on their heads shouting or just highlighting with onomatopoeic sounds passages of preaching. The sermon delivered by the preacher is devised to gather strength and content towards the end, but it is a process carefully crafted by the pastors, and not left to chance, as the words of Rev. Wortham depicts:

**Rev. Wortham:** With preaching there is an art to preaching, especially with black preaching in particular there is a certain kind of style that occurs; as a matter of fact last Sunday, the preacher [he is referring to the senior pastor], as soon as he began speaking I knew exactly how sermon was gonna go. When you start out kind of low, monotone, very low; but then I knew he was gonna build, he was gonna build and get to that climactic moment, that climactic moment that we like to call it the celebration, when you wanna give me your hope. A lot of time with sermon the goal is not only to, to encourage, to reproach, to correct; you wanna do all those things, but then you wanna leave them with hope. [...] And so with that goal, we know we're gonna start here, we are gonna keep going, and going, going, build [he stamps the hand on the table], then celebrate, and then you lay down [...]. A lot of time I think preaching is like storytelling, and so when you're telling a story you gotta have a plot that has been set, and then you have your climactic moment and then you lay down. A good story, you might have a couple climax, just depending on the style [...]. I mean we go to seminar, we go to school, we learn the technical aspects of the preaching, we learn how to construct a sermons, we know we do not wanna get to a climax too soon, because we could get the congregation up too soon, and then they can't get back for the next round.

The interaction between the pastor, the musicians, the singers and the congregation is essential for the functioning of the worship ritual, so that it can act as a catalyst of transformation of its participants “by achieving the experience of mass catharsis; a purifying explosion of emotions that eclipses the harshness of reality for a season and leaves both the preacher and the congregation drained in a moment of spiritual ecstasy”

(Lincoln and Mamiya 1990:6). The pastor has the responsibility of leading the community towards this experience, but not by blind imposition; only through *flexibility* in interpreting the state of the community can this objective be achieved. In this regard, it is interesting to note how Pitts, in his account of the Afro-Baptist ritual (1993) describes how “the sermon owes much of its emotional quality to the rhythm and tune of the preaching. In turn, the rhythm and tune of the sermon depend on verbal repetition and audience response, which launch the preacher’s word onto a new level of expression” (25). In fact, with the culmination of service toward the end, the level of emotional engagement grows, resulting in an increased participation by the entire congregation. When the pastor, after the sermon, calls for the chorus to introduce the second offertory, the air is tensed with the aftermath of the deliverance of the sermon: while the ushers pass around to collect the offerings that participants have already prepared, there is a visible, clear increase in the loudness of the members of the congregation, their voices sometimes harmonizing with the chorus. As the pastor calls for the *invitation*, the congregation is somewhat more alive and loud, stirring up with responding sounds and movements. This is the moment during which the congregation can expand its numbers: the invitation is to both believers to join Ebenezer congregation, as well as unbelievers to open themselves to God. Some individuals of mixed gender and age, in very small and inconstant numbers, would stand up, answering the call and thus approaching with rhythmic movements the altar and the pastor who then points them to the side of the church, where another minister is waiting for this new small group of enlightened to retire in a spiritual workshop. Following this untold new climax, the pastor calls for the entire congregation to join the chorus in “Total Praise”. Without exception, all members of the congregation start

to join their hands, to sing together. At this stage there is no more clear understanding of boundaries between congregation, chorus, ministers and pastor, the level of empathy being raised above individual perception; even for those who were just visitors, as I was, and thus not prepared to expect any given pattern of action or response, it was inevitable to draw into the communal harmonization. The singing is in unison: everybody participates at the same time. It is channeling the emotional rise of this participative moment then that the pastor moves the service towards its final moments, which coincide with the conclusion of the *total* praise. Hence, there are at least two different climaxes throughout the whole service, one at the conclusion of the sermon, another one at the end of service, after *invitation*, with the “Total praise”. On the other hand, within the sermon itself, there can be several different climaxes, depending on the topic, structure, length of the sermon, and depending also on the kind of response that channels in the congregation. What is very interesting to note is how every climax, both within the sermon and throughout the service is immediately preceded by an anti-climax, or, a moment during which the opposite of jubilant exaltation is sought by the pastor, that usually intentionally brings down the excitement of the congregation. To the extent of the maintenance of this balance of climaxes and anti-climaxes, the pastor relies considerably on his coordination with the musical establishment. The object of next chapter will be the very analysis of this interaction, and of the ritual frames that arise from it to the degree to which they contribute in defining the worship ritual as a community practice within which the individuality of its participants are continually transformed and reproduced.

### CHAPTER 3 – PLAYING THE WORSHIP

From what has been discussed up to this point, the worship service at Ebenezer Baptist Church appears to have the qualities of a communitarian worship ritual that is coherently recognizable within the perspective of corporate worship upon which the Black Church, and in particular the Black Baptist Church was formed. If one considers the modern Black Church as a direct development of the “invisible institution” that arose among enslaved Africans, and subsequently permeated the cult and beliefs of American slaves of African descent, the implications of slavery, segregation and of the “black sacred cosmos” that was created on the basis of a syncretization of both African and Christian elements in that specific historical and social context, can still be found as relevant within the context of a modern actualization of the “sacred cosmos” of the Black Baptist church. Moreover, it is relevant to point out and outwardly state these ritual, cultural and intellectual ties to a particular historical tradition, as they substantiate the possibility for a complex interpretation of the specific mechanisms of social bonding and community building that are still enacted and reproduced within the particular context of Black Baptist churches, and in particular, within Ebenezer Baptist church. We have seen how members of the congregation have described their drive to participate to the worship service at Ebenezer as rooted within their perception in terms of physical and physiological need: to many of them, Sunday service represent an opportunity to gather “strength”, “energy”, “inspiration”, “medicaments”, and, in general nourishment for their personal well-being. To the degree that leads to a

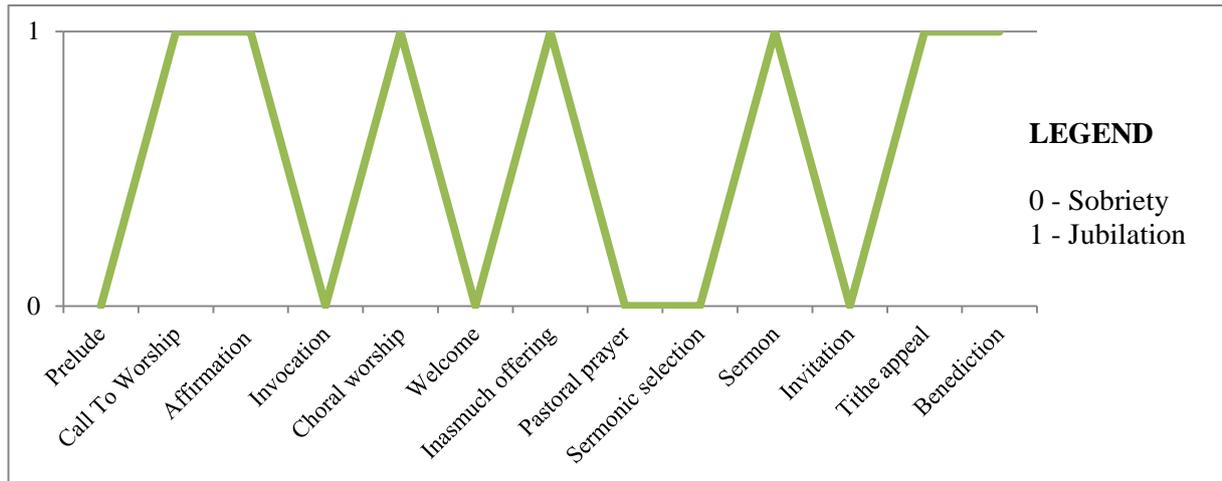
perception of *necessity* to participate to service week after week. If on one hand this nourishment is perceived by the congregation to be a coherent and expected part of the sets of beliefs of Christian Baptists, whose faith in Jesus Christ and his doctrine of salvation significantly influence subjective interpretations of reality, on the other hand many members of the congregation have declared a specific attachment and empathic connection with the music that is performed by choirs and musicians during the worship service. At the same time, a great emphasis is placed, both by members of the congregation and by ministers, and musicians, to the enactment of sermon. Sermon, or its final climax – what Rev. Wortham referred to as the *celebration* – is the apparent focus of the entire worship ritual. It is during celebration that “hope” can be coalesced into that nourishment that members of the congregation long for. The main focus of this chapter will be to define the means through which that *celebration* can be effectively achieved as to fully function as a catalyst of transformation for the community of worshippers. My argument is that the necessary *flexibility* upon which the pastors have to adapt the worship ritual during its very enactment heavily relies on music, and, in particular on the specific practices of performances of the choirs and musicians. Moreover, the very structuring of the overall service seems to be defined by the ministers in tandem with musicians so that it can vary in accordance with the response of the congregation. But before getting to the analysis of the relation between musical practices and the organization of the worship service, it could be relevant to point out some of the characteristics of the ritual itself, as well as the qualities and particular history of the music that is performed within this Black church.

### 3.1 – Structure and practices in the Afro-Baptist ritual

The analysis that has been outlined up to this point has conducted us to determine the quality of the worship ritual at Ebenezer Baptist church as an Afro-Baptist ritual, on the account of the description and close examination provided by Pitts (1993). Describing the worship ritual at St. John Progressive Baptist church in Austin, Texas, he creates direct connections between the Black Baptist ritual and rituals of African communities and of other communities of African descent, ultimately stating how “both somber and climactic events are required to produce the ritual structure found in the black Baptist church” (8). Pitts analyzes how two specific and subsequent parts of the service, which he refers to as *devotion* and *sermon*, present opposed emotional qualities. During *devotion*, the congregation follows the preacher into prayers that are both drawn from a hymnal, as well as improvised by the ministers or members of the congregation: this moment is entirely participative and musicians and choir follow the congregational prayers with discontinuity, intermitting moments of stillness and silence to downbeat rhythm with a lamenting quality, in a way that replicates the mood of the entire congregation assembled in prayer. Then, with the transition to *sermon*, when the senior pastor of the church rises to pulpit to address the congregation, the mood start to rises in intensity, in accordance with the climactic structure of the preaching of the pastor. The quality of the musical performance changes as well with the transition to sermon, and in accordance, once again, with the shift in both the upbeat rhythm of the preaching and increasing exalted jubilation of the congregation: “Through their combined artistry, singers, musicians, and preacher arouse emotion so that the Holy Spirit can enter the sanctuary by manifesting through

individual congregational members. Shouting is dependent on the singing preceding the sermon” (Pitts 1993:24-25). It is interesting to note how the African American scholar refers to the “Holy Spirit” in a way that is similar to that used by Rev. Wortham in his interview with me: Pitts uses an approach that is intensely phenomenological in his description of the worship ritual, and as such places a great importance on the individual worldviews of the subjects of his research, as they refer to a symbolical representation that can be looked upon for verification of internal coherence. But even if the relevance of this theoretical interpretation within the context of this research can be disputed, it is interesting to report the reference to the concept of “ritual frames” as they are developed in Fernandez (1973, 1974), to which Pitts recurs to describe the apparent juxtaposition of a somber *devotion* to a jubilant *sermon*. Fernandez draws from the idea – which he shared with Franz Boas – that the base of a religious ritual lies in “metaphors, not symbol,” so that they “should be considered the basic analytic unit of ritual because ritual and ritual symbols spring from metaphors” (1973:1367). The “frame” is, thus, not only to be perceived as a scheme of progression of events, but, more importantly as an actual metaphoric image of the conditions upon which, during that precise moment, worship is engaged by the community. Pitts defines as the main goal the transformation of the state of being of the members of the congregation, from a state of misery to one of exaltation: each ritual frame, “therefore, becomes emotional paradigms containing as fillers such behavior as a specific type of speech, song style, and gesture. These fillers create the same, associational value of emotion. The ritual, itself, is a syntactical joining of different frames much like a progression of scenarios” (Pitts 1993:32). To consider *devotion* and *sermon* as two separate ritual frames in subsequent progression, allows

us to determine the transformational nature of community worship within a Black Baptist church: the ministers, through the help provided by singers and musicians, have an interest to act on the congregation at a deep emotional level, so that “shifting the metaphoric progression from disparagement at the ritual’s beginning along a continuum of emotion until adornment is reached at the ritual’s end, the participant is borne along an affective span during the rite, finally being transformed from an initially miserable state of mind to one of emotional satisfaction” (Pitts 1993:31-32). Although can be found specific differences with the ritual performed at Ebenezer, starting with the tags with which different parts, or frames, of the service are addressed (the frame that precedes *sermon* is referred to as the *pastoral prayer* plus the *sermonic selection*), the frames structure discussed by Pitts has consistent similarities with the alternation of climaxes and anti-climaxes of Ebenezer’s service. As Baptist churches have no written liturgy, but rely on an oral liturgy arbitrary composed by the pastors along guidelines traditional with the congregation, no liturgical frame will ever be the same in any two given churches. Nevertheless, the alternation between climactic moments of jubilation and anti-climactic moments of stillness and emotional sobriety is a specific and overt characteristic of the worship service at Ebenezer, which I was able to observe throughout the period of my attendance, as it has been described in the previous chapter, and is approximately synthesized in **Figure 35**. In particular, in the second part of the service, the sequence of *pastoral prayer* and *sermonic selection* can be considered as a frame whose emotional quality tends to reflection and a the construction of a somber mood, both through the prayers of the ministers and the song performed by the choirs, which can coherently affect the congregation. On the other hand, with the transition to the *sermon* a progressive transformation of the mood of the



**Figure 35 - Alternation of climaxes and anti-climaxes**

worshippers towards an increasing state of jubilation, in accordance with gradual change of tone in the preaching rhythm while it reaches the *celebration*, which is in turn replicated by a likewise shift in the performance style and selections of the musicians and choirs. Also, the more the congregation sets in a state of jubilant exaltation, the more it participates in the worship with the call-and-response that we have noted. Rev. Wortham affirmed, as we have seen, that the ultimate goal of service is, if nothing else, to leave his congregation with hope. When prompted to comment on the climactic organization of service, and in particular on the reason why songs that would be performed for the *call to worship*, or between *sermon* and *invitation* tend to be more jubilant and exhilarating, while those that are performed around the *invocation* or the *sermonic selection* tend to be more reflective and inner-oriented, he precisely points out the relevance that songs and musical performance have in the actual worship ritual, as an intrinsic part of sets of tools that a preacher has to reach out to his congregation:

**Rev. Wortham:** [...] even if going to the sermonic moment, you wanna set a tone, and let people know, ok we're getting... it's almost, like, a lot of times in black churches that sermonic moment is the highlight, that's the climax of service. So we building, we're building, and with that sermonic selection is the

beginning to set up them all, so that you know, ok, this is it, we're about to hit that moment. So it's almost like a song of preparation, a song to help everybody getting a note that the word of God is about to come forth. So it's almost like a settled, settle the spirit, get the mind and body and soul for the word that's about to come forth. And then, even for the preacher being able to build, to have that kind of, almost, have that reflective song, that reflective music to where's like, ok, you're able to get up, and say like, ok, we're ready to preach, now, we're ready to hone in and go in and see what God has for us in this moment right now, and in this space and in this time. And so, even with offering, offering might be more jubilant, and so, ok, you wanna have everybody upbeat, because, I mean, that's the reality of church too, we gotta be able to have money too [laughs] to do the work of ministry. And so a lot of time we know that to be most effective in some areas of worship, there's a certain tone that has to be in each and every area.

In the eyes of the pastor, the musical selection chosen to precede the sermon – the *sermonic selection*, in fact – has a precise function of “setting the tone” in order for the sermon to be received in full awareness, and bring the congregation as a whole, including the preacher himself, to a mood that is open enough to receive the word of God. Rev. Wortham envisions in this process the function of a preparation, as if from a compelled state of reflective acquiescence, the impromptu of jubilation, exaltation, and participation driven by the preaching and the music could spring out more easily, and, consequently allow for a message, or simply an inspiration of “hope” to be received more effectively. And it is interesting to note how the pastor refers to this process with awareness to both the presence in the preaching of a message to be prepared by the ministers in order for the congregation to receive it, and at the same time the necessary intentionality with which this process – and consequently, this practice – is prepared and orchestrated:

**Rev. Wortham:** [...] with the music there is a message that wants to be conveyed and with the preaching there's a message that wants to be conveyed; and so when you're able to have that singular message go through the whole service, then it ties everything together, it makes everything powerful. And so

that's the intention while we're leading worship, knowing that this is the directions we wanna leave, these are the things we wanna teach, this is the direction we wanna lead the church in, and so let's see how we can accompany that musically so it doesn't seem like service is disjoint, so you have this song over here talking about faith, but we are talking about love on Sunday, this Sunday. And so we are trying as best as we can [...] to be able to say this is the theme, these are the things that we wanna present. And so, I think that intentionality is there because, just making sure that... not necessarily to drive certain emotions, but to make sure to drive a concept, or an idea that we want the people to be able to grasp with the service.

The reverend avoids here to create a direct link between the functional planning of the service and the emotional control over the congregation that such planning potentially provides. We will see how some of the musicians have stated very precisely the opposite, but first and foremost it has to be pointed out that there is no necessary voluntary avoidance here, that might be driven by interested manipulation of the congregation, even if it might appear so from the involuntary acknowledgement of the function of upbeat music as an encouragement to economic contribution. What the preacher is actually saying is that, as long as every part of the service has a function, which could be to deliver the message of God, or to gather the offerings to allow the perpetration of the deliverance of such message, there will be certain practices that have to be enacted, followed, or deployed in order to be able to give to each functional part of the service the specific "tone" that it needs in order to be effective. Moreover, what the pastor has referred to as "holy spirit effect", or the necessary flexible approach to preaching and service progression that a minister has to consider in order to allow God to come into play and directly influence the individual selves through communitarian exaltation, appears to relate at the same time to the specific goal of a certain frame (*sermon*), and to the overall stance that has to be embraced by the ministers, who can ultimately achieve it through the concordance with the musical

performers. He is, in fact, also implying that their skills as preachers and ministers have to comprise the technical ability to influence the sermon deliverance and the overall service planning, along with the development of a spiritual, religious sensibility capable of constantly be aware of the mood and emotional stance of the congregation, in order to respond to their need, as it is highlighted by this other assertion:

**Rev. Wortham:** [...] a lot of that comes from having a connection with your congregation too. And that's another key thing, too, knowing your congregation, and knowing what your congregation needs at the moment, what songs they may need to hear, what things they need to hear, songs to uplift them, some songs they need to tannish them. So it has been having a keen awareness of the congregation as well too. [...] because, for me, as an assistant pastor at the church, to be able to effectively preach to people I have to know what people are going through. I have to know their highs and their lows, I have to know their success and defeats, I have to know all. So I have to be aware of those things to know that, ok, this is what we're dealing with in this house. And then too, you can preach directly into your house, but even then the subject is broad enough to apply to all, by being able to know that so you won't be preaching arbitrarily, but preaching with a purpose, preaching with passion, knowing that, ok, this is, these are the ones that God's placed before me during the word's choice. I've been engaged with them, so I'm not oblivious to what's going on, so I'm not preaching at Ayers Avenue when I need to be on Auburn Avenue preaching. [...] So it is part of being a preacher: if I'm not understanding what my audience and my base needs, what the congregation needs, and I just preach arbitrarily, everybody is going rogue [laughs].

This last bit of conversation is of particular interest in order to encompass in the very actions and practices of the ministers – which ultimately respond to what they perceive as the needs of the congregation – the inner quality of a community practice aimed at the transformation of the individual selves of the members of the community. The drive for ministers to be in direct and possibly deep contact with their congregation arises from the need of acquiring the sources of information on and awareness of the inclinations, desires, and necessities upon which the substance of the preaching and the

practices enacted through service are developed in order to guarantee the prosecution of that very initial connection. If we consider the principle of *necessity* upon which members of the congregation build their communal identity through participation to the worship ritual – an act, participation, that is *necessary* because it bonds members among themselves on the principle of reciprocation – then the quality of awareness that Rev. Wortham is here describing can be considered as directly dependent on the possibility of maintaining those community bonds constantly alive by addressing the very personal instances of the most diverse and vast array of members of the congregation. It is this process that allows the preacher to ultimately reach the participants to the service, who are thus led to an emotional transformation through and during the service upon which the community bonds are continually fueled. Consequently, the characteristics of a communal practice are in a way related to the intentionality with which the ministers address the constant problem of “being in tune”, both through their message and through their practices. The ministers are not to be considered out of this communal process, though: dependent on the response to the audience is also the very commitment to preaching and God of the minister and pastor. In fact, the Rev. Wortham consistently pointed out not only how his achievement as a pastor lies in the deliverance of the “holy spirit” to the congregation, but also that he himself is influenced in his preaching by the response of the congregation. Moreover, he points out how a certain reflective quality of the music before the sermon is aimed not only at the spiritual preparation of the congregation, but to the preacher himself. In this case we see how the effectiveness of a worship ritual depends entirely on the constancy and consistency of an empathic connection that binds the entire community of people present within the sanctuary. Again, it appears how of this worship ritual can

be perceived as a set of communal practices, which we can now add into a perspective of actual dramatization. It is a progression of scenarios, that each of the ritual frames of the service tends to develop: in this setting, communal worship organizes into practices to which the music constitutes the score. The emotional transformation is in fact substantially dependent on the role that music plays within the worship service. But before delving into some of the details that relates to the musical practices, it is necessary to point out some specifications upon the theoretical frame upon which is based the definition of practice that has been used up to this point.

