ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: FAITHFUL GENRES: RHETORICS OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MASS MEETING

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"Faithful Genres" examines how African Americans adapted the genres of the black church during the civil rights movement. Civil rights mass meetings, as the movement's so-called "energy machine" and "heartbeat," serve as the project's central site of inquiry for these meetings were themselves adaptations of the genre of the black church service. The mass meetings served as the space to draw people into the movement, encourage people toward further activism, and testify to anyone watching that the African American community was working toward desegregation, voting rights, and racial equality. In Martin Luther King, Jr.'s words, "Through these meetings we were able to generate the power and depth which finally galvanized the entire Negro community." In these weekly or sometimes even nightly meetings, participants inhabited the familiar genres of the black church, song, prayer, and testimony. As they did, they remade these genres to respond directly to white supremacy and to enact the changes they sought to create.

While scholars have studied the speeches men and women such as King, Ralph Abernathy, and Fannie Lou Hamer delivered at meetings (Wilson; Selby; Holmes; Brooks), scholars have yet to examine how civil rights mass meetings functioned through

a range of genres and rhetors. My study addresses this absence and invigorates this discussion to demonstrate how the other meeting genres beyond the speech—song, prayer, and testimony—functioned to create energy, sustenance, and motivation for activists. Examining these collectively enacted genres, I show how rhetors adapted song, prayer, and testimony toward strategic interventions. I also examine how activists took these same genres up outside the meetings to circulate them in broader contexts for new audiences. By recovering and defining the mass meeting as a flexible repertoire of genres and then examining the redeployment of meeting genres outside the meeting, "Faithful Genres" contributes to histories of civil rights and African American rhetorics, genre studies, and histories of religious rhetorics.

FAITHFUL GENRES: RHETORICS OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MASS MEETING

by

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Introduction:

Recovering the Civil Rights Mass Meeting

> Local people have really begun to find a way they can use a meeting as a tool for running their own lives. For having something to say about it. That's very slow, but it's happening.
>
> –Bob Moses, 1964

Project Overview

In August of 1962, after a long day working as a field hand on a plantation in the Mississippi Delta, an African American woman chose to end her day by attending a meeting held in her local church, the Williams Chapel Church. The Mississippi Delta, that "most southern place on earth," served as the site where two civil rights organizations, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), were working to encourage African Americans to register to vote (qtd. in Marsh 10). Many viewed the Delta as impenetrable to community organizing and civil rights activism because of the stronghold of white supremacy located there. Indeed, its apparent intransigence was part of its appeal for SNCC leaders. They believed that initiating changes—even seemingly small ones like holding weekly mass meetings—in a place like the Delta would speak powerfully to

blacks and whites in the rest of the state (Marsh 10-11). At the meeting that night, the woman listened to a moving testimony by James Bevel, an associate of Martin Luther King, Jr. She prayed with those around her and sang along to hymns and freedom songs. When James Forman took the platform to talk about Voter Registration, the woman was one of eighteen people to raise her hand when he finished. This gesture was a first step of becoming a civil rights activist: a raised hand demonstrated plans to walk to the county courthouse later in the week and try to register.[1]

The woman in this story is Fannie Lou Hamer, a name recognizable to many today as one of the most outstanding and well-known female civil rights orators.[2] Significantly, it was at a civil rights mass meeting where Hamer took her first step toward activism: it was in the familiar context of the rhythms and cadences of her church that she joined the fight for civil rights. Throughout her career, Hamer sang, prayed, and testified in mass meetings to sustain and invigorate her activism. It was also in the rhetorical space of the mass meeting where Hamer delivered her first speeches, leveraging the genre of testimony to encourage others in Sunflower County, Mississippi, to join her in working for black freedom. At mass meetings in her hometown and throughout the state, she took

[1] I am making an imaginative leap here to recount prayers and songs as part of this meeting as full audio for the event is unavailable as far as I know. My reconstruction of the meeting is based on the work of Charles Marsh and Maegan Parker Brooks (Marsh 10-11, Brooks 36-37). While both scholars recount the importance of this meeting for Hamer's entrance to civil rights activity, neither Marsh nor Brooks mentions any aspect of the event besides the performances of Bevel and Forman, and Hamer's raising her hand in response. However, based on my examination of transcripts of other meetings in the area around on the same time, I surmise that this meeting, like the others, was comprised of more than speeches and mostly likely included songs and prayers as well.

[2] Hamer's rhetorical career is now well-documented thanks to the archival work of Brooks and Davis Houck. In their collection, *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer*, they present 21 of Hamer's speeches. See Brooks' excellent rhetorical biography *A Voice That Could Stir An Army: Fannie Lou Hamer and the Rhetoric of Black Freedom* for a nuanced and compelling look at Hamer's life and activism.

up the significant roles of mass meeting audience member and song leader. It did not take long for her activism to shift from the mass meeting to more public venues. Indeed, national civil rights leaders recognized Hamer's extraordinary rhetorical prowess and urged her to perform and speak beyond the mass meeting for new audiences (Houck and Brooks xix; Brooks 42-43). Yet, even as she moved to more publicly visible arenas, the mass meeting remained important for Hamer throughout her career as the space where she had initiated her activism and pledged her will to act for civil rights goals (Brooks 87).

"Faithful Genres" is devoted to the rhetorical space important for Hamer and so many others working to create change in the Southern United States in the 1950s and 1960s—the civil rights mass meeting. Scholars of social movement theory emphasize the significance of spaces where individuals can experience—however temporarily—the changes they seek to create (Brown and Pickerill 29). In the movement for black freedom, the mass meeting was one such space. Within these meetings, Southern African Americans enacted the freedoms they sought outside: they deliberated, adjudicated, and celebrated like the first-class citizens they believed themselves to be. The civil rights mass meeting thus provided ordinary, local African Americans with the rhetorical space and resources to engender their activism and become rhetors armed with persuasive strategies for leveraging Christian nonviolence. As such, the mass meeting indicated to everyone—segregationists included—that change was happening in southern towns like Ruleville, Mississippi, and Albany, Georgia. Simply by attending the meeting, individuals like Hamer took a courageous first step toward greater freedom and participated in the movement for civil rights.

This study is concerned with the specific meetings devised by civil rights leaders as a means of inciting changes in communities across the South. I argue that the key analogue to the civil rights mass meeting was the church service or prayer meeting of the Southern African American tradition. While it is true that leaders designed these civil rights events to blend a business and political meeting with religious worship (Holmes, Wilson), through its genre pattern, spatiality, and affective dimensions, the mass meeting bore its most significant similarities to the worship service of black churches. As Hamer's story indicates, the mass meeting pattern closely resembled a worship service: it often began with songs, moved to Scripture and prayers, included a main address by a leader and testimonies by local people, and concluded with more singing. Like Hamer, and similar to how they would act and speak in a church service, meeting participants leveraged, recast, or took up the genres of the church service. Significantly, they most often enacted these genres within the spaces of churches. In addition to the meeting's pattern of genres, then, the mass meeting was connected to African American churches spatially: the material dimensions of participating in a meeting thus compounded the associations between meetings and worship and religion. Moreover, in terms of the affective experience of the meeting, the mass meeting felt, quite simply, like church. As John Lewis puts it, "The mass meetings *were* the church, and for some who had grown disillusioned with Christian otherworldliness, they were better than the church" (qtd. in Cline). Lewis's sentiment expresses the feelings of many that the mass meeting did indeed serve as a space, like church, where people experienced the freedoms they hoped for.

My project unpacks and explores this relationship between the mass meeting and African American religious and church traditions. As the site where African Americans came together to seek access to democratic participation, the civil rights mass meeting offers us a window in to how activist collectives were constituted in cities and towns such as Greenwood, Mississippi; Nashville, Tennessee; and Selma, Alabama. Examining over a dozen meetings held in locales across the Southern United States, "Faithful Genres" recovers these rhetorical events to illuminate how African Americans leveraged powerful modes of civic participation available through the resources of the black church—especially the genres of song, prayer, and testimony. I argue that the civil rights mass meeting accomplished these ends primarily through the interwoven religious genres that comprised these events, and I demonstrate how through their regular singing, praying, and testifying, everyday people became civil rights activists: they constituted themselves as a Christian, nonviolent collective who responded to oppression and violence with a hymn or freedom song, a bowed head or bended knee, or a personal story about the meaning and sacredness of their experience as African American people in the struggle for civil rights and racial justice. At the same time, I show how these responses—rooted in Christianity and African American religion—came to be questioned, revised, and in some cases, abandoned altogether as appropriate modes of working toward black freedom.

Toward these ends, the project is organized around three key religious genres of the mass meeting—song, prayer, and testimony. After offering an overview of the mass meeting and how all the religious genres work together as a genre repertoire in chapter one, I focus on each individual genre's role in the meeting repertoire illuminating how

each one functions uniquely. I examine how song, prayer, and testimony served as sites for constituting activism and catalyzed rhetorical performances and actions throughout the movement for black freedom. While the main emphasis is on how the genres function in the mass meeting itself, in the conclusions to the chapters I explore how the activists repurposed these genres outside the mass meeting as they fought for their freedoms in other contexts.

Ultimately I argue that the genres of the African American church tradition—song, prayer, and testimony—engendered activist identities rooted in Christian nonviolence even as rhetors sought to remake and revise the genres in subtle and strategic ways toward civil rights ends. Song, prayer, and testimony fostered a specific type of civic participation based in Christian nonviolent ideologies and beliefs. By rooting the civil rights mass meeting and the protests that emerged from these events in religious genres, leaders such as King, Charles Sherrod, Dave Dennis, and others designed mass meetings as spaces where strategies for religious civic participation could be learned, practiced, and performed. As such, the meetings enabled everyday people from Southern communities to enter the meeting and experience it as familiar—a space where they could step right in and join the group. Through this ritual practice and performance of songs, prayers, and testimonies, large groups of African Americans, sometimes along with other white activists, constituted the collective identity necessary for large-scale protest.