First and foremost, Pitts analysis trace a direct and structured link with a cultural tradition that is historically situated, and that can, thus, be interpreted as the very source of a certain social environment – that of the African American community within the Baptist church – in a diachronic perspective. Once we trace a direct connection between the formation of a certain “black sacred cosmos” and certain practices to which it is associated, and the historical displacement of Africans in the Americas, we are inevitably establishing a link between certain historical events, the social structures they produced, and the cultural codes, practices and representation that were in turn generated. It is within this context of interpretation that the worship ritual at Ebenezer has to be placed, and, to this extent I am interested in adopting certain conceptual models which are part of Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of practice. In an attempt to go beyond a dichotomy between structure and agents in social and anthropological analysis – a dichotomy which also entails an opposition between subject and object – Bourdieu devises a model that focuses on the practices of the agents involved in a particular socio-cultural environment, based on the premise that structural properties of certain social systems, if any, exist only as they are

continuously reproduced through time and space, as forms of social conduct (1977, 1990, 1998). To this extent, he crafts the concept of *habitus*, which, intended as “a product of history, produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the ‘correctness’ of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms” (1990:53). To Bourdieu, at the center of the close examination of social analysis is the practice, and the possibility it gives the researcher to investigate patterns of continuity and discontinuity in the performance of such practices that would allow a more truthful and precise interpretation of how a certain social structure is reproduced and transformed. Practice is not the mere action performed by the body – although there is a precise bodily connotation in Bourdieu’s work, since he derives the concept of practice directly from Marcel Mauss’ concept of *body technique* (1936) – but the overall behavior with which the *actor* of such practice performs it within, and according to, a specific social context. Practice is perceived as the social that instills itself within the body, and as such, it produces *dispositions*, which he briefly defined in a note to his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* as “the *result of an organizing action*, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates *a way of being, a habitual state* (especially of the body) and, in particular, a *predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination*” (1977:214). Bourdieu heavily relies on a bodily perspective of social action, which is always precisely inscribed in time and space. *Habitus* is, thus, interpreted as a system of dispositions, which not only are produced by history, but, through the reproduction of organized actions (or practices) by agents,

as well as through the deviation from pre-existent patterns, produce history, and, subsequently, continuously predefine and redefine the social structures within which they are inscribed. The relation between the social *agent* and the social structure is not a conscious one, so it cannot ultimately be reconciled with an objectification of its function within a constituted a pre-regulated order. In his *The Logic of Practice*, in fact, Bourdieu ultimately distills his concept of *habitus* as such:

The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor. [1990:53]

This systems of disposition that ultimately constitutes the *habitus* upon which social actors unconsciously reproduce the existing social structures in which they act, is linked in a relation with what Bourdieu calls *field*, a web or system of objective relations and interdependence between positions. These positions are the source of the conditionings upon which agents or institutions reproduce their practices, and as such, they are objectively defined and constituted by their actual role of power (and capital) within the *field*, and by their relation with other positions. *Fields* appear to be hierarchically organized within and among themselves, and in complex societies they form the overall social sphere within which the agent is placed. If we consider the context of the Black Church as a *field*, it allows us to consider all the different positions – both symbolical and practical – as the source of a set of conditionings that define the *habitus* of its participants. First and foremost, considering the Black Church

as a particular *field* allows us to consider worshipping and musical practices within the church— as well as their intrinsic relations – as organizing actions of a specific social structure, and, secondly, it brings us the possibility of interpreting the perceptions, worldviews, thoughts, inclinations, practices of Ebenezer worshipping community as an actual system of *dispositions* that constitutes a *habitus*. In the participation to the worship service at Ebenezer, in fact, members of the congregation, ministers and musicians all participate as a community to the development of the collective worship ritual, in which each participant to the ritual maintains a certain set of interpretations and expectations based on the individual perception of their specific role within the ritual, which ultimately leads to the enactment of a certain sets of practices that are at the same time independent and interdependent. The very structuring of service on the principle of *flexibly* attune the preaching style, in accordance with musical performances, to the progressive response of the congregation is one of such practices. At the same time this practice is inevitably interdependent with the congregational practices of call-and-response and participation to the worship service, which members perceive as *necessary* practices, in accordance with their individual and collective *dispositions*. Music, and in particular musical performance, has the capacity to address and act upon such *dispositions*, in order to achieve the emotional transformation towards which the guided service strives. This process of constant emotional transformation, which the congregation achieves as a community, is at the base of the very bonding of the community, which constituting as such offers a space for the messages conveyed by preachers and musicians to act upon them. My argument is that music, performed according to the tradition of the African American community, past and present, acts as one of the strongest catalyst of emotional transformation in the

worship ritual performed as a community practice. To analyze the extent of such argument, it could be interesting to provide some brief references to the historical role that music represented in the African American community, as well as some data on the different styles that are typically performed in a Black Church, and, in particular, at Ebenezer Baptist Church.

### **3.2 – Black Sacred Music**

To give a complete account of the African American musical tradition within the religious sphere is a process that supersedes the scope of this research. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in fact, among enslaved Africans, musical practices were recounted as one of the most characterizing aspects of their internal culture and social behavior: they would sing while working throughout the day, their songs, often in a call-and-response style – a repetitive structure where an individual would sing a line which would then be reprised by the rest of the community – actually mimicking rhythmically the pace of their repetitive actions. African Americans would keep on beating the time of their work with their songs throughout their history of slavery and segregation, as many scholars have aptly and extensively reported (Schnable 2012; Adelt 2010; Banfield 2010; Allen 2007; Weekes 2005; Costen 2004, 2000, 1993; Southern 1997, 1977; Pitts 1993, 1991; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Jones 1963; Cray 1961). What is particularly relevant within the interest of this research is the transformative power that original music had within the African American community throughout its history, as Amiri Baraka, formerly known as LeRoy Jones, admirably described in his *Blues People* (1963), the first work to substantially investigate the

roots of African American music in direct connection with the impact that it had within White society, and, consequently, within the African American community. Since it was possible for Baraka to identify a precise shift in African American music style and substance that corresponded to the transition from a condition of slavery to that of segregation – an interpretative paradigm that Baraka would follow up to his then present times, at the height of the Civil Rights movement and the popular boom of soul music – then it was adamant to him that African American musical expression have a genuinely functional quality. Speaking from the standpoint of a social activist – closer to the Black Panther movement of Malcom X than to the Civil Rights movement of Martin Luther King – Baraka addressed precisely the interconnectedness between the trajectory of African American social progress and the development and style variation of black music. Baraka ultimate interest was to both place a social statement and address the origination of the free jazz movement, but nevertheless it was on the basis of his seminal work that subsequent interpretations and research was conducted, which led personalities such as reverend and scholar Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker to state that “what black people are singing religiously will provide a clue to what is happening to them sociologically” (1979:17), thus connecting the black sacred music tradition to this pattern of social transformation. It is important to note that most of the scholars within this field have been African Americans, mostly coming from a musical or religious environment, especially up to the 1980s. Research in this field, therefore, is relevant not only because of its contribution in terms of a qualitative research analysis of musical practices and tradition, but also because it stands as a representation of such community provided by its own actors. Black sacred music, in particular, which only in the last forty years has been comprised organically in this

historically and culturally situated analysis, has a pivotal relevance both in regard of an historical approach to the close examination of original black musical practices as the seminal environment for the elaboration of other black musical styles – the blues, soul music, rhythm ’n blues, dance music, and hip-hop – as well as in consideration of the social relevance of past and present black sacred music genres, such as spirituals, classic and contemporary gospel.

### **a. Music in the Black Church**

In her *The Music of Black Americans* (1997), Eileen Southern provides the most accurate historical and musicological compendium of African American music, a source of information that for its scope is to this day an inevitable reference for anyone who addresses these research themes. Through a collection of early sources and original documents, both written and recorded – most of which are not freely accessible by the public – she gathers, for instance, a precise recollection of how African musical and dance practices were slowly inscribed into black worship practices. We have noted how religious meetings – both overtly and covertly conducted – were probably the earliest and for a long time unique moments of association that African American slaves had at their disposal. Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the original types of religious gatherings – camp meetings and bush meetings – slowly transitioned into more organized forms of Christian worship, with the concurrent rise of the first autonomous black congregations and early denominations, mostly Methodist, during that time. These forms of informal religious gathering, which have already been mentioned in Chapter 1 as “invisible institution”, where the label “invisible” refers to both the clandestine and “invisible nature of events where mutual

relationships, worldviews, behavior patterns, and social and political actions were ‘officially constituted by slaves’” (Costen 1993:36), thus representing the first and, for a long time, the only space of development of the social and cultural tradition of the African American community. Begun during the early slave period, bush meetings were small gatherings with a religious aim which were usually held in the outmost secrecy in small wooded areas on the outskirts of plantations, since in most of the South slaves were not allowed to gather with any associative aim. Bush meetings would usually last for a night, during which the need to share joys, pains and personal history would coalesce in happenings of a religious nature, that would include traditional practices internal to the slave groups, and, as such heavily dependent on African retentions. Camp meetings, which came along at towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, were religious gatherings usually held in wide, open areas that would be attended by large groups of African Americans, in the scale of thousands, during which an open collective oral liturgy would be held for several days. They were usually typical of the more “enlightened” areas of the South, since it was far more difficult to let them pass unnoticed as huge as they were, even if they were still kept as secret as possible. To camp meetings would participate both slaves and freemen, who would listen to black preachers, and sometimes even to some white preacher, as they would roam throughout the country: it was within these gatherings that African American traditional practices started to be more effectively syncretized with Christian beliefs and practices, which ultimately led, during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the establishment of autonomous black congregations. Analyzing the scripts of Daniel Alexander Payne, who had been minister, church historian and bishop at the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Bethel Church of Philadelphia since the early 1840s,

Southern reports one of Payne's recollections of attendance to a camp meeting: "After the sermon, they formed a ring, and with coats off sung, clapped their hands and stamped their feet in a most ridiculous and heathenish way. I requested the pastor to go and stop their dancing. At his request they stopped their dancing and clapping of hands, but remained singing and rocking their bodies" (1997:130). To Payne, a black preacher, the bodily practices he sees, even if performed in the name of God, have a heathen quality, thus, representing the working of the Devil. He represents the embodiment of that black social class that kept on rising after the Civil War, which tended to take distance from the strongest forms of African retentions that were part of his own community at large, preferring the perspective of integration into a more conventional worship practicing. But his testimonies of the history of the AME Bethel Church of Philadelphia describe how, by the end of the 1880s, no black congregation was lacking at least a trained choir, and some would even start using pipe or reed organs to accompany the singing, which, in the end, no preacher had been able to suppress. Dancing, shouting, or even responding in any way to the preaching were not considered proper practices for a congregation to embrace within a sacred space – even if black, Payne, a free black from the Quaker North East, is imbued with this belief, hence his depiction of practices he considers "heathenish". But even if a gradual homologation to more common practices was actually achieved by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, "in traditional African religions, music included dancing, no distinction is made. All forms of music involved bodily movement. For the Africans who converted to evangelical Christianity, the prohibition against dancing had to be respected. Black Christians justified their ring shout by saying that dancing involved crossing one's feet; in shouting the feet did not cross but it involved a slow shuffle step and a swaying

body movement” (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990:353). The retentions were strong, so strong that a total liberation from their previous traditions was not thinkable for the sheer majority of African American, who had had a very scant experience of the white Christians cultural environment, given their seclusion into spaces of intra-racial community. The progressive syncretization of African retentions into a more structured Christian set of beliefs revolved, therefore, around the problematic resolution of the dichotomy between “sacred” and “secular”. Within Christianity this distinction is pivotal for the very possibility, for the worshipper, to access the divine: there are certain spaces, behaviors and practices that simply cannot pertain to the sacred space, while some other, that most commonly relate to sobriety and humbleness, are regarded as highly desirable. However, we have seen how many scholars (see Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Holloway 1990c) identify no such thing as a distinction between sacred and secular thing among the African populations that fueled the slave power in North America – mostly coming from West and Central Africa. Moreover, “oral tradition, folktales, folksongs, and spirituals were vital in retaining African influence from generation to generation. The slaves used their spirituals as a vehicle of communication. In other words, they had a dual function as an information center, and a kind of ‘grapevine system of communication’” (Holloway 1990c:215). It is thus clear that when the transition to the formalization of black congregations into a church establishment, their music and songs followed them, if not their dances – that were still inevitably mimicked in the bodily performance of music. And the overlapping of sacred and secular in the physical world followed them as well. Interestingly enough, Denise White, one of the choir directors, referred to this very matter while I was asking her about the organization of service:

**Denise:** [...] interestingly enough, I'm an R&B artist, so [...] in my show, I sing R&B, I sing about love, I sing about my divorce, I sing about everything, and I sing about God. In that, I understand God's place [...], I understand God's place in everything, even trying to smudge the lines between sacred and secular, or sacred and profane [laughs], and it does make me think about being so, uh, quick to call it sacred and secular, and somehow I believe God is... not somehow: God is in all of it.

Denise, 36 years old, mother of two children, and director of the MLK Senior Choir since 2005, has a very keen perception of the interweaved nature of sacred and secular within reality. It is a worldview, but it is also directly connected to her musical perception. She performs R&B shows in night clubs and theaters, and at the same time she instructs and leads her choir in spirituals, classic and contemporary gospels, having in both situation the same level of emotional and spiritual commotion, without ever perceiving any wrong doing in setting a song for service with a strong funk beat, or a sustained electric guitar solo. And in fact it is exactly in regard to the progressive secularization of sacred music within service that the actual transition from more traditional to more contemporary genre can be explored and described. Christian worship always had a place for music in service; but it was seldom performed by the congregation, nor by a trained choir, unless for special occasions, during specific parts of the service and as litanies more than actual songs, or melodies. In America, the tradition of singing among white congregation begun with the Puritan's publication of *The Bay Psalm Book* (1640), which they derived from the psalm-lining tradition of the Calvinists (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990:354). The psalm singing grew rapidly out of practice, when, beginning with the publication in 1707 of *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* by Dr. Isaac Watts, which started the hymn-lining tradition of meter singing. Hymns consisted of original compositions drawn from the scriptures, but had a much more

vivid imagery than classic psalms, being thus much more appealing to the worshippers. Sung with no accompaniment, hymn texts were composed in poetic meter; the lined style of singing, which is called “meter music”, depended on the meter that was used. In hymnody, there were short, common, and long meters: all based on a four line stanza, the short meter presented six syllables in the first, second, and fourth line, while eight in third line (6.6.8.6):

Come, we that love the Lord,  
And let our joys be known;  
Join in a song with sweet accord,  
And thus surround the throne.

The common meter, presented instead eight syllables on the first and third line, and six syllables in the second and fourth line (8.6.8.6):

Amazing Grace, How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
Was blind but now I see.

The long meter, one of the less common, presented eight syllables on all four line of the stanza (8.8.8.8):

“Go preach My Gospel,” saith the Lord,  
“Bid the whole earth My grace receive;  
He shall be saved that trusts My word,  
He shall be damned that won’t believe.

All hymns were introduced by the preacher, who would sing the first line, while the congregation would go forth with the rest of the stanza. The melody and rhythm of the singing would depend entirely on the type of meter the hymn had been composed in, and usually would end to a slow, drawn-out intonation. This musical style, proper of the white Christian congregation, would soon seep into the worship ritual of the first black congregations, which would use this Euro-American tradition to base their own

interpretations of musical contribution to the worship service. Baptists, actually “blackened” them, so that “since Watts's hymns were texts only, the borrowed tunes from Euro-American hymns and folk songs were Africanized by the distinctive mode of black singing” to the extent that “some of the tunes may also have been of African origin; or, like some spirituals, may have been spontaneous creations of an individual or a congregation of black worshippers” (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990:355).

### **b. Genres of black sacred music**

Spiritual was the first form of folk song of a distinct African American tradition that perspired into the black Christian, and in particular Baptist and Methodist, worship ritual. Hymns had already been randomly introduced by travelling preachers in the meetings of the “invisible institutions”, where collective singing would be based on improvisation on the preaching in the recurrent call-and-response mode. At that stage lyrics from some of the hymns might have inspired some of the collective musical production, but, as Eileen Southern has pointed out, the folk composer, who would usually be a nonprofessional musician, had mostly three choices to compose a new song: “consciously or unconsciously, he or she may (1) improvise upon a song already in existence; (2) combine material from several old songs to make a new one; or (3) compose the song entirely of new material” (1997:185). Within the African tradition the first process would probably be the most common, since given the role of variation, and the ultimate functionality of music in this tradition, “the melody of a song often serves chiefly as a vehicle for the text, and is constantly adjust to fit, even as the singers extemporizes from one verse to the next (185). So it is safe to say that before it got to the worship sanctuaries of the black congregations, this tradition was

shaped “by (1) continuity which links the past with existential situations in the present; (2) variations which spring from the creativity of the group, and the needs of local situations; and (3) the selection by the community, which helps determine the forms and styles in which the music survives” (Costen 2000:70). We see here how spirituals, the first form of African American folk song to be canonized, and subsequently introduced within the worship ritual, was intrinsically dependent on communal practices that would diachronically transform the songs, until they were strong enough to emerge with less and less variations, even if improvisations on the musical and lyrical themes always remained prerogatives of black congregations. But it was not until 1801 that the first African American Hymnal was published by Richard Allen, co-founder of the Free African society, and of the AME Bethel Church of Philadelphia. *A Collection of Spiritual Songs and Hymns from Various Authors*, was compiled by Allen for the use of his congregation. His contribution was decisive, since it appears that he was actually the first to compose songs both combining material from older songs, and adding new material of his own creation, enhancing the emotional potential of the message with stronger sensory and narrative connotations coming from traditional Old Testament passages, which were keen to the African American sensibilities. He also went beyond the fixed structure of hymnals, leaning closer to the repetitive structure of folk songs and including “camp meeting songs and ‘wandering refrains’ in published hymnals” (Costen 2000:76), thus canonizing what would be referred to as spiritual within a black sacred music context. There were actually not many spirituals in Allen’s collection – a more extensive publication, *Slave Songs of the United States*, by William F. Allen, Charles P. Ware, and Lucy McKim, published in 1867, was actually much more successful in popularizing spirituals among black

congregations. Allen’s text served as a starting point for the spiritual genre to evolve into the shape it had when during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century began to be popularized among the white and international population – trained choirs from black congregations and colleges would perform their repertoire and tour outside churches, even at an international level, starting with the Fisk Jubilee Singers in 1871. It is of particular interest to note how for instance one of Allen’s spiritual “Behold the awful trumpet sounds”, served as a clear inspiration for another spiritual, “My Lord What a Morning”, which coalesced into a canonized publishable and arranged form not before the late 1940s, the lyrics being penned down as “traditional”, thus deriving directly from that process of anonymous composition subjected to collective trial we have noted before. Allen’s text, number d7 in his hymnal, goes like this:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| (1) Behold the awful trumpet sounds,<br>The sleeping dead to raise,<br>And calls the nations underground:<br>O how the saints will praise!     | (4) The falling stars their orbits leave,<br>The sun in darkness hide:<br>The elements asunder cleave,<br>The moon turned into blood!      |
| (2) Behold the Savior how he comes<br>Descending from his throne<br>To burst asunder all our tombs<br>And lead his children home.              | (5) Behold the universal world<br>In consternation stand,<br>The wicked into Hell are turn’d<br>The Saints at God's right hand.            |
| (3) But who can bear that dreadful day,<br>To see the world in flames:<br>The burning mountains melt away,<br>While rocks run down in streams. | (6) O then the music will begin<br>Their Saviour God to praise,<br>They are all freed from every sin<br>And thus they'll spend their days! |

Allen’s text depicts with an incredible vivacity the “day of judgment”, narrating with imaginative description the events that would occur during the descent of Jesus Christ, perceived as the “Saviour” that would “burst asunder” all their tombs, and “lead his children home”. While the trumpets burst into powerful sounds, announcing the coming of the day, the entire planetary system participates to the descent of the arbiter

while he saves the just and punishes the evil; the moon itself is personified into a bleeding entity, the sun hides while the stars fall out of their orbits, the whole of creation doomed to a joyful and musical destruction to achieve its ultimate freedom. And we can see how, after singing this hymn, the unknown slave composer “with vivid imagination seizes upon the significance of the awesome events that will take place on Judgment Day according to the text, and has a personal response, “My Lord, what a morning!” (Southern 1997:186). Our unknown slave composer would then take this imagery and concepts and associate them with his own ecstatic reaction, thus rephrasing them into his own style and vocabulary:

Refrain: My Lord, what a morning!  
 My Lord, what a morning!  
 O my Lord, what a morning!  
 When the stars begin to fall.

(2) You will hear the sinner cry,  
 To wake the nations underground,  
 Looking to my God’s right hand,  
 When the stars begin to fall.

(1) You will hear the trumpet sound,  
 To wake the nations underground,  
 Looking to my God’s right hand,  
 When the stars begin to fall.

(3) You will hear the Christian shout,  
 To wake the nations underground,  
 Looking to my God’s right hand,  
 When the stars begin to fall.

The song has now a completely different structure compared to the hymn that inspired it, and proceeds more like a folk song, with a refrain that would be repeated between each of the stanzas, as well as at the beginning and at the end. And the compositional style of the lyric differs as well: the lack of descriptive convolution speaks of the different educational standing of the unknown slave composer, compared to Rev. Allen, but the repetitive structure of each of the stanza – closer to an oral style of tradition, the first line is the only part of each stanza that varies, but even then, only in the object, not the syntax – makes up for the lack in eloquence, keeping, and even

enhancing the emotional drive of the song, which is now entirely focused on a sensorial reflection of the hearing.

Since the social and emotional strife that brought them to access the sacred sphere of Christian eschatology was rooted in their very secular struggles, and given that their African ascendance brought them closer to worldviews that perceived the entire secularity to be sacred, it appears entirely reasonable that their perception of expressive tools, such as singing and playing musical instruments, was perceived, or even unconsciously used, as a mere functional tool of externalization and communication. And by the first decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century, while the black South produced the Delta Blues, thriving with African musical retentions, like syncopation and blue notes, throughout the wake of the Great Depression, it was in their churches that the African American community embraced and collectivized in their pains and yearnings relating to their renewed and reformed status of oppression and dependence, represented by formalized segregation. Melva Costen concentrated through several of her studies in a philological and historical analysis of the themes expressed by the African American community in their spiritual production, especially for those that were specifically intended for usage within the black church worship. The list that follows appeared on one of her latest studies (2000:74-75), deriving from particular analysis of a vast array<sup>8</sup> of thematic and chronological compendiums, and represents a synthetic expression of the religious and social themes – sometimes indistinguishable – pertaining to the lyrics and musical performance of the spirituals:

<sup>8</sup> See *The Forge and the Flame: The Story of How the Afro-American Spiritual was Hammered Out*, John Lovell Jr., MacMillan Company, 1972:223-293; *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, Lawrence Levine, Oxford University Press, 1977:25-37; *Oixon, Negro Spirituals: From Bible to Folk Song*, Christa K., Fortress Press, 1976; *Wade in the Water: The Wisdom of the Spirituals*, Arthur C. Jones, Orbis Books, 1993; *Negro Slave Songs in the United States*, Miles Mark Fisher, Citadel Press, 1953; *Black American Music: Past and Present*, 2d ed., Hildred Roach, Krieger Publishing Company, 1992:23-36; *Somebody's Calling My Name: Black Sacred Music and Social Change*, Wyatt Tee Walker, Judson Press, 1979:33-6.

- (1) A need for radical and immediate social change;
- (2) The ultimate power in Almighty God, with Jesus as the divine deliverer of humanity, from all forms of bondage, whether human enslavement, fiery furnace, the belly of a whale, blindness;
- (3) The corporate and individual need to be immersed in the boundless power of God, and then emerging into everyday existence, invigorated and armored and empowered by God's power;
- (4) Vivid, imaginative and poetic minds so gifted that a "turn of a phrase" or a shift of an accent by singers could vary the message in such a way that only the intended community could understand;
- (5) Faith, hope, inspiration, and assurance tonally articulated in such a way that only the intended community or group can understand meanings;
- (6) Problems and thoughts stated in such a way that the singing community is empowered to talk about the problem and receive inspiration from each other and from the ultimate power of God in Jesus the Christ;
- (7) Life, death, praise, promise, protest and healing, expressed in aspects of nature (e.g., inchworm and boll weevil), as well as human inventions (e.g., steam boat, railroad, train, and engine); and
- (8) Beliefs about the triune God, largely influenced by the antebellum African-American preacher who stressed the importance of each person as a child of God.

If deliverance from oppression and divine salvation were the inner imagined goals of spiritual performances transversally common to the entire black population, we see from the above list is the presence of a multi-layered "hidden transcript" (Scott 1992) in the musical production of African Americans. The effectiveness and continuity of musical performances would always be connected to the precise relation that texts and performers – musicians, singers, *and* preachers – had with their specific congregations; and we will see how this is of particular interest in relation to one of the practices that take place at Ebenezer. It is in the worldviews that happen to be part of Ebenezer social environment, in turn dependent from their general historical positioning, that the

actual tradition of musical practices, that are part of the scope of this research, finds its foundation. The complex relation between sacred and secular in the context of black religious practices is so important that deeply permeates black sacred music. The transition from hymns and spirituals to gospel music centered on this very problem, since first and foremost, gospel music comprised instruments, lyrical expressions, and musical styles that had not been part of the sacred music; tools at the disposal of the black community, they ultimately and naturally came into play in the religious space as well. Even Rev. Wortham refers to this very transition, which is actually what triggers his very reflection upon the apparent non distinction between sacred and secular:

**Rev. Wortham:** [...] music really is an expression of the reality that we've experienced, and so with music, people are able to articulate those terms in music, and you can get it into three to four minutes? Oh, people love it, it's perfect, it's perfect because it's able to distinctly say how I feel at the moment, and able to paint a picture that helps me describe how I feel at the moment. And it's never out of place, at all, and I guess it goes with the sacred and secular bit, because, even for myself, I struggle with the term sacred and secular for the simple fact that I believe that it's almost, even the secular can be sacred, 'cause even if we look historically at how gospel music was formed, was found and formed, 'cause the great Thomas Dorsey would be the father of gospel music and he was a bluesman, he played the blues, so he found a way to take that blues... when he wrote "Precious Lord" that was his blues. I mean he wrote that song just after his wife died giving birth to his son, I mean, and all he could do, I mean, he painted his blues. And he turned to gospel! And I think that that, even in an African American context, that's where, when we try to separate the two, but it's like no, because [...] music is gonna always have his place in worship because is an expression of experience. Preaching is an expression of experience. And so when we bring all these expression of experience, and I'm praying out and singing "Lord, this is the experience I'm going through, and we're calling you to help us with this experience".

While spirituals were performed *a cappella* – and usually by male choirs – gospel songs always had musical instruments that accompanied them; this was actually one of

the most important premises upon which gospel music came to be. Blending both the spiritual and traditional folk song, to other kinds of African American musical expressions, such as the blues or the music of itinerant minstrel shows, which all used instruments, the first gospel hymnal with musical arrangements to be popularized was published by Rev. Charles A. Tindley in 1916. In *New Songs for Paradise*, Tindley compiled material he himself had been copyrighting in the past decades, which ignited a subsequent divulgence of the genre, up until the collection of 165 songs *Gospel Pearls*, published in 1921 under the sponsorship of the National Baptist Convention. Thomas A. Dorsey, a traveler bluesman that went by the name of “Georgia Tom”, was inspired as well by this new kind of devotional music; the possibility of adding to spiritual lyrics also musical instrumentation was particularly keen to him, since he was an accomplished guitar and piano player in both blues and Chicago jazz style. In describing the transition to the gospel genre, Weekes (2005) elaborates a direct connection with the recurrent interpretations of sacred and secular space among particular African population. In her opinion gospel has “always been a hybrid musical form, incorporating improvisation, rhythmic patterns, and tonal variations of African music present in the blues with European-influenced hymnody. Its blending of sacred (text) with secular (music) attests to its African cultural inheritance; conceptual distinctions between ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ had no place in the worldview of Africans. Both religion and music were integrated within the whole of African life and served a variety of practical purposes” (Weekes 2005:46). In this case, the purpose might be the need for relief from pain in the hope of divine love and salvation of a broken widowed Dorsey; or the need of Rev. Wortham of reaching the hearts and soul of his congregation, in the hope of personal and collective betterment. The ultimate

functionality of the musical tool prevails on any apparent perception of inadequacy to sacral behaviors coming from white Puritans inductions. So the sheer emotional potential of a musical performance fully powered by musical instrumentation was irresistible to black congregation, and represented for worshippers and preachers in particular a unique way to get in full contact with a population whose tastes and inclinations were evolving along history. To the point that, up to the present day, is an integral part of black churches musical environment, as it stems out of Rev. Wortham words:

**Rev. Wortham:** [...] ‘cause really it is almost like a line of demarcation a lot of times, where, ok, if you’re secular you’re over here, you are these kind of people, if you’re sacred you’re these kind of people. Secular people do these kind of things, sacred people do these kind of things. But then again, sacred folks do the same kind of shit that secular folks do, secular folks do some stuff secular... so, is it really? So we talk the opposite when at the end of the day, God says the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof! So it all comes back to God, so God can work through anything. Then why no piano in church? Why no piano or no Hammond? I mean, we got arsonists of churches, why no piano? So that’s what we got, we’ve got a bass guitar and a lead guitar, and they all sound really good to me all Sundays.

Ultimately, it is the efficiency of musical instrumentation as a powerful vehicle of expression of human experiences and praises to God that wins over any doubt that could persist over the conflicting secularity of certain practices with the sacred space; backed by a steadily historical interpretation of the scriptures, and in particular of the Old Testament, integral parts of that “black sacred cosmos” upon which the reverend draws articulating his own worldview. The transition to gospel music epitomizes this worldview within the history of black sacred music. Dorsey composed several gospel songs throughout the 1920s and 1930s, which gradually arouse to general notice given how, “to the religious intensity of the Tindley song he added the melodic and

harmonic patterns of the blues,” as well as “the musical density and improvisatory nature of his accompaniments,” which reflected his experience as a blues and jazz pianist. After the popularization of gospel music, the doors for secular music were open by then, and no consistent resistance was seen fit by elders and clergymen. Gospel production evolved on the line traced by Dorsey: it kept on drawing from genres that were progressively popular in the African American community, such as blues music and spirituals, up until the 1950s; but when “new popular styles and technology, the sound of gospel became modernized. During the late 1960s, gospel musicians began using synthesizers, strings, brass, and the electronic musical styles of the burgeoning funk, rock and roll, and soul music. With this more contemporary sound, gospel music reached beyond the church into traditionally secular venues such as concert halls and recording studios” (Weekes 2005:47). Therefore, distinctions between classic and contemporary gospels are inevitably dependent on how close a rendition of current or older styles of music the performed gospel is. Today, it will be perceived as contemporary a gospel song that draws into the more melodic and digitally harmonized sounds of R&B, while a James Brown inspired gospel hit of the 1970s would be considered classic. What is maintained as fixed is only the function that gospel music has as an intrinsic communicative tool, which is heavily deployed by the clergy and the musicians into the worship service in accordance with the expectations of the congregation. The brief description that has been provided up to this point will serve to position the particular socio-musical history of black sacred music in the scope of the close examination of musical practices at Ebenezer Baptist Church, as they are enacted with the goal of ensuring a successful emotional transformation during the collective practice of the worship ritual.

### 3.3 – Musical practices at Ebenezer Baptist Church

Members of Ebenezer Baptist Church congregation have extensively and precisely stated the importance that, in their perception, music has within the worship service. Some of those perceptions have already been discussed in previous chapters in relation to what people felt as vital to their participation to service. Almost everyone I interviewed would state as their main reason to come to service the *necessity* to participate in the communal practice of worship service along with their fellow members, as even Rev. Wortham would indirectly confirm:

**Rev. Wortham:** I think in the worship space, the worship space can be a place where intimacy can occur, and not only between pastor and people, but between people and people. And so people might start noticing, ok, something touched my neighbor, my neighbor's crying, I got some tissues, I can come hold my neighbor's shoulder, I might not even know my neighbor at this moment, but there's a moment where we come together, I hand my neighbor some tissue and let them know everything's gonna be alright, or whatever they need, and then that could be a connection right there. The worship moment is such an intimate space, and if we're all in a mind-frame of worship, that's another key thing too.

The reverend would refer to the concept of mind-frame in order to describe the correct conditions for the congregation to take part into the communal practice; now, we have seen how within the Afro-Baptist ritual the ultimate goal of the communal worshipping practice is the process of emotional transformation it compels individuals into, a process that conspicuously relies on music as an actual functional tool of transformation. The community has certain specific dispositions that might be more or less influenced from their personal relation with the overall and personal African American history, but within the church those dispositions are embraced fully within the specific context of the worship space and of the expectations members place upon the worship service. Those expectations have been described as being ultimately

nourishment for their souls, which is directly translated into a distinct perception of actual physical nourishment. To the congregation, music is an inextricable part of the worship, and we have seen how, in this regard there is a distinct continuity with the African American tradition they are consciously or unconsciously part of. In African American history, and in particular within the Black Church history, music has been considered as one of the main factor of social change and a powerful – if not the most powerful – means of communications African Americans had at their disposition. This was particularly true when, during slavery, music was one of the only *actual* means of communication. But even afterwards, music reflected the processes of transformation that were taking place both in society and in the musical arts. The question, today, might be how much continuity with that tradition might still in place within that same environment. Again Rev. Wortham comes in our help by providing an immediate reference to what has been discussed up to this point in a general perspective:

**Rev. Wortham:** I've come to church also on Sundays I've been up just...I didn't want to be at church. I was like "I don't feel like being here today, I'm not in a good mood, it' been a bad week, my spirit is down." And then I come in, and I hear "Great is thy faithfulness", and... I lose it [laughs]. And so, that's how music can change it, because that music it can find a way to shift your mindset, to make you... You're thinking about the worries and the trouble of the day, and then you hear something that says countless blessings named one by one, and it redirects your mind. And so, music has a way of redirecting the mind, and kind of almost, at least for that moment, helping you forget about the worries of the world. Helping you just think "ok, you know what? Let me regroup". And so the right song, the right song for the right person, and there's a different for everybody, but the right songs can probably help chop some ground in where is like "ok, you know what Lord? I'm open for what you have for me at this moment".

Rev. Wortham hardly moves far from sacred metaphors, but still, he aptly describes is perception, as an assistant pastor, of how powerful an incentive music can be, in order

to conquer the proper mind-frame, or mindset. We see how this perception, backed from the inclination of most of the members, results consistent with the historical role that music had both within the particular Afro-Baptist ritual and in the African American experience in general.

**Rev. Wortham:** If you would have played just a beat out of the drum, people are going to start tapping their toes, clapping their hands above, because that beat it drive something, and so then when those songs are being sung and you find a way to connect with the song, it has a way of driving emotions of raving; it can get you to a place [...] And so with a good song that accompanied by a good music, a good melody, good notes, it can have a way of driving emotions and find the words to say those things that a lot of times we are not able to articulate. And so I think that's the power of music. A lot of times people quote songs' lyrics just to be able to say: "this is what I'm trying to say." You know, we've come this far about faith. "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! / Oh what a foretaste of glory divine! / Heir of salvation, purchase of God"; and so, when you start hearing those songs, and the image of the song, and how they put the words together, it can drive emotions... sometimes, you could probably do a whole worship service with nothing but music, and even without preaching you can have a great worship service, because that's how powerful music can be in the worship.

Here, the pastor moves even further, describing how music is important in "driving emotions", and functioning as a means of communication that some people might prefer, as if condensing messages of belief and hope – which are the main substance of lyrics used in the church environment – into musical songs is sometimes the only way to reach certain people. The whole community would react positively to good music, in order to open them to the message of God, but to some music is even more important than the word itself. Denise, the choir director precise this with very straightforward words:

**Denise:** you know, listening to, you know, someone talk and pontificate, and all that, I can get all like, yaaaawn [yawns]! But if I hear some music, I'm all "Wait a minute, what'd you say? What? What are they talking about?" It speaks to me differently, and we recognize how it speaks to a lot of people. Uh, you

know, I'm not the minority in here! It speaks to a lot of people the same way, and from my church experience, talking to a lot of pastors, and everybody involved, in an amazing kind of way music prepares the ear for the word. It actually almost sets the atmosphere. In short, if you come in and you're not feeling good, you don't want somebody to preach to you when you walk through the door, there's some music going on that kinda warm it up and breaks the ice. It tunes you, it does tune you, it does bring you in, it does warm you up. It really does. For some people that's all they wanna hear. I was one of those people: all I wanna hear was the music.

Denise words not only replicate those of Rev. Wortham, but they go further in pointing out how there would be a general preference within the church for the musical word, a statement that is consistent both with the space music has during service – five or six selections lasting between six and ten minutes in a hour and a half service, not counting the songs or tunes that might be improvised to back prayers or preaching moments, like *sermon*, or *invitation*. Music, songs, can be a concise but not imprecise way of conveying complex emotional as well as religious messages. And in fact, even Rev. Wortham would not restrain from referring to a concept similar to the one Denise expressed:

**Rev. Wortham:** as a preacher I can't be naive to think that everybody is coming to hear me. I mean, it is not even about me from the beginning; so the thing is that as the preacher I have to be clear about that from the gate, knowing that music and preaching we are a tandem. We go hand in hand, when it comes to that worship service. We can go hand in hand because there are some folks that music can manage to stir them. [...] And that goes back to being in tune with the spirit.

Schnable, going after Small (1998) has used the verb *musicking* “to describe all of the acts – singing, composing, listening, piano-moving – that contribute to the performance of music” (2012). From the words of both the reverend and Denise, appears that preaching and *musicking* are inevitably bound together in the process of service building, given the relevance that music has for all the participants to the

worship service, and the extent to which the church establishment goes into preparing and fueling the best musical service possible, which is represented by the economic commitment that the church undertakes for maintaining the musical establishment, which is very consistent quantitatively, as we have already seen in previous chapters. And in fact it seeps through the discussion with at least one member of the MLK Senior Choir, Jacqueline, how the senior pastor would feel the need to address the choir upon the importance of delivering good music during the service:

**Jacqueline:** [music is] terribly important; in fact, the pastor has talked about the importance of music to the congregation, and how sometimes it softens people's heart so they're more receptive to the word.

**Giorgio:** Has the pastor talked about this during a sermon, or...?

**J:** Oh, no, that was during the rehearsals for the preparation of the revival...

**G:** Ok, so music as a means to get to people?

**J:** Uh, uh. [she nods]

It is the senior pastor, Rev. Warnock, the one Jacqueline is referring to; and to him music is important in the process of preparing the congregation "to soften people's heart" in order to receive the word of God, that he feels compelled to address the choir singers while they are rehearsing. And Daniel Moore, the Hammond organ player and leader of the musical band, backs entirely this perception that was possible to gather from both congregation and ministers:

**Daniel:** this is kind of a place where you can step away from that reality and kind of, lift your spirit, just for a brief second. So, our responsibility as musicians is to try to usher in that spirit, that energy. Like, you see, now, it's just a celebration, and so everybody feels good for the moment and you don't have to worry about the bill you gotta pay tomorrow [laughs]. So I think, that is what church is, from week to week, it conveys a message that inspires you, you know, to just keep on going, and the belief that is gonna get better, really soon.

Daniel, as a musician, takes full responsibility for the part he plays into the emotional success of the ritual; on his and his fellow musicians *musicking* depends the possibility for the preaching – and, thus, the word of God – to fall into its right place. But in order to do so the congregation has to be separated from the concrete world that waits for them outside the walls of the church. In order for the spiritual and physical nourishment expectation of the congregation to be met by the establishment, music has to shape sensibilities so that the progressive emotional transformation which is prerogative of the worship ritual can take place. The congregation's system of *disposition* has to be met in order for the preaching to act on it, and music attunement is one of such *dispositions*, that the ministers and musicians have to understand and use. It is indicative how this resembles the way in which Rev. Wortham would talk of his need to get in tune with his congregation's "highs and lows", their personal histories a way to get to their collective perception and acting on them. In fact, music and preaching cannot be separated in this complex process. My argument is that, to a degree, there is a precise intentionality in how the pastors, with the support of key musicians, organize the musical service in order to maximize the transformative process that takes place during the worship service. My assumption is based on some of the practices that I was able to observe in the months of attendance to service, some of which were confirmed by informants I interviewed.

#### **a. Tradition**

During *invocation*, almost at the beginning of service, and during *benediction*, at the end, the two musical selections that occupy these two frames of the worship ritual are usually occupied by two songs that the entire congregation would sing along

with the choir, from beginning to the end. It is not uncommon for the congregation to join in with the singing randomly during service, especially after *sermon*, or *invitation*, when excitement is usually at its peak. But with *invocation* and *benediction* the practice is different: the congregation is invited to join in with the singing, before the selection is played. At the end the congregation always sings the same tune “Total Praise”, which every member of the community knows by heart; but during *invocation*, the selection would always be a traditional lined hymn, or a spiritual; something that would change every service, but would always be explicitly related to the scriptures, and rigorously sung *a cappella*. I asked Jacqueline about this peculiar occurrence at every *invocation*, being mostly interested in the possible relation with the explicit reference to pieces of the scriptures in relation to a possible preparation for *sermon*, but her answer pointed me in a different direction:

**Jacqueline:** Well, it’s traditional here; other churches don’t even use hymnals, or sing any... but Ebenezer is a very traditional church, so hymns are gonna probably always be a part of the service here.

**Giorgio:** Yeah, because I noticed that there are a lot of hymns that are sung normally by the choir as songs, but there’s always that specific one...

**J:** That’s a congregational opportunity for everyone to participate.

**G:** Ok, so hymns are going to be heard throughout the service but there is one in particular...

**J:** That everybody will sing.

**G:** And the same goes for “Total Praise”, at the end?

**J:** Uh, uh. [she nods]

What is relevant in Jacqueline opinion, in relation to these two specific moments of the ritual, is that they represent an opportunity to directly participate to service as an integral performing part of the ritual, and not just in a responsorial dimension, as with

the rest of the service. Moreover, in regard to the quality of the choice for *invocation*, she states that this relates first and foremost to the traditional configuration of the church. As if there would be a distinct need to connect directly to the particular history of the Black Church, and, specifically, with the history of Ebenezer. And the link here is represented by traditional genres repertoire, as if as Muller (2002) refers to the concept of “archiving Africanness in sacred songs”, so it appears that an African American essence is archived in traditional hymns, and spiritual. And when prompted to state how much he thought the musical service at Ebenezer could be considered representative of black churches, Daniel, the organist referred to the same concept:

**Daniel:** [...] Most times in Black Church you’ll find a church that just does anthems and spirituals, or just does traditional gospel, or just does contemporary. You know, we try to bring it all in one because we have all kinds of people that come, you know. So, you have a few church that still embrace it, but more of the modern churches have kind of negated, you know, some of the more traditional standpoints, which is kind of what attracts more of a younger generation.

While some churches might have negated their tradition and moved towards a more contemporary style musical service, Ebenezer makes it a priority to maintain its link to tradition. The reason Daniel states regards the possibility of accessing an audience as broad as possible, but even if so, this need passes inevitably through a constant continuity with its own tradition, which is embodied, in this case, in traditional genres such as hymns and spirituals. Interestingly enough, Tamisari, in her analysis (1998) of the interconnectedness of body, vision and movement in the making of group identity of the Aboriginal Yolngu people of the Northern Arnhem Land, suggests that the concept of “visibility” refers to “the complex reciprocal experiential relationship, sensual participation and interaction of people with the sentient ancestral bodies,”

since it involves the “intertwining of body and world through which meanings are created and negotiated” (256). And this is epitomized by the visible quality of the “footprints”, marks left by the ancestral beings on the land, which reflects a vast array of meanings that directly reflects on the regulation of social boundaries, spaces and identities, thus revealing the dynamic condensation of “performance, experience, meaning and agency” (266). If we substitute the “spiritual” to the “footprint”, it could be possible to interpret the process of participative listening through which the congregation performs them with the above mentioned concept of “visibility”. It is on the premises of collective participative performance that in fact a spiritual song acquires its significance as a means of communication and direct relation with collective history that is dynamically reflected in the bodies and the features of the performance. By collectively singing their traditional spirituals, through their bodies, members of the congregation are capable of communicating their experiences; conveying their dispositions to the divine; and, ultimately, having direct access to their own history. Ebenezer Baptist Church is the church of Martin Luther King: this is relevant to the congregation, and it is relevant to the establishment to fuel and sustain this expectation of continuity, which participates in the shaping of the collective identity of the community as much as the belief in divine salvation in Jesus Christ does.

And in fact Daniel continues:

**Daniel:** Uh, well, it is, it is just that, you know, again, we try to encompass all kinds of urban based, you know, global worshipping centers, so, you know, with that global thing, and us being Dr. King’s church [...]

Tradition is important internally, in how the congregation relates and yearns to connect to its own past; but is also externalized in the expectations that derive from outside the community, given the particular relevance of Ebenezer in the social history of African

Americans. Moreover, these recurrent practices of diversified composition of the repertoire that go along with the fixed points of *invocation* and *benediction* so to encompass all the various array of genres that have been discussed before, allows for a much stronger maintenance and construction of intergenerational ties among the community, in a process keen to what has been noted by Schnable (2012). But there is also another way tradition is embraced by the community, and it is the way in which the congregation, ready to witness every Sunday a different kind of service, is nurtured to expect a recurrent moment in the final collective singing of “Total Praise” at *benediction*; in a service that would otherwise have no other fixed tradition, given the openness and *flexibility* of liturgy, at least one point will be maintained Sunday after Sunday:

**Rev. Wortham:** when I got here that was kind of the closing *benediction* song, like this is almost like saying, almost like a “go on forth” song, as you go forth, you know “Lord I will lift my eyes to the...” [laughs], oh, I gotta sing it now, uh, [sings] “Lord I will lift my eyes to the hills...You are the source of my strength, You are the strength of my life, I lift my hands in total praise...”, so it is really, uhmm, almost like a song, as we would wanna say when we leave this place, Lord we give you our total praise. So it’s almost kinda like a final charge, in a sense, and this, as a congregation, when we leave this place, our total praise will be given to God, in all that we do. So this is kinda culminating moment saying that as we go forth from here, this is what we’re going to do. And so it’s like the *benediction* is that final blessing, that final blessing to go forth. Because a lot of times I’m not even sure if we’ve thought all the way through, because now I don’t even think about it, but with us clasping hands together is almost a covenantal relation saying that all of us together as a whole, we’re coming together, connected together saying that as we’re gonna part from this place, with this final blessing that we’re getting saying that we’re gonna give our total praise to God in all that we do.