Research Method and Chapter Overview

"Faithful Genres" opens by developing a holistic approach to the civil rights mass meeting. In Chapter 1, I draw on audio recordings from the Southern Folk Life Collection held in the Wilson Library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to learn about mass meetings in Nashville, Tennessee. Analyzing the transcript of the Nashville meeting in addition to fliers, secondhand accounts, liner notes for albums, and coverage of in the *New York Times*, I define and describe the civil rights mass meeting with attention to two major concerns, genre repertoire and audience. First, I set out how the mass meeting functioned through the interwoven genres of song, prayer, sermon, and testimony, a repertoire that revised the church service. Second, I analyze how a range of audiences—that included not only the expected audience of local African Americans but also unexpected audiences of segregationists and readers of national newspapers—engaged the range of genres and rhetors that comprised these events. Through discussion of the meeting as genre repertoire and its engagement among multiple audiences, Chapter 1 provides the foundation for the chapters to follow.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 turn to examining in depth the three individual religious genres—song, prayer, and testimony—that comprise the meeting's repertoire. In these main chapters of the study, I analyze transcripts of mass meetings composed from audio recordings held in two archival collections: recordings held in the Moses Moon Collection at the Smithsonian Institute of American History in Washington, D. C. and the recordings mentioned above held at UNC Chapel Hill. These two collections enable me to explore a wide range of meetings held across the South: Nashville, Tennessee; Jackson, Mississippi; Americus, Georgia; Selma, Alabama; Greenwood, Mississippi;

Danville, Virginia; and Hattiesburg, Mississippi. The chapters focus first on how the genre—song, prayer, or testimony—functions within the meetings as sites for faith, activism, and persuasion. In the concluding sections of the chapters, I trace the genre outside the meeting to examine how it was taken up toward civil rights ends for new contexts and for new audiences. Here, I examine primary materials that have been published and circulated by activists, including song books, albums, prayer books, fliers, oral histories, and memoirs. The connections between meeting genres and their work outside the meeting are rarely explicit and overt; in most cases, I construct the relationship between the genre's uptake in the meeting and its uptake beyond in public contexts. This move allows me to explore the circulation of the genre and to consider how the unique functions of song, prayer, and testimony were and were not effective for broader audiences and other movement ends. It further enables me to explore important questions concerning how and why these genres shift, fall out of use, or lose their efficacy as Black Power replaces Christian nonviolence as dominant movement philosophy and ideology within the civil rights movement.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to the religious genre of song and builds on the work of Kerran Sanger, Stephen Schneider, and Keith Miller to examine how the mass meeting supported the rhetorical work of song to constitute collective identity. I argue that it was through and at the mass meeting the civil rights movement *became* a singing movement. Analyzing meetings in Montgomery, Alabama; Nashville, Tennessee; and Jackson, Mississippi, I show how audiences enacted singing as a means both of faith and of protest; they learned to recontextualize hymns and spirituals and then combine them with labor and children's music—coming together to create a specific king of song protest

genre: freedom songs; and finally, they also connected their singing to the larger movement and its triumphs and failures. The chapter closes by examining song's circulation outside the meeting in songbooks and records and how song shifted and dropped off with the rise of black power.

Many activists argue that prayer often worked in tandem with song both in public protests and in mass meetings (Johnson; Lewis; King). Chapter 3 recovers prayer as a civil rights genre with spiritual and political functions. The chapter focuses on three meetings sites: Americus, Georgia; Greenwood, Mississippi; and Selma, Alabama. Through analyses of prayer's roles in mass meetings held in these locales, I demonstrate how civil rights rhetors inhabited prayer toward four key modes of activism: 1) reflection on failures, abuses, protest efforts, and triumphs to create crystallized narratives; 2) silent, gestural lament; 3) innovative, hopeful rhetorical perseverance; and 4) double (and even triple)-voiced speech and action. In the final section, the chapter explores prayer's movement beyond the meeting, demonstrating how prayer functions as rhetorical re-sourcement (Gearhart) in public protest and a site of memory (FitzGerald) in activists' prayer books.

Chapter 4 argues that African Americans revised testimony in mass meetings through strategic encounters with and retraction from multiple audiences. As a genre with both religious and legal import, testimony has long served African American rhetors as a site for testifyin,' or witnessing to their human dignity before audiences who argued otherwise (Smitherman, Brooks, Lathan). In the 1950s and 1960s many civil rights activists used the mass meeting as a space to testify in response to violence, oppression, sadness, hunger, and other effects of white oppression that plagued them. Delivered

within the church-like setting of the mass meeting, testimony provided meeting participants with a familiar mode of speaking out about important issues. By exploring the role of testimony as a site for faith and activism in meetings in Danville, Virginia; Hattiesburg, Mississippi; and Birmingham, Alabama, the chapter demonstrates that the mass meeting was a crucial space where many activists learned to speak out against white violence, and also to "ritualize the mundane," that is, create meaning through story in the midst of the ordinary, daily work of organizing (Ross). This chapter closes by examining how testimony, like prayer and song, circulated beyond the context of the mass meeting. It shows how hundreds of civil rights activists' testimonies were strategically recorded for wider circulation in large-scale oral history projects, albums, movement memoirs as well as hybrid print texts such as scrapbooks that brought together a range of genres.

In the final chapter, I draw conclusions regarding the interventions this study makes to African American rhetorics, genre studies, and religious rhetorics. To this end, the chapter reflects on how the mass meeting serves as synecdoche for civil rights rhetoric more broadly. In line with the work of historians such as Emily Crosby, Charles Dittmer, Wesley Hogan and others, I contend that understanding civil rights rhetoric through a focus on the mass meeting provides a "ground up," or localized from the perspective of activists, view of important genres and rhetors who may otherwise remain unseen. Indeed, examined as a cohesive rhetorical event, the civil rights mass meeting invites scholars of rhetoric to consider how a ground up approach might shape how we understand the genres most significant to the movement.

Contributions of the Project

This project contributes to three conversations in rhetorical studies: African American and civil rights rhetorics, rhetorical genre studies, and religious rhetorics. While civil rights scholars have called attention to the rhetorical importance of mass meetings, no study to date has recovered and analyzed these events in depth and none have considered how religious genres constructed these meetings (Brooks, Houck and Dixon, Miller, Holmes, Wilson). "Faithful Genres" works toward this end, examining the many layers and dimensions of the civil rights mass meeting's rhetorical functions. Toward this end, as an archival recovery project, one major contribution of the study is to illuminate the significance of these meetings as stages for local African Americans to stand up and testify, sing, and pray—constituting and enacting rhetorical identities as individuals and as a collective.

Through this focus on the collective, "Faithful Genres" participates in conversations about developing new approaches to civil rights rhetorics. Scholars have argued for the importance of moving beyond a focus on a "greatest hits" view of civil rights rhetorics and rhetorical history more broadly (Houck and Dixon; Miller; Rivers and Weber). Popular memory often ascribes the victories of the movement for black freedom to the actions of Rosa Parks and the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., as though two talented and important individuals alone sparked a national movement for racial justice and civil rights. Scholars such as Keith Miller, Brooks, Houck and David Dixon, and Nathaniel Rivers and Ryan Weber have argued that rhetorical studies must seek to overturn this "master narrative" and consider nuanced, localized approaches to civil rights rhetorics. This study aims to extend the work of these scholars by exploring how

religious rhetorics of the mass meeting enabled a multitude of individauls to participate in the movement and become activists. Also, through the focus on a recurring event, "Faithful Genres" offers a new mode for analyzing movement rhetoric. By examining one type of pervasive protest tool—the civil rights mass meeting—the project extends the conversation about moving beyond individual heroes and greatest hits and adds an additional methodological tool to our repertoire.

As an examination of the mass meeting as a unique rhetorical space, "Faithful Genres" extends studies examining African American and civil rights rhetorics that consider twentieth century contexts. David Holmes and Vorris Nunley, for example, lay the groundwork for the theoretical work I take up in chapter 1. Holmes has written about the mass meeting as a pedagogical arena and a type of "hush harbor" (158). Nunley too argues for the importance of examining the rhetorical spaces most productive for African American rhetoric (2-3). Responding to their studies and others such as Brooks, Gary Selby, and Richard Lischer, "Faithful Genres" zeroes in on the unique facets of the civil rights mass meeting in African American rhetorical history and illustrates how the rhetorical space of the meeting functions both constitutively for an African American insider audience and at times persuasively for other audiences. In illuminating how the religious genres of the African American church tradition functioned in the meeting, I show the ways the meeting was constructed as a rhetorical space where the participation of everyone present was important and necessary. Song, prayer, and testimony are genres that depend on wide participation; they do not function effectively with a single speaker performing for an audience of seated listeners. Rather, each uniquely relies upon

multiple-speaker activity and requires these seated listeners to become the performers and speakers.

Further, in examining and analyzing how these genres were not just leveraged for the insider audience of African Americans and other activists but also for segregationists and readers of national newspapers, chapter 1 uncovers a little-studied aspect of movement rhetoric: multiple audience engagement. Historians such as Wesley Hogan emphasize that one of the most successful strategies of nonviolent realpolitik is "using the violence of the oppressor against him politically" (70). As a rhetorical scholar, I consider the ways this strategy played out through language and genre in the recurring event of the mass meeting. I examine how the rhetorical spaces of the mass meeting provided participants with opportunities to sing, pray, and testify first and foremost for themselves but at times in the presence of white segregationists including policemen and members of the Ku Klux Klan. These white segregationists at times interacted with meeting participants by speaking and behaving aggressively, or even violently. Here, the presence of another audience, the news media, enabled meeting leaders to leverage it against white supremacists. Toward this end, I demonstrate how meeting genres were observed by white journalists and then circulated through newspapers like the *New York Times*. This strategic engagement with and retraction from broader audiences represents an important and distinctive aspect of the rhetorical space of the meeting and provides a view of how the space speaks on multiple levels. Unlike hush harbor-like spaces present throughout much of African American rhetorical history, the mass meeting sought to engage with and speak to multiple audiences, and in this way, it provided collectives of

civil rights activists with opportunities to experience and enact a specific type of political identity—one engaged in actively resisting white supremacists' power out in the open.

My approach to the civil rights mass meeting also contributes to scholarship among genre theorists about genre use and genre change. The project speaks to conversations in genre studies in two key ways. First, "Faithful Genres" expands conversations about genre use beyond academic and professional settings into the context of an era devoted to creating social change—the modern movement for black freedom. Much scholarship in genre studies has considered how genres function or change in workplace and academic settings (Applegarth; Bazerman; Devitt). Shifting the focus from the workplace and the university to the civil rights mass meeting, my study examines religious genres as sites of public, political intervention and civic action. Scholars in rhetorical genre studies have called for this type of study. As Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff write:

> Further research is needed on how public genres embody not just the rhetorical practices that construct and sustain but also challenge publics. Studies of public genres—genres whose social function is to bring about action and change—would enable rhetoricians to examine sites of intervention, analyzing how such genres enable participation in public processes while also limiting intervention and social action. Studying public genres might also challenge rhetorical genre studies to look beyond fairly stable, bounded, institutionalized contexts

> like workplaces or academics and to examine what happens
>
> when genres are much more diffused. (159)

The analyses of songs, prayers, and testimonies, as genres rooted in the counterpublic of the black church, afford a view of how large groups of African Americans in the U. S. South learned to participate in public, political processes. As chapters 2, 3, and 4 will argue, these genres fostered Christian nonviolent participation in public life, and in so doing, they created frames for action that could be leveraged collectively even as those frames were questioned and interrogated. These chapters illuminate how these religious genres moved and circulated from the permeable space of the meeting to new contexts. Through the tracing of the genres outside the meeting, I describe the varied audiences for whom song, prayer, and testimony were leveraged and illuminate how remediation was central to the circulation of the genres. This discussion of the genre's circulation helps me to explore the life cycle of the genres—what their purpose and functions were beyond mass meetings. For example, I illustrate how song and prayer gained traction and then dissipated. In these moments of dissipation, I examine how activists seek to preserve and remember the significance of these religious genres and how these memorial impulses lead them to remediate oral genres into print texts such as song books and prayer books.