The reverend describes precisely how this very moment in each service, represents the actual concretization of the emotional transformation, achieved through collective act that becomes a moment of intense covenantal worship: the congregation perceives

physically as unity and almost at a conscious level. Even if the *sermon* during that specific day might not have conveyed the “holy spirit” inside the church, in giving their praise to God with gratuity they close their gap towards divinity, towards nourishment, as resonates from Denise words:

**Denise:** [...] I live my life, I give my life, uh, all of this is in praise of God, you know? So I get that at the end of service, we’re reminded, no matter what has been said in sermon, if you don’t get anything else at least you get that, you can go home with that, absolutely.

But the practice of *benediction* does not limit itself to the mere quality of the message. It is a collective singing moment during which, as a collective body, every member crosses his or her arms over the chest to reach for the members at their sides with opposing hands, almost in a total collective embrace. The congregation unfolds in the singing stirring itself in this collective straying movement, which clearly does not have as his focus the mere message:

**Rev. Wortham:** [...] that’s a song, so it’s like... is one thing reciting those words, but it’s another power singing together. And even and specially in a African American context, with, uh and even without the historical location here at this church, with the Civil Rights movement, everything, and how when they were marching and singing songs together, they did, I would say, move with songs together... going back to slavery, when they sang their songs to encode their language, to tell this is where we’re gonna move, this is what we’re gonna do. So, with music being that, almost like the tie that binds everybody. And so that moment together when we’re all, visitor, members, whoever you are in this place, we’re all here together, so... We can take out the label of member, visitor, pastor, all those labels don’t matter at this moment, ‘cause we’re all here together as one, one body, and this is what we’re gonna do together as a body. So I think music sends a stronger symbol, it sends a stronger message, rather.

Music sends a stronger message, and the community needs to embrace this expressive vehicle in order to obtain its goal of transformation. The reverend even directly connects the practice of crossing hands bonding with the very tradition of the Civil





Let the church say amen, let the church say amen, God has spoken, so let the church say...

So, you know, just depends on the church, really.

Daniel doesn't know how long the tune has been kept in place, he only knows that it preceded him – and he was hired in 2006. No one of the people I interviewed had knowledge of when the tune was actually brought into service. But I was able to gather, in following conversation with employees in the administrative office of the church, that it was chosen as *benediction* song between 1999 and 2000, even before the leadership of the congregation passed on to the current senior pastor, Rev. Warnock, in 2005. The continuity of usage of such song since before the congregation chose its new pastor, speaks by itself of the strong emphasis that is placed on this specific ritual frame by their participants. Moreover, Daniel specifies that it is not only for the message it states in terms of allegiance to God that it is particularly relevant, or at least not only: a *benediction* song, first and foremost has to be able to “send you up”. So attention for music that happens outside the church environment is adamant, in order to be able to gather what is being held high in popular esteem, and, thus, has a stronger chance to appeal to the congregations. While the first take Daniel played was the hymn “”, and the second a faster improvisation on the previous theme, the third one was actually a song by contemporary gospel musician André Crouch, “Let The Church Say Amen”, published in 2011. And in fact Daniel adds:

**Daniel:** [...] we try to stay current here, so, there may be a particular song that's on the radio, that most people hear from week to week, and so, you know, it's kind of an excitement when we sing that song that you've been hearing, you

know there are certain songs that, again, we all grew up with, you know so, we try to pull those out too, they sometimes can be more relevant.

Again we see how the disposition towards a strong relation with present time is crucial both in the representation, and in the process of decision making of matters relating to service, such as music, or the themes of the preaching. But what also stems out of this last consideration is the keen awareness that both ministers and musicians have of the transformative potential that music has in the worship ritual, especially if we put it in the perspective of what has been discussed up to this point.

### **b. Intentional *flexibility***

Rev. Wortham has spoken extensively of the concept of *flexibility* as the basic need of approaching every level of the worship ritual being open enough to allow the presence of the “holy spirit” to take control and lead both ministers and congregation to exaltation in the divine. Each preaching take, each sermon, each service plan has to be *flexible* enough to allow to improvise upon the needs of the moment, which are intended to depend on the direct intervention of God into the worship space, but manifest through the actual response of the congregation. The “holy spirit effect” symbolizes the perceived indication of God intervening within the ritual, but it is the transformation of the participants to service into a coalesced collective that actually defines the successful progression of the congregation into emotional exaltation. The actual parameter upon which decision are made on where to lead service from moment to moment, are always based on the emotional state of the congregation, which is expressed by their responses and the level of their participation into the ritual. Therefore, if on one hand the unpredictable intervention of God is what is held responsible for the actual success of a service, on the other hand it has been stated by

ministers, musicians, and members of the congregation that several techniques and practices are actually staged so that the congregation can be influenced towards the right direction. To a certain level, the very structure of the service appears to be intentionally built upon continuous bipolarization between climaxes and anti-climaxes, which is consistent with the tradition of the Afro-Baptist ritual. Hence, the very concept of *flexibility*, which revolves in the representation of the congregation around the idea of a “holy spirit effect” that has to always be acknowledged and let into play, appears to depend much more on an intentional guidance. And when it comes to the pre-organization of the structure of service from Sunday to Sunday, this intentional quality of a functional planning appears more and more consistent. If on one hand it is the senior pastor, with his close assistants that determines the themes and major structure of each service, on the other hand the musical selection are decided in concordance with the Director of Arts and Worship and the key musicians, Daniel, the organist, and Denise and Maurice Seay, the two choirs directors. During the period of time of my research the position of Director of Worship and Arts was vacant, due to a transition, so it was directly the musicians who would take the responsibility of coordinating directly with the pastors. I asked Daniel if he was part of the process of service planning:

**Giorgio:** So, do you also participate in the process of structuring of the service outline?

**Daniel:** Yes, yes.

**G:** So, how much of predetermined and how much of spontaneous is there...?

**D:** Well, the prearranged is usually the songs that you need the choir to sing, you know, those are usually based on rehearsal, unless, once again, you know, something happens in the service, and it makes you say, ok, maybe we should do this song, instead of that one...

**G:** And how often something like this happens?

**D:** Uh, quite often actually, you know, especially after he preaches, you know, we might have planned something, but, you know, the spirit takes you in a different direction, you know...

Denise told me that she would have her choir learn and prepare two new songs every week, so that in the rotation of musical selection that were parts of the planned selections there would always be the possibility for the choir to instantly change the selection and provide what was needed at that moment. I also asked Denise if in she would know in advance the theme of a certain service so to prepare her choir in that regard:

**Denise:** Well, sometimes, sometimes, but often times no. but when it's something that is... you know, because, sometimes the pastor might not decide what the sermon is about until Friday, or Saturday, which is their prerogative, of course, but we have already had rehearsal, so we have to prepare anyway...

From Denise words we have confirmation on the centrality of the sermon in regard to the overall structure of the service: it is in relation to the sermon that the theme of an entire service depends, and as Daniel words confirm, it is on the needs that arise from sermon deliverance that the shift, or abrupt change in the planning might derive. What also emerges from these facts is that although service is planned from week to week, it is not on the rigid application of the predetermined plan that the success of a worship ritual depends. If intentionality exist to some level at this stage – which is where the alternate climactic structure of the service might be conceived – it is not relevant to the point of actually determining the successful conditions for the collective practice of the worship of ritual to achieve emotional transformation. But it is while the service is performed that the plan acquires its modifications and is guided to its intended

outcome, and this was clearly revealed by my interview with Daniel, the organ player and leader of the musical band:

**Daniel:** [...] Well, music, you think of music as if of a soundtrack to a movie, you know, when you can tell, you know, in a horror film, by the music, if the killer is about to come in the room, or you know [laughs], something like that. So the same thing is in church, if we play a certain set of chords, it makes you wanna lift your hands, if you play another set of chords, it makes you say amen, if you, you know, kind of mellow it down, and kind of go into a minor thing it kind of makes people feel an emotion that is more worship oriented, whereas more silent, you know. So, we look at our services as scoring a soundtrack, so everything that we do kind of falls in line with what's happening in the service.

To musicians, the musical performance during service appears to have the quality of a scoring process. While being constantly attentive to where the pastor would lead the congregation, they are also capable of adjusting their playing to what is exactly needed by the pastor or the congregation:

**Daniel:** Well, like, let's say, he's preaching on praise, you know, he'll say "Give me something upbeat", you know, so, we'll kind of have a moment to say, ok, what are we getting ready to do? [laughs] But then, every now and then... You know, most times, it's really exactly what you see, you know, he is kind of before the people and we are behind him, you know, so he'll... whatever he's saying, if it's coming to a prayer, I kind of try to listen, to see the first few lines of a prayer, and it'll make me think of a song, that, you know, may have these words in it. Or, if he's doing a sermon, and he's talking about a particular subject, you know, I'll go into, something, some chords, that I feel like make think of whatever he's talking about [laughs], so, again, it's a scoring, it's a communication we are having indirectly.

The lead would always be taken by the senior pastor, but the level of involvement of the musicians' individuality is heavy: Daniel talks about it in terms of an indirect process of communication with the pastor, which ultimately reveals to be an indirect way of communicating with the entire congregation, achieved through music:

**Daniel:** You know, if somebody's doing something like a praise, scripture or something, you know, I may [he plays]:

You know, so that's, more of the praise thing that, you know, we may go into. If it's a little more soft, uh, you know, spoken word, prayer getting ready to happen, I may play, you know, something more hymn-oriented [he plays]:

It kind of gets, more of meditation, you know, and then if there's a praise moment that has gone, for bringing, you know, kind of making it loose, I might go into a minor thing [he plays]:

You know, and that kind of bashes it for the spirit, when he'll say, you know, come on, lift your hands, you know these kind of things, you know, if he's kind of, after the sermon, if he's kind of given an invitation to Christ, you know, most times it makes me think of my grandmother, for some reason, [laughs], you know, so I kind of go into more of a Baptist thing, you know, Ray Charles kind of [he plays]:

Kind of introduces you to more of a traditional sound, of you know, church. So it's, it's all a certain set of chords, I can be in the exact same key and play in a different way, and makes people feel, you know, a certain way, 'cause, you

know, music is nostalgia, it reminds them, or takes them to a place that they remember. And so everything you play, kind of takes them, somehow, you know, it just takes you to that place. You know, it's like when a church mother gets up and sing, well, because she's older a lot of us will remember when our grandmother sang, and so, you know, kind of takes you to them [laughs], you know, that's how our grandmothers had you doing that [he plays]:



More Sam Cook oriented, you know, Aretha Franklin, you know, so, yeah, that's what it is.

Daniel pulls his musical choices from his undoubted mastership of the instrument, but without ever losing the contact with both the context within which he is playing and the deployment of choices that are consistent with what the expectations of the congregation and the ministers might be. A minor chord would give more of a nostalgic setting to the worship, whereas major chords tend more to exaltation, but only because they let the congregation access their bodily memory, which is composed of their life experiences. If he is thinking of a particular tune or melody that might be needed, he quickly draws connection to an aesthetic of music that specifically pertains to the African American environment. The principle he has in mind is that of the progressive writing of a soundtrack, but he sincerely has no clue, most of the time on what the next scene might be

**Daniel:** [...] A lot of times our pastor would quote hymns, you know like, today he quoted, “Lord I hear Showers of Blessing”, you know, so that made me, you know, [he plays, singing]:



Lord I hear of show'rs of...

So if he does that, I try to go with him, or you know, if he'll say "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" [title of gospel song], you know, and I try to get with him, you know [he plays]:



Until, you know, he's kind of transitioning to wherever he's going. But, you know, in Black Church, if a hymn had to stand out, probably "Amazing Grace", that's the one that kind of works anytime anywhere [laughs], across the world, you know, but again, it depends a lot.

The musical variations that Daniel describes, fall into a precise correspondence with what William-Jones (1979) has categorized as precise characteristics of a black sacred music aesthetic that derives from precise African retentions. And if we include the preaching style of the ministers, and the responses of the congregation at Ebenezer, even more musical practices will be found in the same category. For instance, (1) the use of antiphonal response; (2) varying vocal tone; (3) handclapping and foot patting; (4) emphasis on dynamic rhythms; (5) a dramatic concept of the music; (6) improvisation; (7) communal participation; (8) immediacy of communication; and (9) functionalism of the music (Williams-Jones 1979:378). The transition from major to minor to which Daniel would refer in direct connection with the clapping of hands by the congregation relates directly with the overall setting of musical practice – or again, *musicking* – within the worship service at Ebenezer in the perspective of a dramatic representation. A representation that is collectively acted by the congregation through the musical communication that is established with the musicians, and the ministers. They all participate with different roles, but the result can only be granted by the effectiveness of such communication. And specific musical practices, or playing styles defines

profoundly the depth of the interaction. Syncopation, or progression of syncopation is also relevant relating to the effects that certain musical chords, or interpretation could provoke in people:

**Daniel:** [...] today, you know, we went into more of a funk-like kind of groove, uh, you know [laughs], really it was like this, we went in, you know [he plays]:



Which kind of reminds you a praise song, so it kind of makes people vibe in a different way, you know, and again, it kind of makes us not be so stiff [laughs], and, you know, and that helps us draw in people who may not have grown up in church, you know, but they see that, you know, we can have fun over here too. We can be more effective, that's the thing.

And dynamics have also a central role in the writing of the score of the worship service. Dynamics, which range from pianissimo to fortissimo – with many intermediate, such as piano, mezzo-forte, forte – literally describe to the player how the sound the physic dynamic of the sound should be evoked form the instrument in terms of intensity:

**Daniel:** [...] so, you know, we kind of incorporate that in even gospel music, you know so, for people, as far as a feeling, you know, they are more attentive when things are lower, you know, and then, as the song kind of progresses and you'd be able to digest the lyrics, you know, you start thinking about what the song is saying and then how that relates to your own personal life. And then you start joining in, and so what happens is, you know, at first is just the choir singing, and then the congregation begins to sing, and then it becomes a build up until we're all singing, and the more excited we become, naturally the louder we get! [laughs]

**Giorgio:** And in turn the audience gets more involved...

**D:** Exactly. So, you know, that is a very purposeful thing, to try to, you know, invite everybody, so it doesn't look like a concert, you know, where we're just singing, and you enjoy! [laughs]

The intentionality does not lie in the mere pre-organization of structured service. If to a degree a structure has to be in place in order for the worship ritual to take place, it is in the actual performing stage of the ritual that an intentional guidance comes into play, led by the pastor and communicated through the musical establishment, in order to *flexibly* adapt to the response of the congregation. But the response the congregation produces is strictly dependent on the ability of the pastor of leading the worship to close on the expectations of the very congregation that has to fulfill its guidance with appropriate responses. Moreover, if on one hand music directly influences the level of sobriety or jubilation of the congregation, on the other hand it is upon the sensibility of the congregation that the musicians base their interpretation of appropriate musical attunement.

All the practices that take place within the worship service are intrinsically interdependent, and ultimately revolve around a concept of *flexibility* that defines both the openness of the congregation to unpredictable exaltation and the attention of ministers and musicians to the emotional progression of the congregation. Each of the parts that are in play cannot fulfill their role unless they are constantly exposed to the other parts' dispositions throughout the ritual. The intentionality lies in allowing the *flexibility* to be at the center of the worship ritual.

## CONCLUSION

Ebenezer Baptist church appears to be inextricably connected with the social history of the African American community, both at a local and a general level. If, in fact, it was constituted as a district church that would serve a community residing in the proximities of the church, it progressively became a reference point for the entire African American community at a national level, especially with the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr. Today, its past configuration as an important organizing hub for the Civil Rights movement seems to outweigh its potential role as a reference point for the community at a local level. In fact, most of the participants come from the diverse areas of the Atlanta Metropolitan Area, while its impact on the community of Sweet Auburn district seems to have diluted in the decades. This aspect is emphasized by the scarce attendance of people coming from the urban proximities of the church, as well as from the stark contrast in which the establishment and its congregation are with the surroundings of the church.

Nevertheless, the church still represents an important and outwardly stated reference point for the black community of the United States and for its congregation in particular. In order to investigate its functioning and the role it has in the experiences of the worshippers, I concentrated on the analysis of a specific idiom of interrelationship, which is that of the intentional *flexibility*. Its close examination allows us to shed some light on both the interconnectedness of all the practices that constitute the worship ritual, as well as on the specific relationship between the pastors and the worshippers. Moreover, this idiom directly points our attention towards the

music and its pivotal role within the ritual revealing the importance of the senior pastor and his assistants in directing and controlling the worship ritual.

It is them who define and adapt the message that each particular service should convey, and accordingly guide the musicians and singers, adapting their preaching and musical practices to match or alter the “spirit” of the congregation. Therefore, the practices they enact visibly acquire the quality of *organizing actions* (Bourdieu 1977, 1991; see also Ch. 3 in this thesis) since they organize both the worship ritual in terms of structure, and the process of emotional transformation of the congregation. But the pastor's organizing actions have as necessary counterpoint the active and emotional participation of the members of the congregation during the worship service, to a degree that makes their contribution vital for the very enactment of the worship ritual. It is, in fact, on their responses that the ministers adjust the structure of the service and the musicians attune their playing: the whole process of the worship ritual acquires the features of a collective practice capable of acting on the bodies of the participants – while they progress into alternating states of sobriety and jubilation – the ultimate goal being a qualitative emotional transformation which is perceived by the congregation in terms of spiritual and physical nourishment. This perception of the worship service as “healing ritual” constitutes the *habitus* upon which all the participants act accordingly, in direct continuity with the historical tradition of the Black Church; it in fact generates practices that are produced by this tradition while reproducing it at the same time.

The *dispositions* upon which the members of the congregation respond and participate to the service are reflected in the *dispositions* of ministers and musicians as

they structure and lead the ritual, in a process of reciprocal expectation that generates practices. In Bourdieu's words:

[...] the attention paid to staging in great collective ceremonies derives not only from the concern to give a solemn representation of the group [...] but also, as many uses of singing and dancing show, from the less visible intention of ordering thoughts and suggesting feelings through the rigorous marshalling of practices and the orderly disposition of bodies, in particular the bodily expression of emotion, in laughter or tears. [1991:69]

The "staging" of the religious ritual is reflected in both the unintentional manifestations of emotions by the congregation and the intentional *flexibility* through which certain practices are deployed by the ministers and the musicians. These practices produce in the congregation *dispositions* that shape the sense of belonging to the congregation and foster the *necessity* to participate to service to which members have referred in the interviews. And in fact, "symbolic power works partly through the control of other people's bodies and belief that is given by the collectively recognized capacity to act in various ways on deep-rooted linguistic and muscular patterns of behaviour, either by neutralizing them or by reactivating them to function mimetically" (Bourdieu 1991:69). It is during the very worship ritual that the process of reproduction of the ritual itself is secured, Sunday after Sunday, by the continued reactivation in the congregation of *dispositions* of mimetic response to the preaching and to the music.

At Ebenezer, a great attention is given to the musical establishment both on a qualitative and quantitative scale. Musicians are chosen carefully and choirs trained painstakingly; but what it reflects even more is the attention that is given to the professional musical contributors in terms of economic remuneration. After all the Director of Worship and Arts receives the second best salary after the pastors, and the

musicians are paid handsomely, as to formally glorify the service provided by the musical establishment. It is also worth noting that, to a degree, the process of community bonding and construction which is pursued by the church is also explicitly made visible in a variety of practices which tend to formally glorify belonging to the congregation. Apart from the participation to worship service and to accessory activities, such as choir singing, or occasional voluntary work, one of the most consistent and regular contribution each member or family of the congregation gives to the church are, as we have discussed, the tithes and offerings that are collected twice during each service. The members' economical involvement funds the church, allowing the establishment to function and expand; and if on one hand members have stated to happily contribute to the funding of the church, it is also true that Rev. Wortham feels the need to point out, during the interview, how (to a degree) a joyful music makes for "joyful" offerings. The monthly Nehemiah's Donors List falls into this same celebratory realm, since it actually provides a placement list of the most generous donors that vividly – and rapidly – digresses into the language of competition. The connection between the emotional control of the congregation performed by the ministers, and the glorification of communitarian involvement – even if present – do not necessarily implicates a fraudulent intention of economic exploitation of the community; however, it surely speaks of a certain level of consciousness the ministers have about the influence they hold in ensuring both the success of a worship ritual, and the continuity of the church establishment. The actual power they have on the congregation, and on the ritual, which they intentionally deploy, enforces the symbolic position of power from which they found their practices. But if on the one hand the role of the ministers as mediators of the divine presence is what formally entitles them

to guide the ritual (and what brings the congregation to the worship ground in the first place), it is also true – as we have seen – that in the accomplishment of a successful worship ritual a major role is played by music.

In studying how gospel singing practices within and outside the church generate solidarity among African American communities, Schnable (2012) has exposed how “rather than merely reflecting existing social relations, music is a tool to forge them” (280). The musical practices enacted by the musicians and singers at Ebenezer are, in fact, what ensures the bonding of the community into a communal practice during the worship ritual. By scoring the service by *flexibly* adapting to both the needs of the preacher and the response of the congregation, music qualifies as well as a practice that organizes actions. Musicians perceive their contribution to be significant because of the very communicative and informational quality of the relation they establish with the congregation through their music, which ultimately allows them to perform successfully, to get “in tune with the spirit”. In accord with and guided by the ministers, musicians are capable of directly addressing the worshippers’ most inner *dispositions* so that the process of emotional transformation can be accomplished at a level that would not be ensured by the sole use of speech.

It could be possible to single out music within the worship service in terms of what, throughout his work, Michel Foucault has referred to as an *apparatus*. While Foucault never extensively or analytically digressed on the specific nature of the term he was using – a task he left the fullness of his works to accomplish – the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2006) tried to pinpoint its exact meaning defining it as “a heterogeneous set that includes virtually anything, linguistic and nonlinguistic, under the same heading,” which “always has a concrete strategic function and is

always located in a power relation,” thus, appearing to be “at the intersection of power relations and relations of knowledge” (2-3). Music, a linguistic *and* nonlinguistic set of practices, has in the worship ritual at Ebenezer a precise strategic function, being in fact located within a power relation which has at its extremes the congregation and the ministers. We can thus consider music as an *apparatus* while the intentional *flexibility* that guides the performance of the ritual as a *habitus*.

The importance represented by the musical establishment at Ebenezer, interestingly reflects the importance that is consciously given to its contribution to the establishment: after all, musicians are the second best paid employees of the church after the pastors. Again, there is not a necessary negative connotation in noting or furthering research on such assumptions; the understanding of practices of preaching and worship, and how they rely on the establishment of structured economical systems could actually further our understanding of the consolidation and development of urban communities, and in particular of African American communities, for “when music functions as a commodity, as it often does in American consumer culture, who makes it and on what terms are important questions of cultural and economic power” (Suisman 2004:1296).

## APPENDIX – INTERVIEWS

### Interview 1 – Melissa James; February 26, 2012

GIORGIO – So, first of all what's your relation to this congregation?

MELISSA – Ehh, I've been in this church all my life..

G – All your life?

M – All my life; my mother was the former church secretary here. She was Dr. King secretary dedicated, and most of the other ministers, she was the secretary for them.

G – So, it has been throughout your life..

M – For all my life; it is almost as if I'd been a preacher kid here [she laughs]

G – Ok, and the people of your closer community also come to this church, your family your close friends?

M – Yes, yes, we're all here.

G – And what's your perception of the service, the actual service you attend? How much do you think it relies on the different parts that compose it, the preacher, the choir and its music, and the congregation?

M – Well, actually, everybody has its own unique... [she pauses thinking] ...duties, except, the preacher and the choir do the most.. The music is also a part of the ministry, because a lot of people get more out of the singing [...] so it's an individual thing, but it all comes together as one.

G – How much do you think the service depends, or relies on music?

M – Oh, a lot, I think a lot..

G – Mmmh, as if without music there would be no service, or...?

M – Well, uhmm, well, I can't really say that, because there are churches that don't have music, they just have spoken words..

G – Yes, but thinking more about this church..

M – Oh, this church? It would be... [she pauses] ...it would be very difficult, because we are a musical people, so, I can't imagine no music..

G – Whene you say people you are thinking about...

M – The members...

G – The members of this church?

M – ...and the community, yes. We expect it, we are known for having music, so I can't imagine that not ever happen in here [she laughs]

G – Do you sing?

M – As a matter of fact I do...

G – Meaning that you also sing in the choir?

M – I am in two of the choirs and i sing in two community courses. So, music is very much a part of my life.

G – So it kind of fills your life...

M – Oh yeah, most definetively.

G – I was wondering, during service if you are not part of the choir, so if you are not singing with the choir, if you are just attending, like today, how do you decide when to join the singing with the choir or the rest of the congregation?

M – If I know the song I'm singing...

G – So, it's just that.

M – It's just that..

G – Then you being a member of the choir, you always sing...

M – I'm always singing, yes. Unless I have laryngitis, [she laughs], but, yeah, I'm always singing. And even if I'm not familiar with the music, uhmm, if I hear it I can at least hum it. I can pick it up with my ea, even if it's not a familiar song.

G – Would you attend a different kind of service, a different kind of church?

M – Oh, yeah...

G – Even without music?

M – Yes...

G – I'm not thinking just about an extraordinary experience, but, I mean, would change the type of worship that you actually follow?

M – Well, you know, I lived in Denver for ten years, transferred to Colorado, and, uhmm, so I was very ecumenical up there... I was episcopalian, I was, uhmm, methodist, baptist, church of God and Christ, catholic... I sung wherever I was needed, so I got to go and attend very different churches, so that's why I said yes, I do, I would...

G – Ok, so it came from your own experience..

M – Right; and, uhmm, in the episcopal church, the first service would just be spoken words, there would be no music, you know; the second service had music and spoken words. so that's why I said yes [she laughs].

G – Very clear. I was also wondering, how much attendance of services contributes to the definition of your individual identity? For you?

M – For me? oh, is very crucial, I can't sleep at home on Sunday, there's just no way. Unless I'm just [...], that is the only time, if I'm sick, especially if I have a fever, I won't share that blessing with anybody else [she laughs]; I will keep my at home, but as for as, you know sleeping in because I'm tired? My feeling is, if the Lord gives me strength six days a week to get up and go to work, I can give him one day on sunday to go to church. It's just, I wanna, that's ridiculous to me. "I'm tired.." but I'm tired everyday, if it was a workday, I would have to get up and go to work.

G – So, you think this in terms of debt..

M – Yeah, yeah, to Jesus Christ and to the community.

G – Right. So, how much do you think that attendance of musical services contrinutes to a more broader definition of African-American identity?

M – That's very crucial, very [she laughs briefly]. It's just in our bones, we gotta have the music, you know, we're eager, and... even with instruments or without, it doesn't even have to have all the noise. I mean we're born with he instrument, and just like, I don't know whether you hear the students this morning?

G – Oh yeah, I was here already.

M – They were just singing a cappella, they didn't really have any music, you know, they added the instruments later, but they started, and they were right on key, on to, on everything, you know, it's all inside, it's all inside.

G – So, when you saw the children today, and perceived the way in which they were reacting t music you felt a relation, a connection?

M – Oh, as always...

G – Did you also thought in any particular way about the fact that they were actually African?

M – No, I didn't think about that at all. I thought about the music.

G – I understand. I was wondering one last thing: do you think that this kind of service structure, like, the way in which things happened today – the invitation, the call to worship and so on – is specifically proper of black churches or is a more generally baptist kind?

M – It's more right the format of baptist churches that each church have their own individual order of service, that either add or take away, you know, how long will the service go on, or how would the flow of the service go, depends on each individual church and their pastors.

G – So there is no relation in your opinion between a specific structure of service and black churches in general?

M – Not really.

G - I feel like I already asked you this question, but, just to put it straight, why do you go to service?

M - Oh my goodness, uhmm, I come to church to get my refill for the week. I might have a car, but I'd still have to come back and fuel in for the week, for the world [she laughs]. That is the best way I can describe it.

G - And how much that fuel comes from the music?

M - To me, since music is such an important part of my life, one hundred percent.

G - Thank you very much Melissa, you've been of great help.

M - Thank you.

## Interview 2 – Sam Collier; February 26, 2012

GIORGIO – What's your relation with this congregation over the all?

SAM – I was here once and this is my first day back, and I was probably here for about a year and a half, directing the youth choir, and, so, I guess I function more as a worship leader, at times, to lead the congregation through song, into worship with God, uhmm, and I also direct the young people , so, the younger, maybe the young adults, kinda of, uh, high school students as well, college high school, just in choir just in music.

G – Were you part of Ebenezer Baptist Church congregation before working as a director as well?

S – No, actually I, they brought me on as director, then I became a member.

G – Then, moving toward a more general perspective, what's your perception of the service, like, the structure of the service you attend, and how much do you think it relies on each of the parts that make it, the preacher, the choir and the congregation?

S – Uhmm. There's a couple of different ways to look at it, because I've been, I've been... In the African-American... The African-American churches is a lot different than caucasian church, uhmm, it's just the way that we do things. We have a more charismatic style. Uhmm, it's just that as a race we identify more emotionally, we are extroverse, so to speak, I would say for the majority of parts. We feel a certain way we are gonna let it be known. And so, a lot of time I think the whole purpose of the environment is, uhmm, I would like to say it like this: sometimes the church could b considered a hospital, a hospital for the sick in spirit; and so people come to church looking to be healed, looking to feel better, looking, you know, just as a hospital would do; and so you have so many different people that are in the church, that come pretty much for the same reason we all come. Some of us are already well, you know, but we just, I guess we are coming for our check up, you know what I'm saying? [laughs] My check up, you know, how am I doing, you know, because since we are imperfect beings, in itself there is always something to check up on. There is always an area in ourselves that needs to be get better. So, with that being the overall consensus about why our people, as a race or just as people, come to church, and why church is needed, because is not really an hospital for the spirit, you know. The church would be that to me. Your internal, how do you deal with your internal, how do you deal with your internal and how do you fix what's going on inside, without a counselor, you know what I'm saying? You come in the church and we heal each other, so I think the relationship between the congregation, the music and the pastor... They are three completely different assignments. The leadership would be the musicians and the pastor, uhmm, I'm trying to figure how to say it. The pastor is over all, everything, he's the top. I mean he's the focus of the service; he decides the direction, decides what needs to happen. You know, I've been in a lot of

different church environments, even over at New Birth, to here, Ebenezer. My daddy's where I grew up, my dad is a pastor. And so, I'm a minister as well, I got ordained, or licensed, back in June over at New Birth, uhmm, to just preach the Gospel and some other things, and also lead. I would say the pastor is the visionary, he's the responsible for the overall healing process of the congregation, you know what I mean? He sets the tone, so we say, ok, listen, he would be equivalent to the doctor, the musician would be equivalent to the nurse, you know what I mean? So we see you first, you come in and we say ok, let me get you ready for the doctor, you know, and so we sing some songs, we open up your spirit, we build trust, we, uh, just kind of get you comfortable with where you are, then the doctor comes in and says "Are you ready?", you know what I mean? And then from there... I mean, it is so funny that we are using that analogy because, uhmm, the way the church is run is very much like a visit at the doc.

G – It's an interesting analogy actually; you were saying singing, so, how much of what you are describing actually relies on the music?

S – Well, music I think is a universal language, you know, and I think that... Well, I do not wanna get too spiritual, but, well, I just say it like this. I think overall, when helping people, or trying to teach people, trying to help people heal themselves, or just trying to help people in general, the number one factor when you're trying to do something to push somebody into another place, a better place, trust is the biggest thing, trust. If I don't trust you I'm not gonna open my heart to you, I'm not gonna listen to you, I'm not gonna receive. You know, is the equivalent to why our parents fight on our life because we trust them, like, we grew up with them, you know that mum tells me something, I'm gonna listen to mum, you know what I'm saying? I'm gonna listen to mum before... So, a stranger, so with everything before we, before you do surgery, so like... I want him to trust me, you know, we have, they have to, the people have to trust them before they let them open them up, and, I would say that music, is a... Helps to build trust, if not everything, because music is something everybody can agree on. If it sounds good, we all agree, you know, and if we feel that feeling of "You know what? I now what that is," that's music, and that sounds good, that feels good, and even if I don't necessarily know what I'm at, I feel I'm in the right place because I'm familiar with that. And music is a universal language, music in itself can be healing, it can sets moods, and so that's very important, that's why we start very happy and joyful because we wanna remind you that this is the day the Lord has made, or this is a new day for you, it doesn't have to be like your yesterday, it's a new day, and so that's why most of the songs at the top of the service are very [he starts to sing and clap hands] "Uh, uh, uh, clap your hands, come on clap your hands," [he goes back to a speaking stance] we want you to feel joy, we want you to feel better, and that's why getting closer to the word it gets a little slower, because we're about, we're getting ready to dive into you, dive into your psyche and dive into your heart, and begin to ask you some questions that you may not wanna be asked, but if we ask them we know that we can help you.

G – You are talking about music in a very functional perspective, as effectively shaping the entire process and experience.

S – The entire process and experience... The musicians is probably the second highest paid person in the church, after the pastor.

G – You mean the musicians that play the instruments, like the organ, piano, the drum and so on?

S – Yeah, and also the singers, the worship leaders. Usually there's one worship leader, and then the rest of the people that, but most of them volunteer, but they hire probably somebody to be the worship leader which is key, all worship leader [he is distracted by a passing woman, with who he exchanges greetings before coming back to me]. So, uh, key, you know, that is usually the highest paid people in the organization is gonna be your pastor and the musicians, your Worship and Arts director, because they go hand in hand. That's your foundation of any church.

G – So also in terms of economical planning for the church is very important to think about this.

S – Oh yeah. I mean, everything is, you know, you probably have hired musicians before you hire a secretary. Because is like, “I got the pastor, ok, now I got the Word... I need the musicians.” Because, I mean, I need somebody to open it up. And even if you look in war time, any time before they went into a war, they always sound the trumpet. Music always goes first. Because it's the front runner, that's why the musicians are so important.

G – Kind of the same spirit of the second line, then...

S – Yeah, yeah.

G – That's interesting. Now moving somewhere else, I was wondering how much attendance of service contributes to the definition of your identity, as an individual, as you Sam? Your perception of yourself, as well.

S – Uhhh, well, I don't know how to answer. Ok, I can answer in a lot of different ways, you ask me some deep questions! Well, everything that I do in my life is rooted, to begin, in the church. Every decision I make, business wise, everything I do relationship wise, my friends, my family, my loved ones, if not romantic interest, everything that I do in terms of my health, everything I do is rooted in the Bible, everything. So, with that, going to church is like...going to the doctor, you know? They're all the same, all the same, except it's just more frequent, you know. Anyway, if I were to leave Atlanta, and go, you know, to England, I would be trying to find a church. Because it's... and it's something to be said about us just...we need one another, so that's one, I mean you can just go and experience people that love me, I kind of think that's God. When you experience somebody that loves you in the flesh, you understand more of how God loves you.

G – So, you would attend even a different kind of church or service, even if it would be without music? I'm thinking about the example you did of London...

S – Ohhh, yeah.. But if it had music I'd probably attend it more, but if it was, if I was somewhere, like in Arctica [*sic*], or something, and they just didn't have any music at all, but they had a place where...

[Sam stops and waves his hand to a man who he tells me is one of the pastors – the youth pastor – of the church, Mike. He then stops him and introduces me to him. Mike is very happy about the possibility of helping me in my research, so he gives me his contacts and we agree to get back in touch with more time for a proper introductory meeting. I thank Mike and greet him goodbye. I then thank Sam for the introduction as we go back to our discussion.]

G – So, you were telling me about your relation with the possibility of attending a different kind of service, or church. You were saying that you would immediately look for a church, and you would prefer having music in it, even though if there wouldn't be any, it would still be fine.

S – Yeah, and if I couldn't find one, I would just do it online.

G – You would do it online?

S – Yeah, there's a lot of online churches.

G – Could You tell me more about this?

S – Yeah, well, there's a lot of online campuses that you can YouTube. I'll give you a website of one of the largest online churches right now. It is [www.lifechurch.tv](http://www.lifechurch.tv) I believe. That's the biggest online church that exist.

G – And you would make use of it.

S – Yeah, I would do it; I would want to go and experience it and get to feel it, you know, but, you know, the philosophy of Christ and everything he was about, everything the bible speaks about, you know, even if it's three people around me, or even if it's just me, I'm so dedicated to the mission, that even if every church would go down I would still be dedicated to it. And so, I'm going in on, so, you know, the church doesn't make me, 'cause I've been through so much, that, uhmm, with churches... Because, the thing is that people are flawed, everybody is flawed, but God isn't. He is never flawed, and a lot of time we can get in church environment, and if we base it off of the people, or the minister, or the musicians,

then we can risk losing our salvation because people are flawed, people can make mistakes. So you have to care more about a perfect God than an imperfect man.

G – So the mission comes before the man?

S – Oh, yeah, the mission, period. But! [with a sudden higher pitched burst of voice] we go to church to try to get everybody, you know what I mean? [he laughs]

G – ...going back to the hospital analogy you were making.

S – Yes [he laughs and accentuates the confirmation]

G – Now, very straightforward, how much do you think that attendance of musical services contributes to the definition of an African-American identity?

S – A lot, I mean, the simple answer is just, a lot, you know, uhmm. I think it goes back to slavery in the United States, uhmm, a lot of time the music was a way of communicating when we couldn't talk, we were in bondage. And so music for us is very healing, when, when we can't sometimes. And sometimes as a race you go through some... You...I think our race, just in general, is still dealing with a lot of pain for four hundred years of slavery, period. And it's been a long time since then, but and then racism, of course, and the Civil Rights Movement was only forty years ago, and so, with that, you know what I mean? With that we experience a lot of different issues in our community rather than other communities, uhmm, not... I wouldn't say that we're the only one experiencing but rather than the caucasian community we experienced a lot more. and so there's an internal battle, and a very deep, deep pain that it is still within us at times that we have to overcome. And mu... And sometimes nobody can talk that out of you, sometimes you just have to be... You have to let the music just heal you, sometimes the music, sometimes the sound of the piano or the thump in the base drum or the guitar is... Explains your emotions just enough, you know what I mean?

G – Well, I understand what you say, which is actually very precise, and specific. I actually asked you all that I wanted ask you for now; I had one more question, which is “why do you go to service?” but I feel like you've already answered that.

S – [he laughs]

### **Interview 3 – Rev. Michael Wortham; March 23, 2012**

GIORGIO – One first thing I'm trying to understand is whether or not there is any kind of fixed, structured liturgy in Baptist churches, or it is more a church by church thing.

WORTHAM – What I would say is that a key note about Baptist churches is that in the Baptist denomination all churches are autonomous. So that's a key thing to note, because that means that each church individually can stand on his own, so there's not necessarily any connection with Catholic denomination, where you have your Pope, your cardinals your bishops, you have your structured hierarchy. You have that within the Methodist denomination, United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal, so, they have a structured denomination, where you have, it's almost like a certain protocol you have to follow. But with Baptist churches, with us being able to stand on our own, we are able to set our own structure, our own protocol. And if choose to come together into a national body, like, I say, under, you have the National Baptist Convention, Progressive National Baptist; in all those thing we would all come together, but even then we still all stand alone. So, with that, playing the worship, playing the liturgy, every... Ebenezer is probably a little different from Wheat Street now, Wheat Street Baptist down the street, or New Birth down the corner; and so with that, I can't say that this is standard liturgy for all Baptist churches, because of that one notion that we are all autonomous, and so every service may look different from each on, but I'm pretty confident to say that everyone has a base structure that they go off with. So we have a base liturgy that we'll follow, and so know that we're gonna do prayer in this moment, we're gonna sing a song this moment, we're gonna have our welcome at this moment, we're gonna have offering at this moment, but even then, but with it though, there is still the flexibility, and I think a lot of that, a lot of times people may attribute it to the black churches where that flexibility, I would say the “holy spirit effect”, let me say it like that, the “holy spirit effect”, where's that even if we have a structure, we're still flexible enough to know that, God cn do something different in the service. That a move can happen, where if, ok, we may not need to sing this song, because there's a certain spirit in the church, and we may need to move here now at this moment, or we may need to do this in this moment.

G – So that, something that you've previously planned it's not suitable anymore, and you have to arrange so that it fits.

W – And in the end, almost, that's a responsibility of the clergy, the celebrant or the prosaetor of service, and that's usually the senior pastor, and he would kind of know, ok, I might wanna do it a little bit different here, and that's something almost, that he'll know, and then is something that we would all catch and kind of we just go with it. And so, I think that's the flexibility too, because we have our goal, our goal at Ebenezer is to do service in an hour and a half, so we know we're gonna have service at 8 am, we want to be done by

9.30; service starts at 11 am, we wanna be done by 12.30, that's just our usual set. First Sundays may roll on, because we know we are gonna do communion and everything... some special services, like, church anniversary special days, it may run longer. But, just as a standard base, we know that this Sunday, from 11 to 12.30 we wanna try to have the best possible worship that we can in that time span. Now, we have our structure, but then if something happens within that structure, that's fine, but even with this, we know our base structure is 11 to 12.30, and we know that's our base that we wanna work with, and we know that we have our skeleton worship plan for that Sunday morning.

G – I've always wondered, after the senior pastor sermon, then there is what you call Invitation, and I've noticed that during Invitation you always call on people who are residing in Atlanta but who do not have a church somewhere else, or in Metro Atlanta, to become part of the church, and this ties up with what I've experienced at the beginning as a visitor, like I've been asked where I come from and whatnot; it appears you have a specific attention to visitors, and I was wondering whether this concept of “holy spirit effect” you referred to is specifically tied to the possibility that non-members might get to feel at some point that they are now going to be part of the church in a way that is different from a standard way of behavior, or it is something that applies more broadly to the entire congregation?

W – It's really just a call to the congregation as a whole, so whether it is visitors, members, or you've just been coming, like you are a regular attendee, but you just haven't decided to join and become a member of the church; but it's a general invitation for all to say that... well we wait on two answers. First call it's to say that, ok, if do not have a relationship with Christ, and that's first and foremost, it's like, that's the reason we preach [laughs]. To convey the gospel and to see who, uhmm, I guess for lack of better words, who wants to become a part of the journey of the Christian family, in the longest hope of the universal church. So, not necessarily Ebenezer specifically, but to say, if you wanna accept Christ there's your opportunity. If you wanna accept God, and have that relationship, this is your time. And then a follow up with that, would be, ok, you say you got the Christ part down, you accept Christ but then you don't have a community, a community play that you link with, yet. And so if you feel that Ebenezer is that community for you, then this opportunity is for you as well. And then I believe both of those, even then it's a spiritual factor as well, because preaching, and even worshipping itself, it can drive a lot of emotions. And so, you can have a lot, especially depending if you feel like that song is directly impacting you. Like, I remember one time when I was growing up, and I know the pastor in my home church in Alabama, he preached the sermon, and [pause], it touched me, it touched me and I found myself going into the front of the congregation and said, “God is calling me to preach!”. And is one of those moments, when is like, it can cause and flip so many different things; so that spirit is like, you can feel that thing tucking at you, and say like “ok, what am I supposed to do now?” So, sometimes people then come on, sometimes people won't, but it is a very spiritual moment, because you have to be very sensitive. Because I've also seen sometimes, senior pastors where they know that there's somebody that is supposed to come,

and they'll sit there and linger. Because it's like an intimate connection, because it's almost like you're outing yourself. And that spirit, that spirit factor it's like "ok, we can..." He just kind of knows it, and it pours it, and it draws me, and sometimes it may not draw me that Sunday, but then they keep coming... and it's just like... draw them in, draw them in. So I think that a spiritual factor plays in that moment too, the way it is, when the word of God goes forward, when the spirit touches... 'cause even from the beginning when we talked of the invocation, invocation is when we're inviting God into the space: "Lord, be with us as we worship, be in this place," so he's asking God to be among us, so the thing is it moves from just being somebody saying a speech, and having people coming and say "I agree with the speech"; but then it goes to "the word of God has gone forth, and the spirit is in place, and now God is reaching to try and pull his people to him." And so that's where it becomes... it's less of trying to rally a crowd, and see how we can build the membership and get as many people to join the church as possible, to "let's see how we can... how you could come to be a part of the fellowship, so we can help you grow and become who God wants you to be. And so I think that's how all that, I guess, ties in together.

G – Well, then, to you, as a pastor, how much do you think that music contributes to the actual possibility of arranging a service that has the qualities to draw out that "holy spirit effect"?