Second, by applying key insights from genre theory to the study of the civil rights mass meeting, the project also draws together discussions about *genre change* and rhetorics of social change. In his introduction to the 2015 special issue of *Composition Forum*, Dylan Dryer suggests that studies should examine "genre change as *tactical social intervention*" (Dryer, emphasis his). "Faithful Genres" examines shifting genres as social and political intervention. The study merges conversations among genre scholars

with discussions of rhetorics of social change, and in so doing, illuminates productive connections among the questions and approaches developed by both. As a historiography of genre change in the most successful campaign for human rights in the twentieth century, this study offers insight into how social movements and protests provide unique contexts for examining how genres function and change. In the case of the U. S. civil rights movement, charting the use of song, prayer, and testimony as they emerge from the mass meeting offers insight into the contexts in which religion in general and Christian nonviolence in particular supported and enabled civic participation. Conversely, examining the shift away from these church-based genres offers insight into the ideological limits of religion and the boundaries of the genres, questions I take up at the close of chapters 2 and 3.

Finally and critically, "Faithful Genres" participates in conversations about religious rhetorics. As Houck and Dixon have amply demonstrated, civil rights rhetorics resound with the language of religion. In their collections *Rhetoric, Religion, and Civil Rights, 1954-1965, vols. I and II*, these scholars provide evidence of the ways that rhetors assumed religious positions and leveraged the Christian scriptures in the context of the movement. Assessing these collections, Michael DePalma and Jeffrey Ringer write,

> Rhetorical studies of the Civil Rights movement show the extent to which religion might serve as a basis of motivation for progressive social reform. Such work also prompts questions concerning how religion might function as a catalyst for such ends in contemporary contexts. History suggests that religion can serve as a source of freedom or oppression. Thus, it is essential for rhetoricians to examine how religiously committed

> individuals historically have understood the relationship between religion and civic action. (280)

Scholars such as Lisa Shaver and Lisa Zimmerelli have taken up such study in their investigation of nineteenth century contexts. Shaver, for instance, examines the deaconess movement in the Methodist church that emerged in the late nineteenth century. She demonstrates how "the deaconess identity" functioned rhetorically to enable deaconesses to "transform themselves and make progress toward transforming women's roles in society and the material and spiritual conditions of their world" (204). Also examining nineteenth century women's rhetorical activism, Zimmerelli shows how women's defenses of preaching represents a "unique subset of women's activism" and contributes "to our understanding of the negotiation of religious identity, public spaces, and public voices in this era" (181). Working too at the nexus of religious rhetoric and civic engagement, my study provides a view of how in the space of the mass meeting, African Americans and others developed their vision of a changed world and constituted collectives to support this work. Here I illuminate the ways that the religious genres of song, prayer, and testimony provided inroads to public and civic participation. Together, they helped to create collectives who leveraged nonviolence as a strategy for first-class citizenship. The mass meeting was key to shifting the genres in this way: by creating a rhetorical space that was positioned between church and the public sphere, meeting leaders made it possible for participating in these meetings—standing up and speaking, singing, and praying—to feel comfortable and familiar while also constituting a step toward the very particular changes that the meetings were aimed toward, desegregation, voting rights, and racial justice.

By recovering how African Americans such as Mrs. Johnson, Betty Fykes, and Matthew Jones performed at meetings, I also extend the recovery work of feminist scholars working on religious issues in African American rhetorical studies including Shirley Wilson Logan and Jacqueline Jones Royster. These scholars have demonstrated how important religion was for supporting and enabling the rhetorical engagements of African American women in the nineteenth century. For instance, Logan writes, "[T]he training ground for developing organizational and—I would add—speaking skills was the black church" (xiii). Similarly in Royster's work, she demonstrates the connection between religion and ethos, illustrating how Maria Stewart leverages divine authority to secure her ethos (169). Focusing on nineteenth century contexts, Logan and Royster recover the literate and rhetorical practices of African American women, and they illustrate how the church functioned as a pedagogical arena for rhetorical development and show how religion provided the authority and credibility for some speakers and writers. "Faithful Genres" extends this historiographic work into the twentieth century highlighting the significance of the black church and its genres in the modern civil rights movement underscoring how it provided a rhetorical access point for those who may not gained rhetorical educations elsewhere. Important for my study are the ways that these religious genres have resistance histories that can be traced back to earlier contexts, including abolition and campaigns for women's rights. In this way, my project also builds on this feminist recovery work by looking beyond the most public, famous events and figures to focus on a smaller, everyday site of rhetorical practice and production—one more accessible to non-famous figures, especially women. This impulse of the project provides a view of a diverse group of activists—many of them relatively unknown to

rhetorical history—and offers insight into the ways women and men constituted and sustained their activism over time in the context of the church and its genres.

Notes on Key Terms and Periodization

Before turning to the major investigations of this study, I want to clarify my use of key terms and periodization schemes important for this project. Following rhetorical scholars, activists, and sociologists, I use the term "black church" as a concept describing the broad functions of the African American church tradition in the United States. Activists such as Lewis, Bernice Reagon, and Martin Luther King, Jr. often talk about "the church," meaning in particular the church that developed in black communities as the primary space for leadership development, social and community organizing, and rhetorical training, among other things, free from white control (Reagon, King, Lewis). I use the term black church to refer broadly to the rhetorical tradition in which the genres I study developed. However, I also make every effort to attend to the particularities of local, actual churches in which meetings were held. When appropriate and possible, I name these churches; for instance, as I described Hamer's attendance at the first mass meeting, I named the context as the Williams Chapel Church in Ruleville, Mississippi.

I also want to be clear on my use of terms such as religion, faith, and spirituality. I call the genres I study here "religious genres" because I see them as emerging from the context of both the black church and the African American rhetorical tradition, which has been intertwined with religion since its inception. While it is standard practice in conversations about religious rhetoric to use religion as a term encompassing institutional worship, theology, and church communities, I at times exchange religion for spiritual. As

scholars such as Gesa Kirsch and Royster have argued, spiritual describes affect, wonder, and power—not aspects of faith readily indicated by the term religion. I see the black church and the mass meeting as sites where spirituality and religion interanimate one another; as such I use these terms interchangeably, though sometimes choosing the term "spiritual" to accentuate the affective dimensions of religious rhetoric in the African American rhetorical tradition. For example, in chapter 3 on prayer, I reflect on the spiritual dimensions of silent prayer after a failed protest; by using the term spiritual I am attending to the non-institutional aspects of prayer that developed in the context of slavery.

Finally, a word on periodization. Numerous scholars have called attention to the problems with describing "the" civil rights movement or "the" movement for black freedom (Schneider, Brooks, Hall). As they argue, this focus on a singular movement elides the important contributions that preceded campaigns that began in the 1950s while also suggesting that that struggle for black freedom has ended. While I build my study on these insights, I do find it necessary and useful to at times refer to a particular temporal movement—the collective campaign carried out by African American in the southern United States over the 1950s and 1960s. Here I follow Houck and Dixon and use the twelve years between the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 as a "window into the struggle for black civil rights" (8). As they and many scholars point out, most periodization schemes are "necessary fictions" but necessary all the same (7).[3] In an effort to contextualize the work of civil rights

[3] For related discussions concerning the difficulties of periodization, see Steven F. Lawson's essay, "Freedom Then, Freedom Now."

activists in these two decades and connect them with the rhetorical traditions that made their work possible, I differentiate between the modern civil rights movement and earlier movements including abolition and women's rights.

Politics of Location

To conclude this preface, I offer a reflection on my politics of location as a researcher, that is, the personal exigencies and motivations that drive my writing and my relationship to my research subjects. As a person of Christian faith who lived in the Deep South for most of my life, I am intimately familiar with the places I study and the ways that the language of faith, religion, and spirituality does, and does not, animate work for social change in places like Jackson, Mississippi. Yet, I am a white woman, and in this way, my understanding of the geography of the South and the landscape of its religion is shaped by my racial privilege. On this point, I call on Gary Dorrien's eloquent description of writing in this tension: "Interrogating one's racial bias is exceedingly difficult. Interrogating one's complicity in white supremacy—a structure of power based on privilege that presumes to define what is normal—is harder yet. I am torn between knowing that I am terribly limited as an interpreter of African American social Christianity and believing that it deserves all the books it can get, even from me" (x). Like Dorrien, I believe that on the one hand I am limited by my position of whiteness, and on the other I see the project and the questions it raises as important, for the movement for black freedom is far from over. Rather than see my whiteness as an excuse for noninvolvement, I conceptualize myself as writing alongside civil rights activists

rather than writing in place of or speaking for. The mass meeting concept invites this type of analysis: as I make clear in the next chapter, the mass meeting was designed to circulate primarily among black audiences, but white sympathizers (and indeed antagonists) were expected also to listen in and even participate. In the spirit of keeping the circulation of the mass meeting alive, "Faithful Genres" aims to identify and analyze the rhetorical power of the meeting and its genres for new audiences. While I cannot identify with mass meeting participants in terms of race, I do hope my investment in racial justice and social change informs the ways I draw attention to the rhetorical significance of the mass meeting. I return to the contemporary exigencies for the project in the concluding chapter of this study.

Chapter 1:

Theorizing the Rhetorical Space of the

Mass Meeting Through Genre and Audience

The Albany movement was in full swing. I had never in my life been so profoundly moved as I was by the mass meetings that were the central rallying points of the Movement. They began with the prayer service of the black Christian tradition. The raised voices and the rhythmic stomping of feet could be heard far in advance of one's arrival at the church ground. The undulating wave of the old call-and-response lined hymns drew latecomers and visitors into its warm embrace. It was impossible to stand as a spectator outside the circle of communion. Whatever your faith or your lack thereof, you were included in the amazing kinship of this worshipping community. Interspersed between the lined hymns were the fervent prayers of the deacons, the mothers, and other congregational leaders.

–Prathia Hall, *Hands on the Freedom Plow*

> The [mass] meeting moves with an inevitability . . .—a sense of inner form to it, high moments, low ones, expressions of joy, of sorrow, of mirth, of courage and determination, and expressions again and again of that larger view of life which, spontaneously, out of the hearts of the people, out of their culture, their religion, gave them the grace to have genuine compassion, forbearance, love for their enemies, condemning the sin, not the sinners.
> –Pat Watters, *Down to Now*

The above epigraphs set forth two complimentary perspectives on the rhetorical power of the civil rights mass meeting. Activist Prathia Hall focuses on the unity created by the meeting. She calls attention to how embodying the hymns and prayers created a collective sense of "kinship" and how this extraordinary kinship was contagious and drew newcomers in to the movement. Watters, a reporter from Atlanta, emphasizes how the events moved through various performances fluidly, engendering a generous, gracious spirit shared by the group. He notes how the meeting, from beginning to end, created this rich, complex affective experience for those gathered together. What is a notably absent from these accounts is a singular focus on one moment or aspect of the meeting. Rather than describe one song, one prayer, or one speech, both Hall and Watters attempt to explain the meeting's power by stepping back and considering how the event worked as a whole.