W – Well, music is vital. Very important. And I was thinking even when David played the harp, and it drove the spirit out of him, because music was so soothing. Music has a way of... especially in African-American context, because music has been just a part of our history, for as long as... just the beat of the drum! If you would have played just a beat out of the drum, people are going to start tapping their toes, clapping their hands above, because that beat it drive something, and so then when those songs are being sung and you find a way to connect with the song, it has a way of driving emotions of raving; it can get you to a place, and even for the preacher, that song before we preach is a very important song. I like, really, the music throughout the worship, but also that song right before we preach, I know at least for me is a very critical moment, because it's almost like it gets me that extra divinity into, because, I mean, even now I can feel myself getting excited when I think about some of my favorite songs, because the songs are almost able to tell a story. Because the thing about a song to is that, you don't have a lot of words to say what you wanna say, so you have to be very intentional with your words and how you say them. And so with a good song that accompanied by a good music, a good melody, good notes, it can have a way of driving emotions and find the words to say those things that a lot of times we are not able to articulate. And so I think that's the power of music. A lot of times people quote songs' lyrics just to be able to say: "this is what I'm trying to say." You know, we've come this far about faith. "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!/O what a foretaste of glory divine!/Heir of salvation, purchase of God," and so, when you start hearing those songs, and the image of the song, and how they put the words together, it can drive emotions... sometimes, you could probably do a whole worship service with nothing but music, and even without

preaching you can have a great worship service, because that's how powerful music can be in the worship.

G – When You say right before preaching you mean...

W – Right before the sermonic selection, the sermon.

G – In a way you are implying that the worship service follows a structured planning done beforehand – for instance, the choice and positioning of songs throughout the service – so, I wonder, what is the principle you follow to musically organize service? And who is directly responsible for the planning?

W – Uhhh, our Director of Worship and Arts, Keith Williams, and I know he is the one that plans the music with the, but I'm pretty sure that during a lot of times you will find that there's a lot of communication between the minister of music and the pastor, because even then, let's say, as a matter of fact for the youth day service per se, the song before the service was "Man in the mirror" from Michael Jackson, and my sermon tied into that song. And so, a lot of times you can find ways to... [pauses] the best worship service I've seen is where the music and the preaching go hand in hand, because even with the music there is a message that wants to be conveyed and with the preaching there's a message that wants to be conveyed; and so when you're able to have that singular message go through the whole service, then it ties everything together, it makes everything powerful. And so that's the intention while we're leading worship, knowing that this is the directions we wanna leave, these are the things we wanna teach, this is the direction we wanna lead the church in, and so let's see how we can accompany that musically so it doesn't seem like service is disjoint, so you have this song over here talking about faith, but we are talking about love on Sunday, this Sunday. And so we are trying as best as we can... I'm not saying it happens every week [laughs], but as best as we can plan to be able to say this is the theme, these are the things that we wanna present. And so, I think that intentionality is there because, just making sure that... not necessarily to drive certain emotions, but to make sure to drive a concept, or an idea that we want the people to be able to grasp with the service.

G – So, when it comes to songs, and music in general, you are saying that it's more about the content, the message, than, for instance the musical or performing style? I'm asking this in particular because I've noticed that most of the time songs that are performed for the call to worship tend to be more jubilant and exhilarating, while those that are performed around the inasmuch offering, or sermonic selection tend to more reflective and inner-oriented – even if this does not necessarily happens every Sunday.

W – Oh yes, because even if going to the sermonic moment you wanna set a tone, and let people know, ok we're getting... it's almost, like, a lot of times in black churches that sermonic moment is the highlight, that's the climax of service. So we building, we're building, and with that sermonic selection is the beginning to set up them all, so that you know, ok, this is it, we're about to hit that moment. So it's almost like a song of preparation,

a song to help everybody getting a note that the word of God is about to come forth. So it's almost like a settled, settle the spirit, get the mind and body and soul for the word that's about to come forth. And then, even for the preacher being able to build, to have that kind of, almost, have that reflective song, that reflective music to where's like, ok, you're able to get up, and say like, ok, we're ready to preach, now, we're ready to hone in and go in and see what God has for us in this moment right now, and in this space and in this time. And so, even with offering, offering might be more jubilant, and so, ok, you wanna have everybody upbeat, because, I mean, that's the reality of church too, we gotta be able to have money too [laughs] to do the work of ministry. And so a lot of time we know that to be most effective in some areas of worship, there's a certain tone that has to be in each and every area. Now, one might say, is it like that every time? No, of course not, but for the most part, that's probably what you're gonna find... and a lot of that comes from having a connection with your congregation too. And that's another key thing, too, knowing your congregation, and knowing what your congregation needs at the moment, what songs they may need to hear, what things they need to hear, songs to uplift them, some songs they need to tannish them. So it has been having a keen awareness of the congregation as well too.

G: And why do you think it's important to keep always up the connection with the congregation? To you as a pastor.

W: Oh, because, for me, as an assistant pastor at the church, is to be able to effectively preach to people I have to know what people are going through. I have to know their highs and their lows, I have to know their success and defeats, I have to know all. So I have to be aware of those things to know that, ok, this is what we're dealing with in this house. And then too, you can preach directly into your house, but even then the subject is broad enough to apply to all, by being able to know that so you won't be preaching arbitrarily, but preaching with a purpose, preaching with passion, knowing that, ok, this is, these are the ones that God's placed before me during the word's choice. I've been engaged with them, so I'm not oblivious to what's going on, so I'm not preaching at Ayers Avenue when I need to be on Auburn Avenue preaching. So, that's the importance of the connection with relationship with the congregation, because everybody can go up and give a speech. President Obama can go up and give a speech now. But if his speech is not connected with the audience and base that is in front of him it doesn't matter. So it is part of being a preacher: if I'm not understanding what my audience and my base needs, what the congregation needs, and I just preach arbitrarily, everybody is going rogue [laughs].

G – Do you think your congregation puts a specific relevance or significance to their belonging to this congregation? And if so, in what ways might this affect your preaching and the planning process itself of a worship service?

W – [He nods] oh yeah, and I think, because I guess even speaking from an Ebenezer perspective, a lot of members, especially a lot of members that have been in here, probably, a part of the church since they were little, they have a special affinity for the church. Because it moves from being just Ebenezer Baptist Church a place that I go attend Sunday service, but it moves to let me see if I can be involved in the life of the church. And so, I believe a progression begins to take place if people want they become a part of the worshipping community. So when they become a part of the worshipping community, and then at that moment they decide to say, ok, I wanna become more intimately involved, whether it is joining the choirs, joining the dance ministry, joining community outreach... to find a way to deeper their connection with their church home, and so with that church body. And I think that does help with the worship and the preaching, because it is in those moments that our connections grow deeper. It's when we move outside, and just come in on Sunday for two hours to gather, that person I'm sitting next to, I might begin to build a relationship with them. And so now we are meeting outside on a regular talking, and I might be able to talk about various issues I'm going through, what they may be going through and whatnot. They decide they, ok, we are gonna do these things, we're gonna volunteer, so it's almost like the church begin as a meeting ground, and then from that meeting ground you have various relationships that develop, and then from those very relationships, that's where as a pastor I interact with members, in various spaces, from... aside from Sundays they might come in during the week, we have, we are doing our March Madness thing tomorrow [March 24th], we got plans for some basketball and all different things together, and being able to interact on those different levels, and so when you get to meet, and people know varying levels where... they don't even come for counsel, but we just sit in talking about regular stuff, you know, who you got for the March Madness, who you got for the final four..! [laughs] We have a close connection, and it helps with the preaching, because it goes back again to developing that connection with the people. And so, that initial connection is with our church, and then once I get connected to church, let me see who is in the body of the church that I can connect with, that could be like me or not, or have some differences with and whatnot, but, begin to connect. You connect with the broader, and then begin to see what you can find yourself within the congregation, to build and deepen your connection with the church.

G – Then, apart from enabling you as a pastor to reach deeper inside the individuals, would you say that the worshipping service and the way it draws on deep emotion, allows individuals among the community to better connect between themselves?

W – Oh yeah! Worship is an intimate moment. Worship is a very intimate moment, and a lot of times when people find themselves sitting on the same... it's almost like, if I sit on the same pew every Sunday... like, here's my favorite, my mom sits in the same pew...ok, she's been sitting in the same pew as far as I... ok, I'm 26, so I know she's been sitting there at least 26 years. But the thing about it is that the people in the pews in front of her, the people on the pews behind them, alright' she's found a way to be able to develop a

relationships with everybody that she's been around in that worship space. And so, for 26 years there have been various people that have come, in those different pews and sat in those pews. But she's been able to establish a relationships, aside from teaching in Sunday school, working in the nursery doing various things; but even just having her worship space, she's been able to develop a connection with those people. You know, after a while you see the same people you're going to say hello, and then after another while you might start asking questions, you begin "ok, so where are you from?" and ta-da-da-da... next thing you know, they've become your best friends. And so I think in the worship space, the worship space can be a place where intimacy can occur, and not only between pastor and people, but between people and people. And so people might start noticing, ok, something touched my neighbor, my neighbor's crying, I got some tissues, I can come hold my neighbor's shoulder, I might not even know my neighbor at this moment, but there's a moment where we come together, I hand my neighbor some tissue and let them know everything's gonna be alright, or whatever they need, and then that could be a connection right there. The worship moment is such an intimate space, and if we're all in a mind-frame of worship, that's another key thing too. Which is that everybody come into the space with the mind set to worship. Because a lot of time some folks might not necessarily come in the space with that mindset. And even sometimes, even as ministers and pastors we got to make sure we're wearing that mindset too, because even then, when worship service begins... this is my vocation, so I might be looking, trying to...you know, scan the audience, the congregation, making sure everything is straight, you know, various things can occur, so is trying to make sure that that space of worship is key, because it's an intimate moment with God and with people. And so, communication can be strong, from people to people in congregation as well too.

G – Would you say that it would be different for you to preach without this connection being openly established?

W – Well, let me say, it helps, it helps when the connection is there, because then too, a lot of times that "spirit factor" is key, because a lot of times it can be hard for a preacher entering into a space to preach, when it seems that the spirit in that place doesn't seem right if something seems like... a lot of times people like to use the language now that the "atmosphere" is ok, the atmosphere is set. Well, I'm not too fond of the expression even though I understand what they're trying to say that a certain environment is set, and it is kind of hard to preach when you don't feel the connection with the people, when you don't feel like, ok, are y'all open with me, 'cause I' about to be open with you. Because even then, even that preacher moment is a vulnerable space too, and so if I'm gonna be vulnerable, let's share this vulnerability together. And sometimes you get it sometimes you don't, it happens along the way, it can happen along the way, because sometimes people come in with their own stuff too, they come in with their own issues and everything, and their wall may be already built, before they come in. And so, that's when that "spirit factor" is key to wake, or break some ground in chapel, some soul so worship, authentic worship can happen, and so

that spirit being able to move and flow, and so that's why God comes here, because there may be a wall, and we need to turn any wall like Jericho [laughs].

G – And how much do you think music helps build the correct spiritual environment?

W – I've come to church also on Sundays I've been up just...I didn't want to be at church. I was like "I don't feel like being here today, I'm not in a good mood, it's been a bad week, my spirit is down." And then I come in, and I hear "Great is thy faithfulness", and... I lose it [laughs]. And so, that's how music can change it, because that music it can find a way to shift your mindset, to make you... You're thinking about the worries and the trouble of the day, and then you hear something that says countless blessings named one by one, and it redirects your mind. And so, music has a way of redirecting the mind, and kind of almost, at least for that moment, helping you forget about the worries of the world. Helping you just think "ok, you know what? let me regroup". And so the right song, the right song for the right person, and there's a different for everybody, but the right songs can probably help chop some ground in where is like "ok, you know what Lord? I'm open for what you have for me at this moment".

G – One of the people I interviewed told me that basically a lot of people get more out of the singing than out of the preaching, so that there could be different sensibility to what are perceived as two different but complementary parts of the worship experience. Would you, as a preacher, be able to explain how much then do you need the music?

W – Oh, but for that very point! [laughs] Because, the thing is that as a preacher I can't be naive to think that everybody is coming to hear me. I mean, it is not even about me from the beginning; so the thing is that as the preacher I have to be clear about that from the gate, knowing that music and preaching we are a tandem. We go hand in hand, when it comes to that worship service. We can go hand in hand because there are some folks that music can manage to stir them. I mean, I've heard where preachers that music was so powerful in service that they didn't preach, because the music did enough. And that goes back to being in tune with the spirit. Because a lot of times preachers can get ego, preachers can get ego and say "ok, the music is good, well, what happened to me?". They can get jealous of the music, they can affect their preaching, they're gonna try preach harder, do more than what they intended, because they wanna put themselves up over the power of music, and that can vice versa happen too, that mus...maestros and musicians can get jealous of the preacher, and try to overshadow the preacher and whatnot. But there has to be an understanding between the music and the preaching, they were a tandem. There may be a point to where "You know what? We're ready to preach now. I know that we have five songs that we are ready to sing, and that we got laid out, but you know what? Is preaching time now because the moment is here right now. But then the moment might come... I never forget about one morning I had to lead on another worship, and the priest team was singing, and I mean, they were singing good, and I was just like "OK, keep singing!" [laughs] Because they don't keep singing they would just set an atmosphere so grim inside. So, you know what? Sing! Keep

singing! And I remember another time too, and it was like, the organist was playing and he just was playing good, and I was like "Keep on playing", because the spirit is just like "this is what we need at the moment". And like I said before, I know of pastor who would stand aside, the word has gone forth, there's no need for me to add onto it because the word has gone forth, and so, let me be in tune with spirit. And so that's what's important, not allowing egos to hinder the spirit of God moving into place. And I think that's the key thing to it all. This worship moment isn't about me as the pastor, the choir, the minister of music, the congregation. Worship is about what God is doing in that moment through us, as a unit in this space together. As congregation, as pastor, as ministers, as choir, what we're doing together, in this space together. And so I think that's the most important thing, if we're all clear about that, I think that's when you probably have some of your best worship, when everybody is on the same page like that. And I think to those moments when everything was just in tune, and it was... it's amazing.

G – I noticed that during sermon there often are moments of emotional climaxes that alternates with drawbacks, in the sense of the tone of the preaching; and it also appears as if you adapt your verbal and body language as to achieve this structure of alternating climaxes and anti-climaxes, which is kind of replicated by the responses of the congregation, that would sometimes get almost exalted, or quiet down. Now, is this something that you consciously construct, when you prepare a sermon to deliver?

W – I would say yes and no. Because, with preaching there is a art to preaching. Especially with preaching at a particular day, there's a certain kind of style that occurs, where you can have almost something like a rollercoaster, where you have, you can have like... As a matter of fact last Sunday, with our guest preacher. It was kind of funny when he began, as soon as he began speaking I knew exactly how the sermon was gonna go. Where you started out kind of monotone, very low monotone, but then I knew, he was gonna build, and as he gets to that climactic moment, 'cause that climactic moment we call it celebration; the celebration is where you give me your hope, when you... 'cause a lot of times the goal of sermon is not only to encourage, to reproach, to correct, to encourage; we do all those things, but then you wanna leave them with hope. You wanna leave them with hope that things can get better, things will be alright, this is how, this is what we can do, this is why we have hope, this is why we can get to you. But that goes with like, okay, we're gonna start here, and we're gonna keep going, going, going, build, celebrate, and then come in and lay in the play. [laughs] Those who would preach would call this, uh, oh, I forgot the expression and I don't wanna mess it up, but I'm gonna paraphrase it, I'm pretty sure if google it you're gonna find it, but it's something to the effect where you get up, you strike fire, something else, then you sit down [laughs]. And so with that, I think the thing about that technique is, is... because really preaching in a real sense is almost like storytelling, and so when you're telling a story, you oughtta have, the start you gonna have when the plot is set up, and then you your climactic moment, then you might come down, and In a good story, you might have a couple of climaxes, just depending on the style. But then, so that's

where style comes in to play, but then the other part is a lot of times, when you get in that moment we'll get in a whole another place, we as preachers. I like to joke around it and say, uhm, let's say if I'm preaching or somebody else, I'll say, "ok he's in there now", and when I say he's in there now he or she, they're in a whole another place. They're no longer preaching, God is speaking through them. Because I can honestly say there have been time when I've preached when I don't remember what I've done when I preached; so I don't remember my mannerisms, I don't know what I did with my hands, sometimes I might not even remember what I said. But I know that I preached. And so then I go back and look at it, or listen to the sermon, and I'm gonna be like "Okay, I did that? Why did I do that?". But it gets to a moment where we... 'cause we go to seminar, we go to school, we learn the technical aspects of preaching, we'll learn how to construct sermons, we all know we don't wanna get to a climax too soon because we know if we get the congregation up too soon, it's almost like they're energy is drained where they can't come back even for the next round. And so it's being able to know how to move through your sermon, and so you don't get to a climax five minutes into a sermon, you know [laughs]; but then also too knowing when not to preach one hour. And so being able to know how to use that structure, but even in the midst of that structure, knowing that I'm open to what God is gonna do to me in that moment, because even then, I may have my structured sermon in front of me, and then I'll begin to add, certain things may be add, I have my structure, I know what points I wanna raise, I know what ideas I wanna to preach, but then again, open and available to know that, okay, that God has a move ahead of me. I remember this one time I had to preach and I took two sermons with me, 'cause I wasn't sure which one I wanted to preach, because were good, but... and I was like "Lord, just show me what to preach. And then I walk out there, and I preach. But even then, is being able to know, ok, having the courage not to be rigid, not to be stuck to my paper, not to be stuck to my manuscript, knowing that, ok, once I'm in there, that God gotta move, gotta work. So I think that's why I said both things were, like, we do have a structure, but we're just not go preaching on the wind. By the time study has taken place, time that had been putting into preparation that have been made, so we have that sermon, but then once we get in that moment is being open to know that God even still move, even with what we have prepared. And so I think that, I hope I gave you an idea...

G – Oh, absolutely. I also see a connection in this regard with the organization of the overall worship service, not just the sermon, in particular in the way music is introduced, and patterned throughout the service as if sometimes building or emphasizing climaxes, like for instance with "Total Praise" that is sung in the end at benediction, after invitation. Could you tell me a bit about that?

W – Well, I would say that I don't know the full history, but I know that when I came, and I came at Ebenezer in 2007, I joined membership February 2008, and then I was drawn in as an intern in...as a matter of fact always in 2008, and then from there I moved on to pastor in 2010, but, uhm, when I got here that was kind of the closing benediction song, like this is almost like saying, almost like a "go on forth" song, as you go forth, you know "Lord I will

lift my eyes to the..." [laughs], oh, I gotta sing it now, uh, [sings] "Lord I will lift my eyes to the hills... You are the source of my strength, You are the strength of my life, I lift my hands in total praise...", so it is really, uhm, almost like a song, as we would wanna say when we leave this place, Lord we give you our total praise. So it's almost kinda like a final charge, in a sense, and this, as a congregation, when we leave this place, our total praise will be given to God, in all that we do. So this is kinda culminating moment saying that as we go forth from here, this is what we're going to do. And so it's like the benediction is that final blessing, that final blessing to go forth. Because a lot of times I'm not even sure if we've thought all the way through, because now I don't even think about it, but with us clasping hands together is almost a covenantal relation saying that all of us together as a whole, we're coming together, connected together saying that as we're gonna part from this place, with this final blessing that we're getting saying that we're gonna give our total praise to God in all that we do.

G – And would it be different to give this "total praise" without the music?

W – Yeah! Because even then, that's a song, so it's like... is one thing reciting those words, but it's another power singing together. And even and specially in a African American context, with, uh and even without the historical location here at this church, with the Civil Rights movement, everything, and how when they were marching and singing songs together, they did, I would say, move with songs together... going back to slavery, when they sang their songs to encode their language, to tell this is where we're gonna move, this is what we're gonna do. So, with music being that, almost like the tie that binds everybody. And so that moment together when we're all, visitor members, , whoever you are in this place, we're all here together, so... We can take out the label of member, visitor, pastor, all those labels don't matter at this moment, 'cause we're all here together as one, one body, and this is what we're gonna do together as a body. So I think music sends a stronger symbol, it sends a stronger message, rather. Uh, I hadn't thought all the way through that I was thinking about that, that's alright, that's alright, I preached! [claps hands] I preached!

G – Okay, so, I noticed that there's always a very philologically coherent interpretation of the gospel that is relevant to the reality. You analyze the words, and sometimes use them to bring about intellectual interpretation that might be out of the text, or only indirectly underlying, in a way that is very different and far from, for instance the Catholic fixed, allegoric interpretation of the gospel. So is this done to more effectively reach the congregation, or is it just the only way it could be?

W – I'll say it like this, this is something that has been happening for a long time, because even then, even if we look in the biblical text, the prophets were preaching to the people during that time about what's happening in their time. And so, even with Christ, Jesus was preaching, Jesus in his parables was giving them situation that they knew and understood, you know. So they understood all those things because he was talking to them in ideas and images that they saw and do. And so the thing about it is... my former pastor back in

Birmingham, on day he told me when I first accepted my callings and everything, he said “One thing you wanna do is try to be able to bring, uh, bring Jerusalem to Birmingham”, that’s what he said to me, “You’re gonna bring Jerusalem to Birmingham”. So the bible doesn’t become that abstract book that we look at, but let’s make this book real to people, let’s make the principles and ideas that are being taught, that are being laid out in this text, let’s make these things real for people so they can see. So even with the “mirror”, for example. So when you look at a mirror, you never look at a mirror the same again. Like, okay, I gotta remember the image, my image of God when I look in his mirror. And so being able to tie the things that they see on a regular basis, so we can begin to trigger memory, and then also too to tie things so we are like, okay, let’s see now, if we’re gonna talk about love and justice in the world, so God is talking about justice and when Jesus said “I come to free the captives, set the oppressed free”, he said all these different things, but what do they mean in 2012? What does it look like in 2012 for us? And so is being able to translate the text over time, and so that’s something, that’s the tradition we see in biblical text, and even now, because is one thing to preach abstract ideas, but how do we make these abstract ideas a reality? So, I can tell you to love your neighbor, but does loving your neighbor look like in 2012? So being able to make it tangible, that’s important, because now the word becomes, I guess in a real sense the word becomes flesh. The word becomes reality. So we move from ideas to concrete concepts, and as a matter of fact I’d been in front of silent language ministry, and they were saying how when they’re doing signs is easier for them to be able to sign when we’re speaking in a concrete language. So we’re not as abstract with our words that when we’re concrete with our words, so they’re able to communicate better. I think in a light manner is like when you’re preaching you can’t get too lofty because, that loftiness they might not get that. I know what eschatology, and all those seminar terms I could bring in, but that won’t mean anything to them, or for most of them at least. As an old preacher would say, make it plain, make it plain and simple so that people can understand, so they can be able to do the deeds that God is asking them to do. And so, I think that’s what we have to do to make it so people can see it. So that’s something we’re intentional about, because is illustrative, where you’re able to paint the picture so people can see it.

G – Then, considering the music that’s performed in the church, and especially contemporary gospel, as it moves into popular culture from its classical gospel and spiritual tradition, would you say that this concurs in the same way in the process of “making it plain”?

W – Oh yeah, I go with that, because, even with the music, music really is an expression of the reality that we’ve experienced, and so with music, people are able to articulate those terms in music, and you can get it into three to four minutes? Oh, people love it, it’s perfect, it’s perfect because it’s able to distinctly say how I feel at the moment, and able to paint a picture that helps me describe how I feel at the moment. And it’s never out of place, at all, and I guess it goes with the sacred and secular bit, because, even for myself, I struggle with

the term sacred and secular for the simple fact that I believe that it's almost, even the secular can be sacred, 'cause even if we look historically at how gospel music was formed, was found and formed, 'cause the great Thomas Dorsey would be the father of gospel music and he was a bluesman, he played the blues, so he found a way to take that blues... when he wrote "Precious Lord" that was his blues. I mean he wrote that song just after his wife died giving birth to his son, I mean, and all he could do, I mean, he painted his blues. And he turned to gospel! And I think that that, even in an African American context, that's where, when we try to separate the two, but it's like no, because with music, we're so intertwined with it, because in real music is giving nothing but expression to my experiences. So my blues, that's a reality, when I talk about what was going on with Judas, that's a reality, the same with my "Precious Lord", is a reality too. The same now here with hip-hop music... I mean, for me, I love hip-hop music, and really, I probably listen to more hip-hop than I do contemporary gospel music, because for me that's what I identify with. I can find a song and say, man, that song is really speaking to me right now. I'm hearing God clearly through this song, because I never found that expression...and I may see a song, or a hymn, or a bit of contemporary gospel that is too tough connecting with. And so I think that's with the music, it's just about that expression, and so music is gonna always have his place in worship because is an expression of experience. Preaching is an expression of experience. And so when we bring all these expression of experience, and I'm praying out and singing "Lord, this is the experience I'm going through, and we're calling you to help us with this experience".

G – So you're saying that anything could be perceived as sacred, as long as it ties with the inner expression of experience?

W – Well, I'll say it like this, the word says that "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof" . So, the earth is the Lord's: every single day here is sacred, because it comes from God. So is there really such thing as secular if all things come from God? And the thing is, even with Moses in the wilderness, he turned a mountain into a sanctuary, he said "You are on holy ground, take off your sandals, 'cause I'm here". And so God is present, if God is present all things are sacred, and then if you say that is our mission, and he's present everywhere, if we say those things, it really just cause us examine our view of God, our view of those things... 'cause really it is almost like a line of demarcation a lot of times, where, ok, if you're secular you're over here, you are these kind of people, if you're sacred you're these kind of people. Secular people do these kind of things, sacred people do these kind of things. But then again, sacred folk do the same kind of shit that secular folk do, secular folk do some stuff secular... so, is it really? So we talk the opposite when at the end of the day, God says the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof! So it all comes back to God, so God can work through anything. Then why no piano in church? Why no piano or no Hammond? I mean, we got arsonists of churches, why no piano? So that's what we got, we've got a bass guitar and a lead guitar, and they all sound really good to me all Sundays.

G – Would you say that this process of abolition of boundaries between secular and sacred is a process peculiar, or particularly relevant within Black churches?

W – I could argue that, because of the Africanisms that we brought over with us. I mean, and I can say that clearly, through Christian history, Africa played a major part in the development of Christianity. But talking about only those Africans that came to America, they brought those Africanisms with them. And so, some of them may have been introduced to Christianity, they took what they were introduced and in a real sense turned it on its head. They melted their culture with the things that they saw best out of Christianity, 'cause, I mean, we got some people forced down to obey a master, and they saw, hey, wait a minute over here is telling me I could be free, so I'm gonna go with the free part. And they take those into what they called the invisible church. So when you're talking about the time of slavery, when they'll go into the churches, they'd have slaves in the balcony, and everybody else in the lower level, and then when they'll leave church, what they'll do is they're go and their own circles, do their ring shout, have their own church, do their own services. And so with that they brought in their own dancing, they brought in the drum, they brought those things that they were supposed to discard from their home, because, the thing is a lot of time we fear what we don't know. And so with the slaves, ok, we gotta take away their drums, so they can't communicate, we're gonna take away their language so they can't communicate, we're gonna take away all these things that are them. So, what we do is we hold on what we have, and what we know, and we tie it in with what we're getting, and try to make the most out of it. We make the most of it; like I said they give us scraps, we made soul food. And so, that's what we're talking about we can destroy that line, because what deems what's sacred versus secular? Who has the knowledge to say it? And so, I guess, when we look at the westernized version of Christianity, like, we do find what people say this is, you have this and you have this. When you had the great migration of African Americans from the South moving up to the North for industry, you had churches in the North that had a high anthem, a high liturgy, and they had their line saying, well you can't bring that stuff from the South, you can't bring that shouting, and all that extra stuff. We wanna be pristine, we don't wanna be that church you wanna be. So you haven't had those straws, but the thing is it can eliminate the very idea of worship, because it's almost like I got a double personality, I come in church and I try to be all sacred, and then I go into this world where I'm dealing with all the secular all the time, so... how do I go between these two things? Am I living a double life? Let me bring in my full experience, and why can't I see that in my full experience? Why is it that I just have to have put something that is beyond me in a box? How can I do that? I have no place and no right to do that. Who says I have to worship in this, in this...? We got a nice sanctuary. But why not in the AP Theater? Why not in the drycleaner? Why is it that there are, uh, I guess, status quo that I have to follow? Who made the rules? You, see, it's just to go back to that line, 'cause I'm bringing all my experiences in here, and let me bring all myself here. And I think that's the thing too, because when we begin to cross those lines, people are not gonna like it that we cross those lines. And why can't we? We're trying to reach the people, right? So I need to go where the people are.

G – Do you feel as a preacher that you need to remember this to your congregation, or does this come naturally out of the assembly?

W – I think you gotta remind of it. Because a lot of times we come in... I mean, we don't come into church as blank sleeves... so we always come in with our ideas and preconceived notions about what church should be, how church should be, and a lot of times is learned, is not even something that we include in our path, or develop on our own, but is something that has been taught: this is what's appropriate in church. And I do feel there's some things that are appropriate and inappropriate for the church... I mean, there are boundaries and limits, to everything, but even then there is a point where we have to remind "look, y'all this is why we do what we do"...because God is always moving and doing something new and different. When we look at Abraham and Jacob, they built their own altars...soon enough, we move to a point where they have, when they left Egypt, they had the tabernacle. So now we have a corporate worship, we finally see corporate worship in the church; then we move from this corporate tabernacle, 'cause now we gotta a home, so now we're gonna build a temple. And now we got this temple, we do finally fare well, we get in trouble with God, oh, we gotta go to exile, so temple's gone! So now we got our various cities, where we're in exile, and there we got our synagogues. We come back, we build a temple, but now we spread out a little bit, so we got all these different synagogues, now. We move from the synagogues, then you bring on Christian churches, you got house churches, then we got a cathedral, then after a while we got a whole different... so, don't you see, it's almost like, it's a progression the church has been growing, and moving and progressing, and really...[laughs] this is almost funny what I'm saying, but the church has been evolving...

G – Oh, I understand the irony...

W – [laughs] But the church has been evolving. And the reason's God moves and adjusts all the time. And it don't mean to be able to know what God's moves and adjustment will be all the time, but being able to move, and adjust and adapt to what the times are. To what's taking place, how things are happening. And so the thing is now, if we don't adjust we can become obsolete. You're not doing a disservice to the church by evolving, but the thing is you wanna be able to reach people where they are, speak to people where they are. And that's why Christ said "I didn't come here to disrupt the law, I came to fulfill it, I came here to help y'all through these days, so we're gona do it a bit differently". And that's the evolution. So the thing is, are we so in tuned with God that we're moving and evolving, as God would want us to do? So that becomes our question, and that's what we have to remind our congregation. Look, don't get stuck in your ways, don't become a Pharisee, or a Sadducee because there's a structure that no matter you wanna keep in place. Because that's just a structure, and the world will keep on moving, anyway.

G – I mean we all know about Martin Luther King, and his influence in American, and world history, but what is interesting to me is how this particular neighborhood where Ebenezer and the King family happened to be was so peculiar and probably of a great

significance in producing the very events that ultimately led to Civil Rights movement. By that time this was apparently the only truly autonomous African American community in the South...

W – Well I believe that actually Big Bethel AME down the street, I believe they're the longest organized African American congregation in Atlanta. But Wheat Street has a strong history, with their former pastor William Borders. As a matter of fact his granddaughter Lisa, she was president of the city council...I know she did run for mayor, she didn't win, but, great woman, great phenomenon, they had a long standing history in Atlanta, along with Ebenezer, so all around this quarter... The whole Sweet Auburn district, this was one the most thriving district at one point in the time, in the city, in the south. And then... once they built that Interstate, that changed everything. Because what it did, what the Interstate did was that it cut right through the community, and that was around the same time when you begin to have suburban flights. So they started to build Interstates...probably, well, I would say from 1950s through 1970s, 1980s, that good thirty year period, you might have begin to see some of the dynamics of this neighborhood begin to shift and change. Because what the Interstate did was it broke, it almost kind of split Auburn Avenue in half, almost, in a sense. And then what happened is that, when suburban area began to pop out, so you began to have everybody do the suburban flight, so everybody start to leave the city, and so when you leave the city, that's when the drugs start to infiltrate the streets and all those other things and yadadada. The community began to shift about those days, and now what you see you start seeing all that good gentrification, so now you got a whole... As a worshipping community is almost like how do we see ourselves in this community because, on one hand you got homelessness, violence, you got drugs, but on the other hand you got right around the corner you see some nice, beautiful homes... So it's just an interesting dynamic to see now.

#### **Interview 4 – Jacqueline Pogues; March 18, 2012**

Giorgio – So, nice to meet you, my name is Giorgio, I'm from Italy...

Jacqueline – Ok, I've been to Italy twice!

G – That's nice, where?

J – I went Florence first, then I went to Venice...

G – oh, I study in Venice, I come from Venice.

J – Oh, isn't it cool?

G – So, and your name is...?

J – Jacqueline.

G – Jacqueline, nice to meet you. So, you said you are a member of Ebenezer Baptist Church.

J – I am!

G – Ok, so you've been a member throughout your life?

J – Since the eighties...

G – Since, the eighties... And what about your family?

J – I'm from South Georgia, I moved here after school, after college...

G – Ok, what school?

J – University of Georgia.

G – So, if you've been coming here since the eighties, I guess that service is important to you...

J – It is!

G – So, how important it is, and why?

J – Oh, well, it inspires me, it gives me, uhmm, food for the week, in a sense. You know, you work all week long, and then, if your faith is important to you, Ebenezer is a wonderful place to gather strength for the week.

G – You speak of food as in terms of energy?

J – And inspiration.

G – You mean creative, fundamental inspiration?

J – Absolutely.

G – And how much this service, given the importance it has for you, relies on music, in your opinion?

J – This specific service, you know, this was the first Sunday the choir had a new director, and I think it took the service to a whole another level, and was very inspiring. You know, we have, five or six choirs here, so every Sunday they bring a different flavor. The church choir is more... they sing anthems, they sing more... some traditional stuff, they do some negro spiritual which is a mixture in a sense...[stops to greet a friend] ...uhmm, but I thought that today service was particularly good.

G – And this was after the resignation of Keith Williams as Director of Worship and all the process that...

J – Uh uh, and he was good, but this was just... it was a little different today.

G – So, Maurice Seay is no more director of this choir?

J – Maurice Seay, he does the men's choir.

G – So, this service was of particular importance to you, but how much is music important to you, in the context of service?

J – Oh, very much so, but, I mean, I've been in choir since I was in high school, or whatever... And I sing in the M. L. King Senior choir here...

G – Uhhh, and I was also wondering, do you feel a kind of sense of necessity to come to service? Do you think of it as if it is necessary for you to come?

J – It is, it is! And then of course if you're in the choir and you have specific Sundays when you sing...

G – ...and you are bound to those?

J – Uh uh... It creates a sense of commitment.

G – And do you think this relates with how people bond and relate to each other as a community, during service?

J – It does! People sing together, even if they're not in the choir, and you can feel that spirit of community bonding, through the music...

G – Ok, and how much of this community bonding do you think is relevant to the worship service?

J – It’s terribly important; in fact, the pastor has talked about the importance of music to the congregation, and how sometimes it softens people’s heart so they’re more receptive to the word.

G – Has the pastor talked about this during a sermon, or...?

J – Oh, no, that was during the rehearsals for the preparation of the revival...

G – Ok, so music as a means to get to people?

J – Uh uhmm.

G – And, can you tell me about a particular hymn, or song, that is relevant to you? I know that being a singer this might be tricky, but...

J – Oh! There’s a lot of songs! Well, I kind a combination, because, I like some of the traditional hymns, but I also like some of the more contemporary things too... Let me think of just one song... Probably one of my favorite hymn is “Come ye disconsolate”... That is a song that is, you know, is uplifting, and inspiring, and it’s a very old song. And then I like some contemporary things too.

G – Thank you. Now, I was wondering, there’s a part of the service, at the beginning, the invocation, when everybody proceeds in singing a hymn from the African American Heritage Hymnal, and usually the melody would have been kept as regular as possible. Why is that?

J – Well, it’s traditional here; other churches don’t even use hymnals, or sing any... but Ebenezer is a very traditional church, so hymns are gonna probably always be a part of the service here.

G – Yeah, because I noticed that there are a lot of hymns that are sung normally by the choir as songs, but there’s always that specific one...

J – That’s a congregational opportunity for everyone to participate.

G – Ok, so hymns are going to be heard throughout the service but there is one in particular...

J – That everybody will sing.

G – And the same goes for “Total praise”, at the end?

J – Uh uh.

## **Interview 5 – Daniel Moore; May 3, 2012**

Giorgio – So, your name is...

Daniel – Daniel Moore.

G – Daniel, nice to meet you I am Giorgio, I'm from Italy... So, you are the organ player, here at Ebenezer Baptist Church.

D – Yes.

G – And how long have you been playing here?

D – I have been here for four or five years now.

G – Ok, and you are a member of the congregation as well?

D – Uh uh, I am.

G – And, you've been a member since you started working here, or...?

D – Well, that's, yes, since I started working here.

G – What about before, you were a member somewhere else?

D – Yes.

G – So, you're not from Atlanta?

D – No, I am from DC, Washington DC.

G – So, how long did your relation with music started?

D – Oh, well, my grandfather is a Baptist preacher, so I've been playing in church my entire life. Uh, yes [laughs].

G – Would you be able to say how old you were when you actually started playing?

D – Oh, I was three when I started playing. Yeah, my grandmother was the pianist for the service, and my father was the organist, so they taught me classical music first, and then I learned to play by ear, and I started playing in church when I was about six, for Sunday school first, and then, from then on I played [laughs] the rest of my life.

G – So you've always worked as a organ player in a church.

D – Oh, yeah.

G – And you started at your family's church?

D – Yeah, with my family at my family’s church.

G – Ok, so, given all this how important is worship service for you, in general?

D – In general, I think it helps people, you know, there’s a lot of things that go on, you know, and I think people stress level is at all time high, you know, given the economy, given loss of jobs, loss of... this is kind of a place where you can step away from that reality and kind of, lift your spirit, just for a brief second. So, our responsibility as musicians, is to try to usher in that spirit, that energy. Like, you see, now, it’s just a celebration, and so everybody feels good for the moment and you don’t have to worry about the bill you gotta pay tomorrow [laughs]. So I think, that is what church is, from week to week, it conveys a message that inspires you, you know, to just keep on going, and the belief that is gonna get better, really soon.

G – You were saying “and we as musicians”, as if your role has a part in this process of bettering of the spirit...

D – Absolutely. Well, music, you think of music as if of a soundtrack to a movie, you know, when you can tell, you know, in a horror film, by the music, if the killer is about to come in the room, or you know [laughs], something like that. So the same thing is in church, if we play a certain set of chords, it makes you wanna lift your hands, if you play another set of chords, it makes you say amen, if you, you know, kind of mellow it down, and kind of go into a minor thing it kind of makes people feel an emotion that is more worship oriented, whereas more silent, you know. So, we look at our services as scoring a soundtrack, so everything that we do kind of falls in line with what’s happening in the service.

G – When you say we, referring to the scoring of service, you mean...

D – The entire band. Here we have a drummer, a guitar player, a base player, and I play organ, so, you know, I kind of let everybody know, ok this what we’re getting ready to do, you know, and we, we kind of bring it in [laughs], for lack of better words.

G – Oh, I’ve seen you a lot of times, I’ve been coming to service for the past, six or seven months, and I’ve been seeing you very often, actually, standing out, because at some point effectively, vividly, you start acting along with the music you play, a lot, as if the music you play transpires from the movements of your body and your actions. So I wonder, how much of what you play, of the chords and transition you play is predetermined?

D – It really all depends on the moment, most of it is, you know, spontaneous, you know... Every now and then, the pastor will kind of give us a heads up on what we’re getting ready to do, if he wants to hear a particular song, or if he wants to hear a particular sound...

G – What do you mean by a particular sound?

D – Well, like, let’s say, he’s preaching on praise, you know, he’ll say “Give me something upbeat”, you know, so, we’ll kind of have a moment to say, ok, what are we getting ready to do? [laughs] But then, every now and then... You know, most times, it’s really exactly what you see, you know, he is kind of before the people and we are behind him, you know, so he’ll... whatever he’s saying, if it’s coming to a prayer, I kind of try to listen, to see the first few lines of a prayer, and it’ll make me think of a song, that, you know, may have these words in it. Or, if he’s doing a sermon, and he’s talking about a particular subject, you know, I’ll go into, something, some chords, that I feel like make think of whatever he’s talking about [laughs], so, again, it’s a scoring, it’s a communication we are having indirectly.

G – So, do you also participate in the process of structuring of the service outline?

D – Yes, yes.

G – So, how much of predetermined and how much of spontaneous is there...?

D – Well, the prearranged is usually the songs that you need the choir to sing, you know, those are usually based on rehearsal, unless, once again, you know, something happens in the service, and it makes you say, ok, maybe we should do this song, instead of that one...

G – And how often something like this happens?

D – Uh, quite often actually, you know, especially after he preaches, you know, we might have planned something, but, you know, the spirit takes you in a different direction, you know...

G – I wanted to go back very quickly to what you were saying about the fact that certain sets of chords make people react in a specific way. You mean you know exactly what kind of chords produce what kind of reactions?

D – Oh, yeah, you know, it’s a kind of... I can show you... You know, if somebody’s doing something like a praise, scripture or something, you know, I may... [PLAYS #1]



You know, so that’s, more of the praise thing that, you know, we may go into. If it’s a little more soft, uh, you know, spoken word, prayer getting ready to happen, I may play, you know, something more hymn-oriented [PLAYS #2]



It kind of gets, more of meditation, you know, and then if there's a praise moment that has gone, for bringing, you know, [PLAYS #3] kind of making it loose, I might go into a minor thing, [#3bis]



You know, and that kind of bashes it for the spirit, when he'll say, you know, come on, lift your hands, you know these kind of things, you know, if he's kind of, after the sermon, if he's kind of given an invitation to Christ, you know, most times it makes me think of my grandmother, for some reason, [laughs] [PLAYS #4], you know, so I kind of go into more of a Baptist thing, you know, Ray Charles kind of, [#4]



kind of introduces you to more of a traditional sound, of you know, church. So it's, it's all a certain set of chords, I can be in the exact same key and play in a different way, and makes people feel, you know, a certain way, 'cause, you know, music is nostalgia, it reminds them, or takes them to a place that they remember. And so everything you play, kind of takes them, somehow, you know, it just takes you to that place. You know, it's like when a church mother gets up and sing, well, because she's older a lot of us will remember when our grandmother sang, and so, you know, kind of takes you to them, [PLAYS #5] [laughs], you know, that's how our grandmothers had you doing that [#5],



more Sam Cook oriented, you know, Aretha Franklin, you know, so, yeah, that's what it is.

G – And that last bit you would define it as traditional Baptist?

D – Uh uh, yeah.

G – So the transition from minor to major, or from major to minor is relevant, in your opinion?

D – Yeah, absolutely.

G – In the sense that minor gives more of a nostalgic setting, whereas major tends more to exaltation?

D – Exactly, exactly.

G – Ok, so is there a way you could point out some song or hymn that stands out for you?

D – Well, not really, again, is kind of the mood, uhmm, you know. A lot of times our pastor would quote hymns, you know like, today he quoted, “Lord I hear Showers of Blessing” , you know, so that made me, you know, [PLAYS #6] [singing/] “Lord I hear of show’rs of...” [/] [#6],



so if he does that, I try to go with him, or you know, if he'll say “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” [PLAYS #7], you know, and I try to get with him, you know [#7],



until, you know, he's kind of transitioning to wherever he's going. But, you know, in Black Church, if a hymn had to stand out, probably “Amazing Grace” , that's the one that kind of works anytime anywhere [laughs], across the world, you know, but again, it depends a lot.

G – So then, how do you with the pastor decide the repertoire, for a specific service? I mean on what premises do you decide which song or which hymn to pick and rehearse day after day? Is it just a matter of rotation, variety?

D – Well, kinda, you know, uh... it depends on a lot of things; we try to stay current here, so, there may be a particular song that's on the radio, that most people hear from week to week, and so, you know, it's kind of an excitement when we sing that song that you've been

hearing, you know there are certain songs that, again, we all grew up with, you know so, we try to pull those out too, they sometimes can be more relevant. And then you know, sometimes, pastor, you know, he'll preach on a specific theme, and so we try to find songs that fit.

G – Of course... And so, classic gospel, contemporary gospel, and spirituals, these three genre, within the Black Church music, how are they defined, how are they different? How do you, then, decide whether to go traditional or contemporary?

D – Again, it kind of depends on where the moment is, you know... He kind of leads us there a lot, the pastor...

G – So is the pastor who decides...?

D – He doesn't decide, but, you know, again, it's a scoring, so whatever he's saying, you know, we try to fit the mood, we back him...

G – And you musicians, you play with all five choirs?

D – Yeah...

G – That's a lot of work...