In rhetorical studies, by contrast, civil rights mass meetings have largely been studied through attention to a very particular singular moment: the rhetorical savvy of the event's major leader delivered through the genre of the speech. Examining the speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph Abernathy, and Fannie Lou Hamer, scholars have amassed great insight into the strategies leaders devised to exhort and encourage mass meeting audiences to work toward civil rights goals (Wilson; Selby; Holmes; Brooks). Writing about Hamer's address to a meeting audience in Indianola, Mississippi, for example, Maegan Parker Brooks illuminates how Hamer exhorted black Mississippians to register and vote (109). Brooks' analysis reveals much about Hamer's sophisticated argumentative strategies. For instance, she shows how Hamer's complex jeremiad structure "undermine[d] the plantation mentality and the white supremacist terror that bound [her audience's] potential" (109). As Brooks astutely demonstrates, one of Hamer's key objectives in her meeting speech was to empower her audience to see themselves "as agents of change" (109). Brooks' analysis thus reveals how Hamer used the meeting as a platform for speech-making and to motivate African Americans in the Mississippi Delta.

While studies like Brooks' have drawn much needed attention to the mass meeting as an important but understudied rhetorical event, these examinations also raise new questions that suggest the fruitfulness of taking a more holistic approach to the meeting's rhetorical work to see what *else* was happening besides speech making. Brooks, for instance, gestures toward the broader significance of these events. She writes, "Reflecting on audience reception to 'We're On Our Way,' in particular, and Hamer's mass meeting orations, more generally, also provides a glimpse into the vital role mass

meetings played in propelling SNCC's grassroots campaign for social and political change in Mississippi" (87). Other scholars have similarly noted the important functions of the mass meeting that Brooks points to. For instance, in his study of Abernathy's speech at a 1963 Birmingham mass meeting, David Holmes observes the wide rhetorical significance of the civil rights mass meeting. He notes that the mass meeting functioned as a space essential to African American life in the South during the 1950s and 1960s, comparable to the hush harbor or the Underground Railroad (157). While both Holmes and Brooks focus on individual speakers at the meeting, their descriptions of the entire event implicitly call for further study of the complex rhetorical situations they present. Indeed, Keith Miller makes this call explicit when he writes, "I suggest that . . . rhetorical critics should now examine in detail how *all* the oratory and song lyrics of a specific civil rights rally functioned *together* to create patterns of argumentation as sophisticated as the weave of a Persian carpet" ("Landscape" 179, emphasis in original).

Responding to the work of Brooks, Holmes, and Miller, the project of this chapter is to develop a holistic approach to civil rights mass meetings.[4] In what follows, I take a broad view of the rhetorical functions within the mass meeting to examine and

[4] By holistic I mean that I examine how the meeting worked from beginning to end, considering the entire meeting as functioning through interwoven but discrete genres. This approach is similar to the ecological approach that Nathanial Rivers and Weber develop in their analysis of the Montgomery bus boycott. They reveal how the boycott developed through "[a] complex concatenation of texts and rhetorical acts, both mundane and monumental, propelled the movement—logistical and organizational texts to keep the boycott going, informational and motivational texts to inspire the boycotters, and advocacy, public relations, ally building, fundraising, and legal texts to represent the movement to various other publics" (200). My approach here differs, however, in that I am focusing on one event and aiming to illuminate its rhetorical work with detail and nuance. So while this study takes cues from Rivers and Weber, I do not aim to be comprehensive in my analysis of particular campaigns. Rather, I seek to uncover the unique and sophisticated contributions that the meetings make in various locales and to consider the broader implications of studying rhetorical events in this way.

explore how the meeting operated as a multi-speaker and multi-genre event and to what ends. Toward these aims, I develop my approach to the rhetorical space of the mass meeting through two concepts: genre and audience. These concepts, I argue, help shift the focus of the event from one genre and one speaker to consider the varied genres in play and the multiple audiences for whom they are leveraged. Toward this aim, I first consider how the mass meeting functioned as a *genre repertoire*, or a group of genres that a group owns and uses to accomplish its purposes (Devitt). Through brief analyses of meetings held in Southwest Georgia and Nashville, Tennessee, I illustrate how the Southern civil rights mass meeting operated through a cohesive set of genres including songs, prayers, testimonies, and preaching. This genre repertoire, adapted from the black church, functions not primarily through the speech of one individual but rather through a range of varied genres that interanimate one another.

After demonstrating how the mass meeting relies on a group of interwoven religious genres, the chapter then moves to examine mass meeting audience(s). The mass meeting scenes in Albany, Georgia, and Montgomery, Alabama, among other locales depicted in the *New York Times*, reveal that the genres of the mass meeting were not only leveraged and enacted for a single, sympathetic meeting audience; rather, the mass meeting was often a permeable protest space that frequently engaged with multiple audiences including segregationists and national newspaper writers and readers. The songs, prayers, testimonies, and other genres were powerful not just for the insider audience but also for other, sometimes sympathetic and sometimes hostile audiences. The view of the mass meeting afforded through attention to its multiple genres and audiences provides us with a more nuanced view of how the meeting functioned and the purposes

for which it was leveraged. In addition and important for this project, this approach to the meeting opens up new lines of inquiry: by illustrating that the meeting did not operate just through the speech but also through a number of *other genres*, this chapter points to the importance of examining the unique functions of these genres within the meeting and for audiences beyond it. These are the questions I pursue in the remainder of the dissertation as I break the meeting repertoire apart and zero in on the particular significances of song, prayer, and testimony.

II. The Civil Rights Mass Meeting as a Genre Repertoire of Collective Action

In his book, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, historian Charles Payne argues that mass meetings were crucial to the organizing campaigns carried out in the Mississippi Delta. For Payne, the meetings functioned as a space where Mississippians transformed their very sense of self. Payne writes:

> Mixtures of the sacred and the profane, the mass meeting could be a very powerful social ritual. They attracted people to the movement and then helped them develop a sense of involvement and solidarity. By ritually acting out new definitions of their individual and collective selves, people helped make those selves become real. Informed and challenged by the speakers, pumped up by the singing and the laughing and the sense of community, many of those who only meant to go once out of curiosity left that first meeting thinking they might comes once more, just to see. (263)

In rhetorical terms, Payne points to the constitutive rhetorical functions of the mass meeting: through their regular participation in the meetings, people developed new

individual and collective identities through language. This function of the meeting was not happenstance. In its reliance on the church service as a model for meeting organization and participation, the mass meeting adapted a genre repertoire designed to transform people as individuals and as a collective. Religious genres can be transformational and transcendent, and in the mass meeting, these aspects of prayer, song, and testimony were leveraged toward remaking social and political identities in subtle and strategic ways.

By examining the mass meeting through the lens of genre, we can examine the rhetoricity of the entire event: what the rhetorical precedents were for the civil rights mass meeting, how it functioned cohesively, and how the particular genres of the meeting including song, prayer, testimony, as well as others, operated as sites to engender activist identities. In this section, I overview a range of meeting scenes in Southwest Georgia and Nashville, Tennessee, to illuminate the constitutive dimensions of meeting genres and to show how the genre repertoire was central to this work. Before moving into this analysis, it is important to set forth the theoretical terms—rhetorical genre, genre repertoire, and constitutive theories of rhetoric—that inform the examinations of meetings in this chapter and the ones to follow.

Rhetorical genre theory is an apt mode for examining rhetorics of social change given its emphasis on how texts operate as forms of "social action." Theorists such as Carolyn Miller, Amy Devitt, Charles Bazerman, Mary Jo Reiff and Anis Bawarshi, among others, have called attention to how genres frame and support ways of acting, knowing, and being in the world. In Bazerman's influential definition, he writes:

> Genres are not just forms. Genres are forms of life, ways of being. They are frames for social action. They are locations within which meaning is constructed. Genres shape the thoughts we form and the communications by which we interact. Genres are the familiar places we go to create intelligible communicative action with each others and the guideposts we use to explore the unfamiliar. (19)

As Bazerman points out here, genres as social actions play important roles in helping people navigate new territory. He goes on, "[W]hen we travel to new communicative domains, we construct our perceptions of them beginning with the forms we know" (19). This aspect of genre is important for understanding why inhabiting familiar church-based genres in the mass meeting served such powerful ends. In the communicative domain of the civil rights movement, the mass meeting relied on religious genres and this reliance helped create frames for nonviolent Christian actions. The meeting genres of song, prayer, and testimony thus served as powerful initiators to civil rights activity and ways of understanding the changes sought in their communities. The meeting often looked and felt like a church service, and indeed they were often held in the physical space of a church. Thus, in many cases, people were fluent with these genres, thus revising and reshaping these actions for the work of civil rights seemed possible, even easy. Drawing upon genres long important to African American worship traditions, the meeting genres and their pattern facilitated participants' perceptions of political power and social change through familiar forms.

Genre theorists also emphasize how genres must be relationally understood, that is, genres do not exist in isolation but are always in flux and responsive to other genres

(Devitt 27). This insight is equally important for considering how the mass meeting shaped and enabled collective and individual activist identities. Amy Devitt, for example, offers a number of terms for understanding genre relationships: context of genres, genre sets, overlapping genres, call and response genres, genre system, supergenres, and genre repertoire (58).[5] Genre repertoire is the best term for describing the mass meeting. Devitt defines the genre repertoire as "the set of a genres that a group owns, acting through which a group achieves all of its purposes, not just those connected with a particular activity" (57). Because the meeting genres were widely used and enacted by groups of civil rights activists, genre repertoire rightly names how they used their set of genres to accomplish a variety of goals. I see the mass meeting as a *genre repertoire of collective action* because it frames and enables groups of activists to act together within the meeting and beyond. Aldon Morris informs the "collective action" part of this descriptor; he defines mass meetings as "developing a cultural repertoire of collective action" ("Retrospective" 530). I pick up on this thread but exchange "cultural" for "genre," employing genre theory to more specifically explore how the mass meeting functions through texts as well as defines the actions people will take up in more public forms of protest.

[5] Devitt emphasizes that while groups generally rely on a set of genres to accomplish their goals, genre sets differ in important ways depending on the type of group and their purposes. For instance, she differentiates between context of genres and genre system. Context of genres, for Devitt, describes "the set of all existing genres in a society or culture" (54). A genre system, by contrast, has more limited uses and refers to a genre set "identifiable by those who use it that has clearly linked genres with a common purpose (56). For example, a job search invites a genre system which includes job advertisements, cover letters, curriculum vitae, invitations to interview, thank you notes, and so on. These genres work together for a singular purpose, and this is the distinguishing characteristic of genre system (54). For discussion of the varieties of genre sets, see Devitt ps. 54-59.

My view of the genres comprising the meeting also takes cues from contemporary rhetorical theory. Contemporary rhetorical scholars emphasize discourse's capacity to function *constitutively*. A constitutive view of rhetoric attends to how discourse engenders exigencies and identities. As Maurice Charland asserts, members of a group "do not exist in nature" or "outside of rhetoric," but "within a discursively constituted history" (137). Alisse Portnoy similarly claims, "Texts create exigencies and identities; they generate and call forth new, sometimes transcendent or transformational, ways of being in and relating to the world. . . . A uniquely compelling kind of power occurs in the telling of experience (Portnoy 7).[6] These insights correlate with genre theorists' view of genre. Rhetorical genre theorists also demonstrate how genres support and enable agency even as they can be constraining (Bawarshi and Reiff). For participants in the mass meetings, the religious genres they enact served as sites to create their activism: as they sang, prayed, and testified, they engendered the collective and individual identities necessary for civil rights work.

It is important to note that the constitutive dimensions of discourse should not be seen as at odds with the instrumental or persuasive features of rhetoric. In their study of

[6] The term constitutive rhetoric can be traced back to the work of literary and legal scholar James Boyd White. He developed the concept to explain "an act of constituting character, community, and culture in language" (x). In rhetorical studies, Maurice Charland expanded our understanding of the concept in his study of the nationalist movement in Quebec. Charland grounded his use of the term in the scholarship of earlier theorists such as Kenneth Burke and Edwin Black. Employing Burke's notion of identification and Black's concept of the first persona, Charland shows how "particular subject positions can undergo transformation" and "political rhetorics can reposition or rearticulate subjects by performing ideological work upon the texts in which social actors are inscribed" (147). Since Charland, numerous scholars of rhetoric have contributed case studies enriching our view of the constitutive dimensions of rhetoric. For instance, Portnoy discovers how women acquired collective political agency in the context of early nineteenth century debates over Indian Removal.

King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail," Michael Leff and Ebony Utley claim that to see the power of King's letter, one must view the persuasive and constitutive dimensions alongside one another. They argue King's appeals to ethos (persuasive) by playing into mainstream American values, while at the same time, he creates his powerful first persona (constitutive) as a transformational, subversive role for black Americans to occupy with him (38). Leff and Utely suggest that this was a significant move for King and other civil rights rhetors, particularly Malcolm X.

> Thus, a tension between the constitutive and instrumental functions surfaces almost immediately when examining Malcolm's rhetoric, and although it is generally less obtrusive in other African American rhetors during the civil rights revolution of the 1960s, it is still a prominent feature of their discourse—and for good reason. Their efforts to overcome a system that repressed and demeaned them required rhetorical instruments sufficient not only to serve immediate political ends but also to constitute a new conception of themselves and their fellow African Americans. (38)

Following Leff and Utley, I examine how the mass meeting genres work toward both immediate persuasive ends and also constitute a new conception of individual and collective identities as well as exigencies. By participating in the mass meeting, black audiences worked persuasively through these genres and constituted themselves as activists.

The mass meeting operated to both constitutive and persuasive ends through a complex interplay among the genres that comprised it. As I will demonstrate in the next section, the genre repertoire of the mass meeting did vary considerably among locales.

However, it is useful first to consider the general pattern of the mass meeting genres. In the chart featured on this page, genres are depicted in the order in which they typically occur during the meeting:

Patterns of Mass Meeting Genres

Genre	*First Persona/ Rhetor*	*Constitutive Dimension*	*Persuasive Dimension*
Hymn and/or Freedom Singing	Collective	Generate identity based on cultural heritage/history	Epideictic
Prayer	Collective	Sustain and transform identities; engender exigencies	Forensic/ Deliberative
Scripture Reading	Individual	Sustain and transform identities	Instructive
Opening Remarks	Individual	---	Deliberative
Testimony	Individual	Engender exigencies	Epideictic/ Deliberative
Preaching/ "Pep Talk"	Individual	Generate connection between identity and exigencies	Deliberative
Hymn and/or Freedom Singing	Collective	Generate identity based on cultural heritage/history	Epideictic

As the table details, the meeting consisted of around seven genres that mirrored the church service and functioned both constitutively and persuasively. Participants began the meeting with singing, speaking collectively and constituting themselves as activists who sing. As chapter two will detail, the songs at times had epideictic functions for

meeting participants, as the songs were sometimes celebrations or laments. From their singing, participants shifted to enacting prayer, where they continued the work of engendering their collective identity as civil rights activists who believed God was on their side. While song's persuasive dimensions were largely epideictic, prayer by contrast looked backward and forward, enabling reflection and planning. After these two collectively spoken genres, individuals enacted Scripture readings, pep talks, and testimonies. These individually spoken genres helped to engender exigencies, sustain and transform activist identities, and draw connections among aspects mentioned during songs and prayers and the major goals of the evening. The concluding hymns and songs served to reaffirm the importance of the collective and its dependence upon the participation of everyone.

Through these interwoven genres, the mass meeting offered black audiences, and the white sympathizers who sometimes joined them, a recurring form of genre participation.[7] This type of participation afforded them sites to cultivate identities, individually and collectively, for movement ends. At the same time, it provided them with opportunities to leverage the genres toward celebrating and remembering their achievements, reflecting on failures and tragedies, and devising plans for future work. In considering how this genre repertoire worked together constitutively, the resemblance between the mass meeting and the black church service cannot be overstated. Enacting the meeting's pattern of genres felt familiar to many, if not most Southern African

[7] For Nunley, the Black audience "is one that is persuaded by tropes, knowledges, and terministic screens anchored in African American life and culture. Therefore, although non-African Americans can be part of a Black audience, in general such is not typically the case in AAHH and other Black spaces constituting Black civil society" (30). Here and throughout I use Nunley's concept of the black audience to describe the primary meeting audience as a group of black and white activists invested in civil rights efforts.

Americans; this familiarity fostered fluid movement through the genres. Moreover, the pattern resonated with all those who had participated in church services before. Fluid movement through the event's genres coupled with resonances from prior experiences enabled people to constitute their activism in ways that felt authentic, rooted in their lives and communities, and promoted the dominant movement ideology, Christian nonviolence.

The two genres collectively articulated, hymn and prayer, then served to galvanize the entire audience toward a shared view of themselves and their goals. Building upon this collective identity, the genres with singular first persona such as the Scripture reading, the opening remarks, the testimonies, and the preaching or pep talks was the space for more specifically articulating the kinds of activism the primary audience should take up or reflect on their circumstances—constituting activists who planned, reflected, and carefully considered their next moves. Previous understandings of meetings have focused on the preaching: how speakers like Abernathy and King urged people to engage in activist efforts toward freedom through their rhetorical savvy; however, without a shared sense of history and self enacted through genres with collective personae, the inspiring speech of any given individual would be far less effective. Put differently, inhabiting hymn and prayer facilitated listening with a new sense of what was possible; in light of continued articulation of the strength of the collective, the future-oriented instruction delivered by leaders subsequently seemed just in reach. Significantly, the genre repertoire was the crucial means for engendering and sustaining this type of activism. The ultimate goal of collective identity could not be reached with the preaching of one individual alone.

Beyond the significance of a pattern of genres that works together through individual and collective first persona, weaving multiple singular first personae genres with the preaching of a leader created a space where audiences could enact new identities through genres suited toward those ends. In expressing their stories of the past, their feelings about the present, and their arguments for the best path forward, participants had opportunities to speak before one another. While preaching entailed an authoritative, almost exclusively male leader exhorting an audience and seeking to persuade them of a specific agenda or argument, genres of testimony allowed diverse people to get up from the crowd and speak extempore. Inhabiting testimony, individuals told their stories and expressed their emotions: fear, anticipation, and sadness could be leveraged toward shaping a view of the past, present, and future. The flexibility of testimony functioned to shape collective memory, generate identities, and engender new exigencies.

III. The Genre Repertoire at Work in Southwest Georgia and Nashville, Tennessee

While meetings often included genres such as these and constituted collective and individually identities, they functioned a bit differently in terms of the lifecycle of activism and the location of activist endeavors. The lifecycle of activism in the civil rights movement generally entailed getting a movement going, sustaining it over the course of struggles, fear, or waning enthusiasm, and celebrating and engendering new energy in light of victories. Mass meetings can thus be categorized along these cycles of activism: introductory meetings; "middle" meetings; and victory meetings. The cycle of activism was recursive; a movement did not end with a victory mass meeting. Rather, they might return to the sustaining or middle meetings after a victory meeting.

Introductory meetings occurred early in a city or town's entrée into the movement. When an organization such as the National Association of Colored People (NAACP), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), or the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) held a first mass meeting, the genre pattern was geared toward generating collective identity first and foremost. "Middles" meetings looked to direct participants toward participation in specific protests or to rejuvenate spirits when an organization encountered a setback or a difficulty. Victory meetings sought to commemorate achievements and set a new agenda. Each of these types of meetings leveraged the genre repertoire in slightly different ways. Thus examining the genre repertoire at work in each of these types of meetings further reveals how it functioned and to what ends.

A beginning meeting in 1962 Southwest Georgia offers insight into how the genre repertoire was enacted toward initiating a movement and constituting a collective. Before examining the genre repertoire at work, it is necessary to reflect on the background and context of the Southwest Georgia movement. In November of 1962, six SNCC activists accepted a Sumter County pastor's invitation to hold a mass meeting in his church. Since October of the year prior, SNCC members had been working in the southwest portion of Georgia, centering movement activities in Albany. While the movement had extended to a few counties beyond Albany, the goal was to continue registering voters throughout the southwest corner of the state. The location of the pastor's church in Sumter County, 30 miles north of Albany, held promise for extension of SNCC's influence and expansion of the southwest Georgia movement (Hogan, Sokol).

SNCC's interest in Southwest Georgia as a location for a voter registration campaign was similar to their investment in Mississippi. They sought to create change in the "heart" of the South, and this southern corner of Georgia, like Mississippi, was a location still deeply affected by its past as a site significant to the slave plantation system. Albany, in particular, once provided the surrounding region with a center for slave trade activity. While the region was not entirely unchanged in 1961, Albany's surrounding counties—Sumter included—were still areas where blacks outnumbered whites, worked the land, and mostly did not overtly question the prevailing order. SNCC's Georgia campaign sought to register voters but also to help train leaders within the communities, grassroots style. True to the organization's rationale, SNCC's strategy in southwest Georgia was to move throughout the region, one county at a time, cultivating relationships and leadership within the communities that would outlast SNCC's stay (Zinn, Hogan, Sokol).

When SNCC workers were approached at an Albany meeting in October, they promptly responded "yes" to the invitation to extend their program to Sumter County. Faith Holsaert, Jack Chatfield, Chico Noblett, and Penny Patch "gladly accepted and set the date" ("Memo"). Significantly, through their agreement to the pastor's invitation to hold a mass meeting in his church, they also agreed to extend their influence and program into his community. In Holsaert's description of the decision, "None of us fully realized the extent of the responsibility we had assumed in setting up a meeting" ("Memo"). Charles Sherrod, field secretary for SNCC, was out of town when staff made the agreement. When he returned to discover the arrangement, he argued that it would have

been better to wait until workers were living in the community before setting up the meeting.

Nonetheless, the first meeting happened shortly after Sherrod's return. In this introductory meeting held in Sumter, Georgia, in 1963, the evening began with Sherrod's silence. After pacing in silence, he spoke briefly to those gathered, first inviting them to look at themselves and to recognize the varieties of ages represented. He said to them, "We have the young men back there, I'm glad to see them; that is our pew of strength. Our older men back there, I'm glad to see them; that is our pew of wisdom. And here, here sit the women, in the pew of knowledge. Lastly, but most important, we have here in the front, our children; they represent the future" ("Student"). Through these opening remarks, Sherrod set forth the goal for the introductory meeting: assess the group, to see differences and then to generate a collective identity. Discussing the importance of varied ages represented, he helped the group to consider their unique role in making change in Sumter.