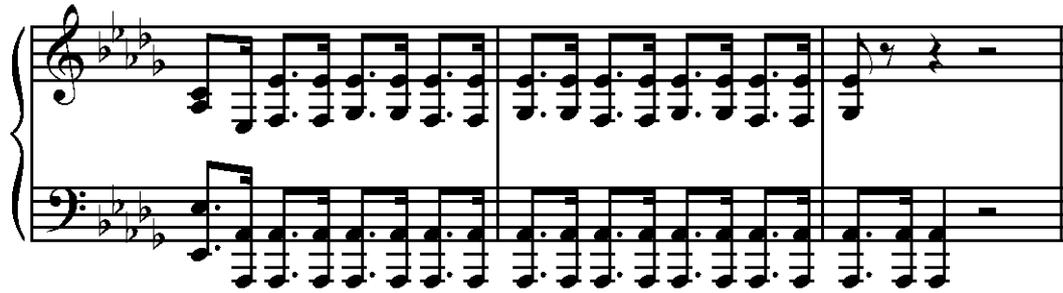
D – It is! [laughs]

G – So, we talked about how much you cooperate with the pastor in building, scoring the service. I also noticed that every service ends with "Total Praise", so I was wondering if you had an idea on why this is so?

D – Uhhh, I don't know if there is a why, you know, growing up in Black Church we've always had a benediction song; "Total Praise" was a big hit, you know, uh, about ten, fifteen years ago, uhhh, so, that's maybe why... I don't know how long they've been singing it, they were singing it before I got here, but you know, uh, you know, when I was a kid it was, uh [PLAYS #8] [singing/] "Till we meet, till we meet again, God be with you till we meet again" [/] [#8].



You know, I've heard other churches, you know, speed it up [PLAYS #9] "Taaaaa, I'll be with you..." [#9].



So, is kind of whatever is good enough to send you up, here is that, you know, sometimes the songs on the radio, you know, and right now the big song is [PLAYS #10] [singing/] “Let the church say amen, let the church say amen, God has spoken, so let the church say amen” [/] [#10],



so you know, just depends on the church, really.

G – Do you think that the relevance that the music seems to have, here at Ebenezer Baptist Church, would possibly be representative of Black Churches in general?

D – Uh, I think that, uh, is representative of, uh... your traditional church is that kind of embrace all styles of music... Most times in Black Church you’ll find a church that just does anthems and spirituals, or just does traditional gospel, or just does contemporary. You know, we try to bring it all in one because we have all kinds of people that come, you know. So, you have a few church that still embrace it, but more of the modern churches have kind of negated, you know, some of the more traditional standpoints, which is kind of what attracts more of a younger generation.

G – So, in a way, what you’re saying ties directly to the purpose statement of Ebenezer...

D – Exactly.

G – Then what’s your perception of your role here as a musician in the perspective of the purpose statement of Ebenezer?

D – Uh, well, it is, it is just that, you know, again, we try to encompass all kinds of urban based, you know, global worshipping centers, so, you know, with that global thing, and us being Dr. King’s church, you know, you may get a school from Switzerland, or, you know, or a HBCU tour, you know, so, it’s a... we have to now, uh... we have to not... we have to

kind of invite all of those different cultures into one thing, and that's, you know, for a lot churches is very difficult to do, because a lot of times, again, if you're into traditional, or if you're from Switzerland you may not know anything about Black Church, but you may know Handel's Messiah, so we have to, you know, incorporate those things.

G – Now, one last thing, trying to avoid the “general” approach, going back to Ebenezer being representative as a Black Church, would you say that there is a specific way of relating to music that the African American community have that is different in non-African American communities, when it comes to churches?

D – Ummm, I don't think it's unrelated, but I think it's a different flow sometimes, you know, but again, I've been to a couple of Presbyterian churches, as well as to Catholic churches, and, you know, I hear the same pipe organ, or some of the same songs, you know, that we incorporate here, so, they may not do the gospel things, you know, but a lot of the hymns of the church, and the traditional things are pretty much the same, you know. There is continuity, and you know, and that kind of insight is kind of what we thrive on here, you know, to try to, you know. Because, even once a year, I think twice a year, we come together with seven different churches around the community, and you know, there's a Methodist church, there's a Baptist church, there is a Catholic church, you know, like, Ash Wednesday, and, you know, Good Friday, we all come together. So, if we're gonna come together, we have to be able to incorporate all these [laughs, loudly] different things.

G – Going back to one last thing, would you say that syncopation, progression of syncopation is also relevant relating to the effects that certain musical chords, or interpretation could provoke in people?

D – Sometimes, you know, like, for instance, in the service today, you know, we went into more of a funk-like kind of groove, uh, you know [laughs], really [PLAYS #11] it was like this, we went in, you know... which kind of reminds you a praise song [#11],



so it kind of makes people vibe in a different way, you know, and again, it kind of makes us not be so stiff [laughs], and, you know, and that helps us draw in people who may not have grown up in church, you know, but they see that, you know, we can have fun over here too. We can be more effective, that's the thing.

G – So, like, the third refrain of “Total Praise” is slower than the others, but at the same time it builds up a lot more in terms of intensity, along with a concurrent increased harmonization by the congregation. Is that done on purpose as well?

D – Absolutely. Dynamics, you know. Meaning that, you know, in musical text, you know, we have a few different dynamics, like, piano, when you see a p, it means soft; then you have mezzo-piano, meaning medium soft, then you have forte, meaning loud [laughs], you know, mezzo-forte, meaning medium loud. Luckily for you, all of this is Italian, so like fortissimo! [laughs] So, you know, we kind of incorporate that in even gospel music, you know so, for people, as far as a feeling, you know, they are more attentive when things are lower, you know, and then, as the song kind of progresses and you’d be able to digest the lyrics, you know, you start thinking about what the song is saying and then how that relates to your own personal life. And then you start joining in, and so what happens is, you know, at first is just the choir singing, and then the congregation begins to sing, and then it becomes a build up until we’re all singing, and the more excited we become, naturally the louder we get! [laughs]

G – And in turn the audience gets more involved...

D – Exactly. So, you know, that is a very purposeful thing, to try to, you know, invite everybody, so it doesn’t look like a concert, you know, where we’re just singing, and you enjoy! [laughs]

G – Ok! What about then melisma, the specific act of prolonging the note? It does seem to have a powerful effect over people as well, maybe I’m mistaken...

D – No no no, that comes from my ancestors, you know, when we didn’t have instruments, you know, all the church was it was a wooden floor... uh, you know, in slavery times, they would build shacks, and they would have these wooden floors so your beat came from the heel, and you would clap, and you know, people would sing “Oh oh oh...” [SING #1]...



G – So it was all about the shackles...

D – Exactly, so that when those notes kind of happen, it brings you back to that time when your grandmother was singing “Sweet Lord, sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home, sweet Lord” [SING #2].



So you know, that, it kind of draws you in, so when we incorporate those things into more modern music, you know, not only allows the older people to participate, but it kind of, you know, some things are within you, that you can't even explain [laughs].

G – One more thing, when you sometimes with the organ sustain some specific notes, and there's that kind of suspension of the note on the organ, is there a way to call that, to refer to that?

D – Not really, uh [laughs]...

G – Because that too seems to attract a lot of participation...

D – Well, like, in church times, there were a lot of famous organists, like, uh, Twinkie Clark, Rudolph Stanfield, uhmm, and even Tom Whitfield, uh, and they are more of what we called Detroit organists, so they kind of brought that style of organ playing, uhmm... Billie Preston, coming from that church, brought it to modern music, you know, The Rolling Stones to The Beatles [laughs], so, you know, when you hear a George Harrison's, you know, "My Sweet Lord", you hear that style of organ playing, you know. So that just kind of comes from, you know, a place where we would all, you know back in the days we would all have what we call musicals, and this was a time, about 11 to 12 o'clock, all choirs and musicians we would all get together at whoever's church, and we all sing and played till wee hours in the night, and so, whatever styling that you heard different people play, you brought that, you were able to see, you know, until recordings kinda came into play. Yeah, that was it! I think they're about to kick us out...! [laughs]

## Interview 6 – Denise White; May 13, 2012

Giorgio – My first question would about your relation with this congregation? Are you a member? If yes how long have you been a member? How does it relates with your work as a musician?

Denise – Well, I'm not a member, I actually was hired here, I think it was six years ago. And I've been a choir director slash pianist here for about six years.

G – But you're not a member...

D – I'm not a member.

G – Which means you are a member somewhere else or...?

D – Yeeees, uhhh, I'm in transition. And I'm looking for my son as well, who's actually a musician as well. So I'm in transition, I'm looking for a church home that... I don't know, it's hard for me to a member where you work. Very hard. I want to join somewhere where I have nothing to do with the inner workings, where I wanna go and worship, and kind of leave. So I'm looking, I'm looking...

G – So you are still looking. That's interesting because all the people that I've interviewed as of now, especially members of the musical establishment, are or became members at some point...

D – Yeah, absolutely... Because I've done it in the past with other churches, and I found that I haven't been able to be, maybe as objective as I need to be because I'm a member, but I work there, and that just seemed to interfere for me. For me they kind of bleed into each other and it gets a little weird, so...

G – So, how long have you been practicing music?

D – Oh, wow! I think I was thirteen when I started, so then it has been twenty-three years.

G – And, did you start in a church environment or outside?

D – Well, I started outside the church environment. I had a piano teacher, and I did, we did recitals and all, and... I guess I started playing when I was eight, and by the time I was thirteen one of my aunt said to my mother "Listen, you really should have Denise play, she reads music, there's a lot of stuff that she could do, there's a lot of places that she could play at, you know, get her doing some stuff!". And next thing you know, again I was just thirteen and I had my first church job. Was at a Catholic church, "Immaculate Heart of Mary". Catholic church in Chester, Pennsylvania, and from there I've had... Catholic church, Baptist church... So yeah, I went from Catholic church to protestant church... Catholic church, Baptist, United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal. So every Sunday I was at a

different church. And not just a different denominations, but I went from Catholicism to Protestantism, you know, which was very interesting.

G – What would you say in terms of interest and differences that would you find in all these different church environments, as it relates with the music you were asked to play?

D – Oh, they vary so much, which is very interesting and might be part of the reason why I am not able to really find... you know, I feel like I don't fit anywhere! Because I was exposed to so much, there are things from each of those, uh, denominations that I pulled from that I, you know, maybe I long for. And then, it is very hard for me to feel comfortable at any one place, as far as a worship environment. That's really tough, really tough.

G – So, in general how much service is important to you, then?

D – Oh, service is extremely important. Uh, you know, I've had musician friends who say "You know, don't worry about the service, just go in and do your job", but there's no way you can do that, if you really love the music, and if God is really the reason you're here, if God had become part of the service. So it's extremely important. Absolutely. Paying attention to service will dictate what I oughtta do in service.

G – But in your perception isn't it against this openness to service not to be a member of this congregation?

D – Oh, no, absolutely not! Because you can be... You can... You don't have to be a member to be a part of the service. You know what I mean? Some people would disagree...

G – Then I wonder, how do you think this is "gathered" among the congregation at Ebenezer, or, between ministers and lay members of the congregation?

D – You mean how would they take it? I don't know, I've never said it, I've never spoke it. And no one's ever asked me.

G – But of course the pastor knows...

D – Oh, he knows about me, he knows I'm not a member...

G – That's so interesting...

D – He knows I'm not a member. But I think they like, they like to, uh... He knows I'm not a member [laughs].

G – No, I mean, of course. Wouldn't he know it would be a problem, after six years...

D – Exactly! Because he hired me, he hired me, so...

G – Of course I realize these two things, being a member and work inside a church, especially in a place like this, are two very specifically differentiated things...

D – Absolutely...

G – But then again all the people I've interviewed as of today...

D – They are all members...

G – Or they all became members at some point...

D – Really?

G – So, moving forward, how important do you think music is in the worship service, your personal opinion?

D – It speaks to a place that, uh... This sounds trite, but is the truth, it speaks to a place that only music can speak to. There are people who are... And just music being that universal language, very much like love, it, uh, for someone like me, who gets bored very easily, and, you know, listening to, you know, someone talk and pontificate, and all that, I can get all like, yaaaawn [yawns]! But if I hear some music, I'm all "Wait a minute, what'd you say? What? What are they talking about?". It speaks to me differently, and we recognize how it speaks to a lot of people. Uh, you know, I'm not the minority in here! It speaks to a lot of people the same way, and from my church experience, talking to a lot of pastors, and everybody involved, in an amazing kind of way music prepares the ear for the word. It actually almost sets the atmosphere. In short, if you come in and you're not feeling good, you don't want somebody to preach to you when you walk through the door, there's some music going on that kinda warm it up and breaks the ice. It tunes you, it does tune you, it does bring you in, it does warm you up. It really does. For some people that's all they wanna hear. I was one of those people: all I wanna hear was the music.

G – So your role as one of the choir directors is also very important in relation to the planning of the service?

D – Absolutely. I am a choir director here, so I prepare the choir, one of the choir, the Martin Luther King senior choir, I prepared them for second and fourth Sundays, and, uh, we have about five selection in the service, and I prepare, uh... we find songs that are appropriate, uhmm, so, I look at where they are in the service, and I see what's appropriate, what would work here, and... we try to prepare more than what we need, depending on how service is flowing. I might look out at the congregation and they're extremely sleepy, well, we might have to change the material, change the selection. And that's another reason why is so important to be in tune, and be in tune with service. So I might have planned to do, you know, Handel's Messiah, for offering, and it doesn't to do it there! You know, you gotta be in tune, you might need to do, uh, "What a Mighty God We..." [sings], if it has sense to do it there, you know, so...

G – And given that it is the pastors that decide, for instance, about the theme of the sermon, or the overall structure of the service, how do you relate with them when it comes to organization? Do you know things in advance, for instance?

D – Well, sometimes, sometimes, but often times no. but when it's something that is... you know, because, sometimes the pastor might not decide what the sermon is about until Friday, or Saturday, which is their prerogative, of course, but we have already had rehearsal, so we have to prepare anyway...

G – So given that you have five selection for each service, and there are two services every Sunday...

D – Oh no, but we repeat for each service...well, sometimes we don't, for the most proper times...

G – So then how many songs do you rehearse each week?

D – Oh, wow... I'd like to try to teach two songs for rehearsal, so then we have to do some recycling, because we have volunteers, people who had been at work, they've been doing stuff, they gotta get home to their families... So with the two hours of rehearsal time that we have, sometimes less than that, you don't wanna give everybody too much. So, uh, for a period of time we learn enough that we can, you know, bring some new stuff in there.

G – You said that all choir members are volunteers?

D – Yes, they're volunteers, all of them, nobody is paid, you know, except for the musicians, but none of the choir members is paid, so you have to keep that stuff in mind, they've got full time jobs, and families, and we don't wanna get anyone of them beaten! So, let's learn a couple of songs, and then everybody can go home, you know, we'll just do it more frequently...

G – And when you came here, how much do think the singers were ready to sing?

D – [laughs] They were... They needed... some shaping... I'll say that, but I'll leave it at that! [laughs] I've worked them for six years now, so... but they needed some shaping. And now the face of the choir has changed to, completely...

G – So you were here before Keith Williams, as well?

D – Yes, I was here before... everybody! I brought Daniel no, I brought the band on. The pastor hired me, and I brought the guys on.

G – Pastor Warnock...

D – Uh uh, yeah...

G – My question was not aimed at pointing out deficiencies of the choir, it is just that I'm interested in understanding how much tradition of this level of choir singing was already in place when you came...

D – I understand... Well, unfortunately there are not a lot of people who are... who will have a degree to do this. Unfortunately a lot of people end up with these jobs because they can play the piano, or they can sing... But being a choral director is completely different. Caring about the voice, knowing how to tell somebody to care about the voice, uh, know how to tell the choir how to blend in, you know, all that stuff that goes into that, you know, some of that stuff goes on unspoken when you have someone who's just a pianist, or someone who's just... well somebody like Daniel? He knows it all, he's able to do it all, but that is very, that's not common, he is the exception. And there're not many of us who can do that, you know, uh... And that's what's unfortunate, churches are in dire need of someone who's knows... who's aware, and they don't, they don't get it... So, you know, I come in, or, you know, Daniel goes somewhere, it's like "Oh!", so many people are shocked, they're like, "I have to do vocal exercises? I have to do warm ups?" ... Yeah, you do! Of course you do, and you should probably do them in the car on the way here, so we don't have to warm up for an hour when you get here! You know, that stuff is... you're supposed to do that! Yeah, you know, it should be a drill...

G – I was also wondering, how much do you think that the actual structure of the service, is actually relevant to the efficiency of service deliverance?

D – Extremely important, extremely important! I think that's part of the reason why, again, it's hard for me to join in... Because, I have my own idea of how the service should flow... and, you know, I just keep quiet, I do my job. But I have an idea of... I think there are different places... If the spirit is moving in a certain way, or it's an emotional time, it's not time for an announcement...

G – In the sense that it's not time to mix sacred and profane?

D – Exactly, you kinda have to yield to that, and if it's in the program, if it's in there to do that, then there needs to be some...it has to be malleable, you know what I mean? You can't be stiff and rigid, and "this the way it's gonna be!"... It just doesn't mean that that it should move that way. Now, it doesn't mean either that you come in and it's just free-fall "You know what? We're just gonna go...", no... But there's should be sensitivity...

G – You mean about what's actually taking place?

D – Yeah, precisely about what's actually taking place. Now it should take place next, but what is happening now? Is time for us to do choir, or is it time for us to...?

G – And you don't think that this doesn't happen as often as it should?

D – No, not as often as it should. And not just... I mean it happens in a lot of churches...

G – So, you’re not saying that is something about this specific church...

D – Exactly, I mean everywhere I’ve ever gone, and I think a lot of that, you know, comes from not being a pastor so I don’t know, but I assume you wanna keep order, you know, you wanna keep structure, so I get that, and in trying to keep that sometimes we cheat the service, we cheat the parishioners, the spirit, absolutely...

G – I wanted to briefly go back to something you said before, when you indirectly referred to some things that should be considered as sacred, or intensely spiritual, and some things that should not. Now, I’ve seen these two aspects often actually very intertwined in this Baptist church service. I come from a Catholic environment, where this doesn’t actually ever happens, it is almost unthinkable, but I’m saying this just to place me, because then I wonder what is your thought when it is the music that comes under scrutiny in terms of sacred and profane. You play hymns, or classical gospels, but you also play contemporary gospel such as “Jesus is on the main line”, which has a very profane undertone of the divine, or you play pop songs such as “Man in the mirror” by Michael Jackson. So your repertoire actually pulls from many different cultural environment.

D – [laughs] Well, interestingly enough, I’m an R&B artist, so it is really interesting that you ask me this... In my show, I sing R&B, I sing about love, I sing about my divorce, I sing about everything, and I sing about God. In that, I understand God’s place... I’m glad you said that, so I need to clarify... I understand God’s place in everything, even trying to smudge the lines between sacred and secular, or sacred and profane [laughs], and it does make me think about being so, uh, quick to call it sacred and secular, and somehow I believe God is... not somehow: God is in all of it. How do we make it work where we see God in all it? Maybe that’s the best way, I feel like ego gets in the place, and then it’s hard to see. So then when we see, if it’s not “ohhhh!” [excited shout], we feel like it’s not, but it’s still, order still is in place... I believe God wants order. Does it mean that it’s not spiritual? Are you following me?

G – Just to clarify, when you say that sometimes when you see that there’s a spiritual impromptu it should be left there and not smudged with pre-determined sequences of the services, like, for instance, an announcement...?

D – No! Absolutely! If everybody is in, is not because there’s a difference between secular and sacred, but just because the relevance of that sacred has to be kept! You water it down when you come in or you almost not even water it down, you dowse it! You get it, don’t you?

G – Yes, absolutely. I was trying to understand if there’s in your opinion a difference between secular and sacred, in the church...

D – No, it’s not about that, exactly, exactly...

G – So, is there any particular song or hymn that is relevant to you, one that stands out? Maybe it's a bit of a tricky question...

D – Oh, no it's not, there's one that stands out to me, uhm, "Alas! And did my Savior bleed? And did my Sovereign die? Would He devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?"... I know that sound weird from me, but that's called "At the Cross". I always remember that one because I... in my own writing that particular hymn as influenced my writing, that one line. You'll see it different, in some hymnals [picks AAHH], uh... oh, here it is, 264... This is relevant to me because this line right here I thought it was the worst line ever, but I wasn't able to talk about it until I became an adult, right? It was such... ah! They changed it! Some of the older hymnals, they would say "for such a worm as I"... And I'm so glad that they've changed it. That hymn changed my life, in that I said what kind of God would we serve that would even, uh, condone... we sing songs and we put ourselves down in those songs? Why? What does that mean? And I'm so relieved to know that they did, they absolutely have changed it. Because I couldn't take it! Are you kidding me? Aren't we supposed to be better? So we should dwell in that place! I say all that to say that that hymn is important to me, so that in my writing I think about it all the time... When I'm raising my kids, am I saying things to build them up? Or am I saying things to keep them there? To bully them into loving God? I know that's just strange as a reason, but that's why I remember that song, I can remember the words, that's why!

G – What can you say about "Total praise", the fact that you sing it for every benediction? Was it already in place when you came here, did you participate in the choosing?

D – It was in place when I came, and, uh... I think it's actually... It is a staple clearly in, they've actually made it a hymn [picks AAHH], they put it in the hymnal. And, Richard Small would be the composer, this amazingly gifted and anointed, touched, in that area of his life, absolutely, and ... I think is one of most beautiful pieces I've ever heard! However, I do think that, you know... I get it, I get it! I live my life, I give my life, uh, all of this is in praise of God, you know? So I get that at the end of service, we're reminded, no matter what has been said in sermon, if you don't get anything else at least you get that, you can go home with that, absolutely.

G – How much do you think Ebenezer is representative of Black Churches in regard to the music?

D – Of Black Churches... Well, of some denominations, like Baptist, or United Methodist... But not in general, not in general...

G – And do you think non-African American communities to this music, in this particular context in the same way?

D – Uh, not the same way, not the same way... You know, with my travels, depending from where you are... like... I just got back from London, and I did a show called "The Gospel

Show”, and, uh, you know, the gospel music I was singing was great, and everybody was listening, and they’d listen, and they’d wait till I was finished, and when I was done they got up and clap, you know. You know, after! It was not the same... However, when I’m doing a show, I feel like... Oh, there’s so much to say with that, because... only because I feel like I’m in church and I’m in the club, and it’s so different everywhere! Not just African Americans, it’s, uh, I mean for everybody... In the club I could sing one of my songs, a love song, and people they treat that like I’m singing a gospel song... Whereas I find that there is not this focus on it just being a gospel with other cultures, it is music. That’s when we say about that sacred and that secular’s kind of smudged, we get the same reaction and response. Am I making sense? There’s a much more empathic relation with music, in general..

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