The remainder of the Sumter meeting worked toward this central goal not by encouraging or exhorting everyone further, but instead by moving to new genres that required participation: standing together as a collective and singing. The genres after Sherrod's speech then worked with the goal he had established—constituting a collective identity—while offering the group opportunities to see newcomers to the community as part of the activist group and to see themselves as part of it as well. Immediately after Sherrod finished, a local minister took the platform and asked for a vote of confidence in the Sumter movement. Individuals who wanted to show their support for continuing holding mass meetings were asked to stand. After the group stood to demonstrate they

were indeed supportive of continued organizing, Sherrod led the group in singing "Woke Up This Morning With My Mind on Freedom." Through their singing of this freedom song, the group attested again to their will to become a collective through their participation in the genre. Next, Sherrod invited an eleven-year-old girl named Marion up to the front to lead the group in singing "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round." By passing on the song leader role to a girl, Sherrod helped the Sumter group to develop the shared leadership aspect of their collective identity. All together, the genres of this Sumter meeting demonstrate how the meeting repertoire worked to engender a collective identity in the beginning stages of activism in a place like Sumter.

Turning to a "middle meeting" in Sumter's northern neighbor, Albany, Georgia, illustrates how the meeting genre repertoire could be leveraged toward affective, spiritual ends, and procedural. The crucial constitutive work of "middles" meeting was sustaining the collective identity that everyone had worked so hard to create. The affective, spiritual dimensions of the meeting repertoire served importantly toward this planning strategy. Charles Sherrod's account of one Albany meeting illustrates this point, as he emphasizes the emotional and spiritual power that emerges from the fluidity of meeting genres:

> The church was packed before eight o'clock. People were everywhere, in the aisles, sitting and standing in the choir stands, hanging over the railing of the balcony, sitting in trees outside the windows. . . . When the last speaker among the students, Bertha Gober, had finished, there was nothing left to say. Tears filled the eyes of hard, grown men who had seen with their own eyes merciless atrocities committed. . . . Bertha told of spending Thanksgiving in jail. . . . And when we rose to sing "We Shall Overcome,"

> nobody could imagine what kept the church on four corners. . . . I threw my head back and closed my eyes as I sang with my whole body. I remembered walking dusty roads for week without food. I remembered staying up all night for two and three nights in succession writing and cutting stencils and mimeographing and wondering—How long? (qtd. in Zinn 128-129)

As Sherrod illuminates, this mass meeting provided the context for rejuvenating activism during the long, difficult work of initiating and sustaining a civil rights campaign. Sherrod, like "the hard, grown men," needed to be reminded that a town like Albany could change, and that an ordinary man like him could be part of bringing it about. In this meeting, the interwoven genres of song and testimony were particularly empowering.

Leaders such as Sherrod, local African Americans, and white and black allies from all across the United States came together to re-see and reimagine the possibilities for Albany and to attest to their desire and ability to achieve their goal of desegregation. Through the fluidity between women like Bertha Gober's testimonies and the collectively spoken songs, activists like Sherrod participated in a transformational affective experience. By listening to accounts of women enduring jail and then testifying together in a collective persona of a will to persevere, activists revived their spirits and their collective identity. Particularly in the middle of a difficult phase of movement activity, the mass meeting was *the* space for affective inspiration, a renewed vision of change, and logistical planning. The affective dimension of the genre repertoire thus helped engender an impassioned collective identity that moved effortlessly from individual leadership leveraged through testimony or other means to collective action supporting the

individual's words and experiences. As both the Sumter and Albany examples demonstrate, meeting genres functioned together fluidly, serving a specific movement goal on any particular evening.

A "victory meeting" in Nashville, Tennessee, offers another important dimension to understanding how the meeting genres functioned together to constitute individual and collective activist identities. While the meetings in Sumter and Albany offer examples of meetings where the genres moved fluidly and together reveal a particular meeting agenda and its relationship to constitutive rhetorical functions, this Nashville meeting reveals something slightly different: it suggests that in terms of viewing the specific purpose of a mass meeting and how it operated to engender activist identities, we might miss the point altogether if we focus solely on the individual speech of a famous speaker.

This May 1960 meeting was devoted to celebrating the achievements of student activists during the sit-ins carried out in Nashville over the course of the past semester. Through the sit-ins, the Nashville Movement successfully desegregated the downtown establishments—restaurants and stores—their sit-in campaign targeted. This was a major victory for Nashville and put them in the national spotlight as a model for successful civil rights strategies. In public and popular memory of the civil rights movement, most of the focus is given to locales where King was a central player such as Birmingham or Montgomery, Alabama. However, in the context of the 1960s civil rights movement, Nashville was a truly remarkable scene of collective civil rights activity, and one extremely significant as a model for other campaigns to follow. As historian Ben Houston writes, "It is no exaggeration to say that the Nashville sit-in movement proved to be a model for activism as much as the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In 1961 these same

students would rescue and extend the Freedom Rides, capturing the attention of the entire world" (Houston). This success and attention provides the backdrop for the victory meeting held before Nashville's student activists left the city for the summer break.

The meeting was designed to celebrate the successful achievements of the first part of 1960 and the individuals—especially the students—who helped make it happen. The celebratory event, called "Students' Night," functioned through songs, Scripture, testimonies, prayers, and exhortation working together to celebrate everyone's effort, keep the group unified, and create new goals for the next phase of their efforts. Each of the testimonies, for example, praised the students for their work and sought to generate enthusiasm from the crowd about the future of the Nashville movement. See the chart below for an overview of the meeting:

Program for Mass Meeting Nashville, TN, May 1960

Genre	*First Persona/ Rhetor*
Hymn	Collective, unnamed song leader
Scripture Reading	Individual, Rev. Jr. C. Johnson
Prayer	Collective, Red Jr. C. Johnson
Protest Songs with Instruction	Collective, Guy Carawan
Opening Remarks	Individual, Rev. Vivian
Four Testimonies	Alexander Looby, Mrs. C. M. Hayes, Mrs. Burgess, and unnamed student
Introduction of Speaker	Rev. Vivian
Pep Talk, Preaching	Ralph Abernathy
Hymn	Collective
Prayer	Rev. Vivian
Letters	Read by Rev. Vivian – from Kelly Miller Smith; NAACP
Exhortation	Jim Lawson
Encomium/testimony	Dr. C. J. Walker; Mrs. Ezelle
Discussion	Collective

On this meeting program, one performance is an anomaly—the pep talk delivered by Ralph Abernathy. While all of the other genres are consistent in the theme of seeking to feature and promote Nashville students and residents and praise their work, Abernathy's address works toward a different agenda and departs from the celebratory constitutive work of the other genres. In this way, this Nashville meeting program reveals that the "pep talk" or sermon sometimes diverted from the main purpose of the meeting, particularly so when the speaker was a visitor. Abernathy's speech forwards the agenda, he has developed and been working for with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. In the case of this Nashville meeting, Ralph Abernathy's speech seems as

though it would be an important moment to analyze to understand the rhetoricity of the meeting. While we might expect a leader like Abernathy's speech to be revealing about the purpose of a meeting, this May 1960 Nashville meeting actually suggests just the opposite.

Significantly, in this mass meeting Abernathy's speech stands in stark contrast with the rest of the meeting. In his address titled "The Road to Freedom," he articulates exigence in terms that emphasize the interdependence of African Americans across the South. The road to freedom, Abernathy asserts, must lead to "first-class citizenship." He urges, for instance: "We must realize that none of us will be free until all of us are free. We will not be free here in Nashville in spite of its cosmopolitan and Northern air that we do not experience in the deeper areas of the South until your brothers and sisters are free down in Mississippi" ("Nashville"). If we examine the speech alone, we might see these as the key terms for the Nashville movement in May 1960. However, when examined in the broader context of the meeting, what his speech actually accomplishes is providing challenge and disruption in terms of the overarching project of the meeting and the ways the other genres were supporting that project. Seen alongside the rest of the meeting genres, this speech stands alone for its focus on individual freedom and its "outsider" perspective. Abernathy focuses on putting Nashville's successes into a broader framework by contrasting their movement with what has happened in Montgomery, Alabama. This address tells us much about Abernathy's sophisticated rhetorical strategies and about the broader civil rights movement, but it tells us little about this Nashville mass meeting's purpose and how it was achieved.

Indeed, set against the remaining 13 performances, Abernathy's speech appears nearly anomalous for its tone and overall message. Not one other speaker employs the term "citizenship," which provides the thematic structure for Abernathy's speech. In terms of imagining exigencies, Nashvilleans articulate their future goals in New Testament moral and religious terms. In his follow-up exhortation to Abernathy's speech, for example, James Lawson reframes Abernathy's argument in terms that resonate with Nashvilleans:

> So this isn't just simply a challenge that you go but it is also a challenge that where you find this kind of dissatisfactory service that you will take the initial steps yourself to try to resolve it, to try to reconcile this person, to try and aid this process. Because you see in the long run, as Ralph Abernathy has suggested, if we have 200 or 500 of us walking into a restaurant in any given time as prepared to try and break down the wall of ill feeling there, we have a much faster opportunity of seeing finally the kind of service evolve that will mean change, a real period of reconciliation, at least in this one small area. ("Nashville")

Lawson urges meeting participants to continue taking advantage of being able to eat in the downtown restaurants, the victory of the sit-ins. In this exhortation, Lawson picks up on Abernathy's thread of the significance of the individual walking on the road to freedom, but he uses "real period of reconciliation" to describe the goal of the movement. Lawson's exhortation along with the many other testimonies, songs, and prayers reveal a movement focused on the work of their collective toward social integration and reconciliation. In the period of testimonies, for example, three local Nashville activists,

Alexander Looby, Mrs. C. M. Hayes, and Mrs. Burgess, along with a student activist (unnamed in archival records) speak about the collective actions of their community, especially the students, in remaking Nashville as place of reconciliation. Mrs. Burgess's opening illuminates the tone of the testimonies and their emphasis on the students' work: "While we the Nashville citizens lay sleeping, during the early morning hours of February 27, there was no intimation even in our dreams, that we would awake to a day of turmoil, confusion, and strife, out of which a phase of a new social order would come into being" ("Nashville"). Reverend Johnson's prayer and the songs of the meeting also emphasize the importance of reconciliation as a movement goal and highlight the students' collective work toward helping realize it.

This Nashville meeting then helps underscore the importance of taking a broad view of the meetings to learn about their projects and how meeting genres support or work against these projects. On the level of the local meeting, the mass meeting as a genre repertoire of constitution and collective action could be applied flexibly to account for recent victories such as the case of Nashville. As this example illuminates, to look only at the main address is to risk missing the terms most exigent to particular locales. Nashville, for instance, acquired a reputation for being a very different movement from say, Montgomery. In order to see the different means that inspired meeting participants, the pattern of genres must be examined. Moreover, upon examination, it is clear that the genres work together in significant ways. In the case of the Nashville meeting, oscillating among genres with individual and collective first persona affords the meeting to balance generating collective memories and constituting new exigencies.

Collective and individual transformations happened not just through one moment in the meeting but instead through the entire event—from beginning to end. Listening to speeches and "sermons" was part of what encouraged African Americans, but it was not the most important mode for audience participation. Put differently, without the songs, prayers, and testimonies, the mass meeting would have been far less effective as the rhetorical space in the movement for bringing people in and keeping them united around civil rights goals. Moving speeches alone were not enough to constitute collective and individual activist identities. Rather, the entire genre repertoire worked together to achieve this purpose.

IV. Audience(s) and the Civil Rights Mass Meeting

New York Times reporter Pat Watters has written movingly about the mass meeting scene in the South. His accounts provide a rich portrait of what the meeting looked like and for whom it spoke. Describing his time in Albany, he writes,

> It's a hot summer in Albany, Georgia, the summer of 1962, the summer of the final drama of the Albany Movement. I am in the Shiloh Baptist Church; I sit on the floor beneath the pulpit, to its right, looking up to it on the raised platform, with the three high-backed, red-upholstered chairs symmetrically behind it. The little space between the altar rail and the first pews is tacitly reserved for the press. Six other reporters share the space with me, sitting on the floor, as I do, with legs crossed, taking notes, listening. Two television crews beam their bright lights on the pulpit platform, aim their cameras. Two people operate tape recorders. The

> people of the movement fill the sanctuary behind us. They are crowded into all the long, light-wood benches and are sitting in the middle aisle between the two sections of benches and standing in the two side aisles, some leaning against the walls or propping hands back on the window seats, and they are standing across the rear of the church and out into the vestibule. They fill the two long benches set perpendicular to the pulpit on either side of it, the amen corners and they fill the choir loft behind the pulpit. The white plaster walls of the church curve inward toward the ceiling, gently, gracefully, giving the sanctuary sort of an ark shape. The wall behind the choir loft is painted blue, and across it is inscribed: 'The Lord Is In His Holy Temple,' and beneath that is a framed print of the Lord's Supper. (141-142)

Watters' description points to an important complexity of civil rights mass meetings: the meeting often included reporters, like Watters, and other members of the press sitting inside the church, listening in on what was happening. Moreover, as Watters alludes above, these meetings were sometimes recorded, whether by television crews, or tape recorders, or both. This detailed portrait of a meeting in Albany thus reveals a perhaps surprising and little-discussed aspect of civil rights mass meeting: these meetings were often not secret, closed events for a primary audience comprised of black activists and white sympathizers. Instead, they were frequently open events where anyone would be welcomed. As such, besides reporters and news media, local whites often ventured to meeting sites and listened in from the parking lot or took a seat in the back.

The last section illuminated how the genres of the mass meeting functioned together to constitute and sustain collective identities for civil rights work. The meetings in Southwest Georgia and Nashville, Tennessee, offered much insight into the internal functions of the meeting for blacks and their white allies who were gathered together. The meetings, however, did not speak to this insider group only; rather, the civil rights mass meeting often had multiple audiences, as Watters' description above helps illuminate. While the mass meeting spoke first and primarily to the insider audience, it also taught these audiences how to enact their collective identity through various genres before other audiences both inside and outside the meeting space. This feature of meetings reveals the most significant way that the genre repertoire of the church service was revised for civil rights ends.

Through its engagement with other audiences, the meeting became a space where participants shifted the purposes of the genres and their exigencies even more overtly toward achieving their goals. This aspect of meeting rhetoric was both preparatory and performative. So while the prior sections focused on the constitutive functions of meeting rhetoric, here I demonstrate how the meeting also worked toward persuasive ends. In this section, I will illustrate how the tertiary audiences operate as the *eavesdropping* and *extended* audiences of the mass meeting. The eavesdropping audience includes white segregationists who listened in on meetings from the perspective of outsiders to the movement. The extended audience names those who encounter mass meetings from

national news media and the journalists, such as Watters, who observe meetings for such purposes.[8]

Seeing these additional audiences is important for understanding how the genre repertoire functioned and to what ends while it also challenges the prevailing view of the mass meeting as a rhetorical space that functioned as a secretive, closed space with a singular audience. To define the space of the meeting, scholars have turned to concepts with rich histories in the African American tradition, such as the hush harbor or the Underground Railroad. For example, Holmes uses Vorris Nunley's theory of the African American hush harbor to conceptualize the space of the civil rights mass meeting. Nunley defines hush harbor spaces as temporary refuges "from the disciplining gaze of whiteness" (*Keepin'* 3) The rhetorical space Nunley theorizes takes its name and some defining characteristics from the hush harbors created by enslaved African Americans in eighteenth and nineteenth-century America (*Keepin'* 23-24*).* In the secret space of a dwelling house, or other covert site such as brush arbors or woods, enslaved people found opportunities to speak frankly before one another and God, sometimes making plans for escape (*Keepin'* 24, Rabateau 43).

[8] These categories of analysis are only a beginning to understanding the audiences of the meeting. As mentioned above, the primary meeting audience was of course not *solely* African American, or even Southern. Whites such as Ed King, Casey Hayden, and Guy and Candie Carawan, whom I consider in the next chapter, also at times participated in meetings as insiders and as leaders. And Northern blacks such as James Forman played key roles in the movement and in meetings. Over the course of the movement, some Southern whites listened in curiously to movement events, such as meetings, only to later become activists themselves (Dittmer 284; Hogan 96-100; Payne 79; Hobson 1-2). What I call the extended audience might be further interrogated to account for the complexities of international newsreaders or apathetic Northerners. Future studies might continue to refine and develop audience categories that adequately address complexities such as these.

Extending Nunley's definition to apply to the rhetorical space of the mass meeting, Holmes writes, "[T]hese meetings within the larger tradition of African-American churches, served as types of 'hush harbor,' places where one could declare freely the unvarnished truth by and about blacks" (158). Besides Holmes, Richard Lischer also portrays mass meetings as hush harbor-like through his discussion of the "secret" nature of civil rights mass meetings (245). Holmes and Lischer develop these claims about mass meetings by focusing on the audience present at these events. Their studies examine the ways the space of the meeting provided African American audiences and rhetors the freedom to speak openly and candidly with one another. Such studies astutely connect the civil rights mass meeting to the larger African American rhetorical tradition, and in particular, to spaces like the hush harbor that provided temporary safety for enslaved Americans.[9] While these studies have offered much insight into the rhetorical interplay that happened inside meetings and for the black audience and white allies[10] that attended these meetings, they have not yet fully explored what role the mass meeting played with broader publics, such as segregationists and white journalists, who were also audiences to these events.

Challenging the view of the mass meeting as hush-harbor like has implications both for how we understand the genre repertoire's work for the insider audience and for how we think about its broader rhetorical functions. In addition to speaking frankly in a

[9] Besides Holmes and Lischer, scholars such as Kirt Wilson, Gary Selby, and Maegan Parker Brooks have examined the rhetorical sophistication of mass meeting rhetoric. These examinations also work from a "hush harbor" approach to the rhetorical situation of mass meetings. Though not explicitly, these scholars define the mass meeting as a type of hush harbor insofar as they approach the events' primary rhetorical impulses as singularly directed toward an immediate, largely black audience.

temporarily safe space, mass meeting rhetors, I contend, sometimes spoke dangerously and openly in a very visible forum. While at times they were internally directed spaces unconcerned with speaking back to whites, the mass meeting was also a space where meeting genres were leveraged to more public ends and to different audiences. The mass meeting was a rhetorical space for practicing *and* enacting public, political action. Participants enacted their new identities before one another while also strategically positioning themselves toward all of those looking on from the outside. The mass meeting happened in the shadow of unpredictable, and often hostile, eavesdropping local whites, a powerful reminder of the necessity of a strong collective identity that would work effectively toward enacting changes that would change the fabric of the entire community. Besides the importance of recognizing the significant function the eavesdropping audience played, the news media also powerfully shaped the work of the mass meeting. Ultimately then the mass meeting worked as a space with multiple invested audiences and very real risks in view. It was a halfway house just on the other side of safety.

In defining meetings as types of hush harbor, our current understanding suggests that they functioned like the Underground Railroad where absolute privacy or secrecy from white audiences was at a premium (Holmes 157; Lischer 245). Consider Richard Lischer's description of meetings: "The mass meetings were not media events. Their poignancy was never translated into public relations or Neilsen ratings. Had they gained access to mass media, the meetings could not have functioned as the secret life of African Americans in the South" (245). Importantly, Lischer highlights the value of secrecy for

oppressed groups. However, there is significant evidence to suggest that creators of mass meetings did not prize secrecy as the above description suggests.

A "first" civil rights mass meeting held in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in June 1953 illustrates this point. African Americans in the city were beginning to organize around a bus boycott, and a mass meeting was a necessary next step so that leaders could generate support from the community and prepare the group to speak back to white segregationists. On the evening of the first mass meeting, the entire city took note of the event because of the unusual traffic. According to sociologist Morris' description of these meetings, "[E]veryone was aware that this was an important development. The scale and vigor of the nightly activity left an indelible impression on whites as well as blacks" (19). When black citizens in Baton Rouge left their homes to travel across town to the first mass meeting, they did not try to secretly sneak away; they got in to their cars, traveled to the same destination at the same time, and created a massive traffic jam that no one could ignore (Morris 18). The presence of all the cars on the street spoke volumes to local whites of the importance of the mass meeting to the black community. As much an act of visibility as the boycott itself, mass meetings in Baton Rouge helped to organize and sustain the boycott at the same time they were influencing other audiences, such as hostile whites, watching from outside.

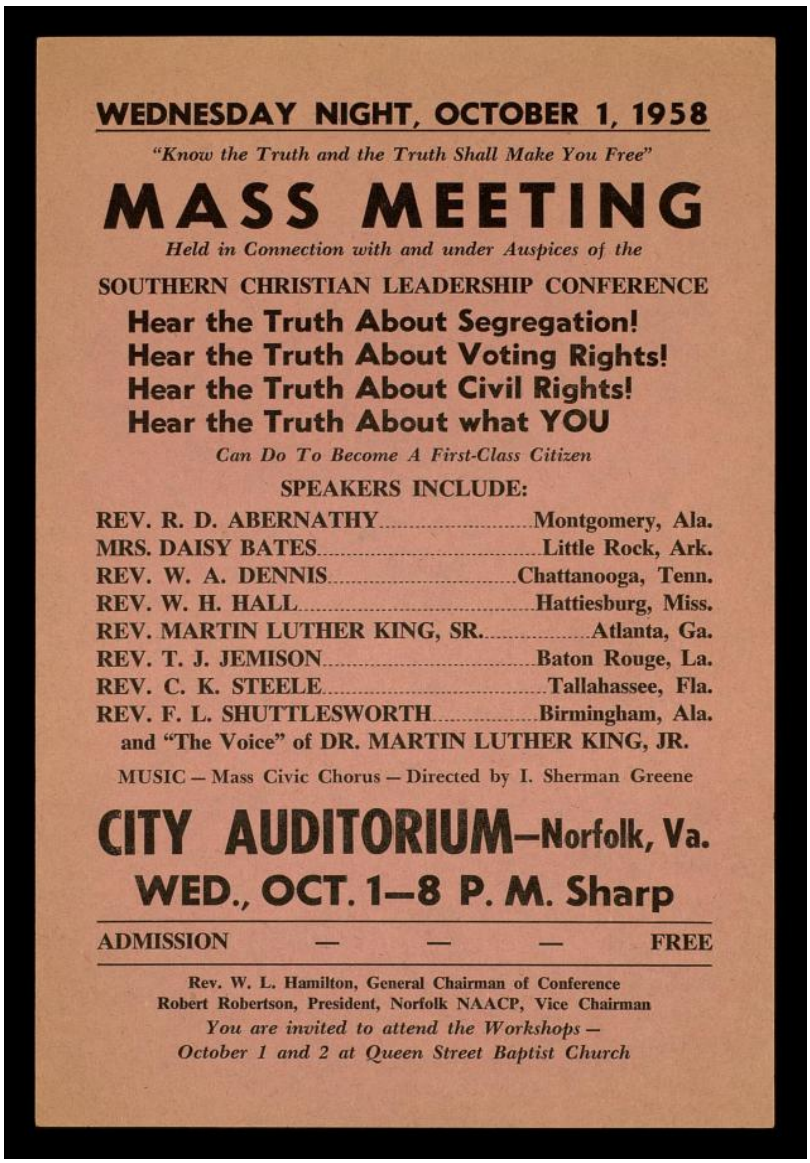
In Baton Rouge, rather than hiding that meetings were happening, they pronounced it: through traffic. While in this example meetings were made public by African Americans simple refusal to sneak away to meetings, in other locations leaders sometimes more overtly publicized that mass meetings were happening through fliers, posters, and audio records. Mass meeting publication materials demonstrate that Baton

Rouge is not an anomaly: making indelible impressions on multiple audiences was built in to the rhetorical purpose of mass meetings, and this purpose was circulated to everyone in the community through fliers, posters, and audio records. Civil rights leaders frequently made strategic use of the contingent nature of gatherings of civil rights activists and depicted mass meetings as open, visible, highly effective forums of African American rhetorical activities.

In the 1950s, when black communities began to organize mass meetings around attempts to desegregate public facilities and schools in places like Baton Rouge, Montgomery, Alabama, and Savannah, Georgia, leaders strategically circulated invitations, flyers, and posters advertising to their entire communities—white opposition included—that mass meetings were happening. Given the civil rights activism strategy of public, direct action, leaders recognized that the mass meeting might a means not just of fortifying the African American community but also of engaging in cross-racial communication with multiple audiences. Yet the brilliance of the mass meeting was that it positioned African American meeting participants and their white activist collaborators, such as Reverend Ed King, as the insider audience. Then, through strategic publicity, white segregationists were positioned as an eavesdropping audience and readers of national newspapers became part of an extended audience through the press. In this way, the mass meeting retained the power of the original hush harbor—African American insiders and those who identified with them remained the primary audience—yet the rhetorical power generated at these meetings spoke to other audiences that were anticipated and even welcomed. This move also had an important added benefit. By opening up meetings to everyone, activists were able to draw attention to the irony of

white hostility toward an open meeting orchestrated by blacks and other activists. That is, whites often feared what was happening in meetings, but by inviting them in and not recreating the secret and hidden moves of the original hush harbor, African Americans emphasized that their meeting agendas were not intended to be secret or unknown: they desired voting rights, full integration, and first-class citizenship, and they would work to achieve those goals in as many ways they needed. In this way, transforming the hush harbor into a speaking harbor in which other audiences were anticipated and welcomed to listen in was to their advantage.

Through their fliers, posters, postcards, and records, civil rights leaders defined mass meetings as open to everyone in their community. As I described in the previous section, one important rhetorical purpose of the mass meeting was to generate, direct, and sustain collective black identity that might be wielded toward social and political changes as defined by local communities. On publicity fliers, organizations such as the SCLC defined this rhetorical purpose for everyone who would see it. For example, in publicizing a 1958 mass meeting in Norfolk, Virginia, the SCLC circulated this flier to the community:



WEDNESDAY NIGHT, OCTOBER 1, 1958

"Know the Truth and the Truth Shall Make You Free"

MASS MEETING

Held in Connection with and under Auspices of the

SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

Hear the Truth About Segregation!
Hear the Truth About Voting Rights!
Hear the Truth About Civil Rights!
Hear the Truth About what YOU

Can Do To Become A First-Class Citizen

SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

REV. R. D. ABERNATHY.....Montgomery, Ala.
MRS. DAISY BATES.....Little Rock, Ark.
REV. W. A. DENNIS.....Chattanooga, Tenn.
REV. W. H. HALL.....Hattiesburg, Miss.
REV. MARTIN LUTHER KING, SR.....Atlanta, Ga.
REV. T. J. JEMISON.....Baton Rouge, La.
REV. C. K. STEELE.....Tallahassee, Fla.
REV. F. L. SHUTTLESWORTH.....Birmingham, Ala.
and "The Voice" of DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

MUSIC – Mass Civic Chorus – Directed by I. Sherman Greene

CITY AUDITORIUM–Norfolk, Va.

WED., OCT. 1–8 P. M. Sharp

ADMISSION — — — FREE

Rev. W. L. Hamilton, General Chairman of Conference
Robert Robertson, President, Norfolk NAACP, Vice Chairman
You are invited to attend the Workshops –
October 1 and 2 at Queen Street Baptist Church

As this flier reveals, the primary purpose of this meeting was, simply, to describe the "truth" about segregation, voting issues, and civil rights, so that one might "become a first-class citizen." In publicizing this purpose, the organizing body—here the SCLC—alerted the community that within the mass meeting African Americans was working rhetorically to become a collective. While these fliers presumably circulated among African Americans, mimeographed publicity visibly indicated the meeting's rhetorical

purpose to everyone in town. Such publicity illustrates how mass meeting creators relied upon pronouncement, rather than secrecy, to define meetings' purposes for others.

A poster advertising the first mass meeting organized by the NAACP in Savannah, Georgia, similarly invited local African Americans and supporters to gather under the auspices of political identity: the poster invites people to "overflow" the church with participants in the "Freedom Now" movement. The defined rhetorical purpose is consistent with the SCLC's materials. Extant fliers and posters demonstrate that the meeting's rhetorical purposes were continually communicated as invitations for people including and beyond the black community. One poster, for instance, includes an especially provocative appeal to local whites: "Come One, Come All – Everybody Is Welcome." As a directive intended to defray accusations of conspiracy from opposition, the poster highlights how meeting leaders strategically countered white depictions of secret meetings. Through such a move, leaders simultaneously bolstered movement ethos and protected themselves from the accusations that might be leveraged from white opposition.

Besides overt invitations to outsiders, civil rights mass meetings were sometimes recorded with the goal of circulation. These records provide yet another disturbance to the understanding of the mass meeting as a traditional hush harbor where the activities were kept private and secret. Interestingly, it was often white activists who often took up the role of recording meetings and movement activities. For instance as I discuss further in chapter 2, Guy and Candie Carawan recorded dozens of mass meetings and collated them into albums for broad release during the movement. In 1960, for instance, they released "The Nashville Sit-in Story." As the cover art below reveals, through Folkways

Records, the Carawans circulated the successes of the sit-in protests in Nashville and highlight the significance of mass meetings. In this album, portions of mass meetings are interspersed with interviews and songs important to the Nashville sit-in movement. Minister Kelly Miller Smith offers an introduction to the album in liner notes where he articulates its purpose: to demonstrate that the Nashville sit-in movement was not simply about the most obvious actions that occurred at lunch counters. Rather, he argues, the successes derived from months of mass meetings and workshops (Smith). Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, the Carawans published two other similar records that include mass meetings from Birmingham, Alabama, and Greenwood, Mississippi.

These records spoke to the extended audience of meetings. For these interested observers, civil rights leaders overtly revealed what was happening in meetings. Importantly, not only were fliers and posters used to invite people in to the mass meeting; records were also used to circulate and publicize their successes. Mass meetings thus became the rhetorical spaces where African Americans and other activists explored the rhetorical possibilities of speaking frankly as a community to anyone who would pick up a flyer and attend a meeting or listen to their records of mass meetings.

In the visible space of the mass meeting, participants learned to enact collective political identity before whoever might watch. Twenty-first century accounts often highlight the work mass meeting did for the insider activist audience, and indeed this was the primary objective of the meetings, but we should see the rhetorical acuity of meeting organizers as they were continually organizing meetings to speak to this critical and primary audience as well as others. Turning now to examine one of these other audiences, the eavesdropping audience, I approach a mass meeting in Terrell County, Southwest

Georgia to see how meeting leaders and participants interacted with one of its multiple audiences: segregationists. Here I engage the concept of "eavesdropping audience," as theorized by James L. Golden and Richard D. Rieke. Local antagonistic whites often even attempted to "listen in" on meetings. Whether they learned through fliers, posters, records, or by watching traffic patterns and parking lots, in many cities across the South segregationists paid attention when mass meetings occurred, and they became an audience to these rhetorical events

For scholars such as Golden and Rieke, the "eavesdropping audience" is a construct that can be used to protest white supremacist power. Golden and Rieke argue that militant black rhetors such as Malcolm X construct eavesdropping audiences in order to speak to whites who may "overhear" what they say to their black audience. For Malcolm X and others, this meant speaking frankly to a black audience while also crafting discourse as a challenge to whites listening in (Golden and Rieke 492-493). In this tradition, mass meetings leaders strategically spoke to eavesdroppers, except in this case these eavesdroppers are an invited, or least an anticipated, group listening outside church or school walls, and at times even from within the building. By extending open invitations, meeting leaders essentially gave hostile whites who desired to listen in on meetings two options: 1) they could "accept" the invitation and attend the meeting as part of the immediate audience; or 2) they could ignore the invitation and choose to remain an antagonistic outsider only interested in overhearing. Through strategic publicity, then,

meeting leaders positioned antagonistic whites who refused to join the activist audience as outsider listeners, and thus eavesdroppers, to their discourse.[11]

Before describing this mass meeting, some background on Terrell County's role in the Southwest Georgia portion of the civil rights movement is useful. With a population of 13,000, Terrell was a county where black people outnumbered whites by two-to-one. Yet in the summer of 1962 only 51 blacks in the county were registered to vote. In spite of a federal injunction, the Voter Registrar continued attempting to prevent blacks from registering. As part of the southwest Georgia movement, SNCC sent field secretaries into various counties to aid in voter registration and organize black communities (Sokol 75; Hogan 69-74; Tuck 166-168).

On the evening of July 26, 1962, the Terrell mass meeting program was designed to bolster participants' spirits and help them prepare to register to vote. However, this evening's meeting also included an audience listening in outside the church walls. In this particular event at Mount Olive Baptist Church, the eavesdropping audience actually engaged with those gathered inside: during this mass meeting, a group of eavesdropping whites including Sheriff Matthews and his chief deputy entered the church after the Scripture reading. The response of Matthews and the group of whites he brought with him highlights the risks involved with speaking strategically at mass meetings when participants spoke to one another and to the tertiary audiences of white listeners. As the leaders and audience members' performance shows, in response to eavesdroppers, meeting participants adopted a "double-voiced" rhetorical strategy, speaking at once to

[11] For a more extensive discussion of the productive intersections between eavesdropping, rhetoric, and race see Krista Ratcliffe's essay, "Eavesdropping as Rhetorical Tactic: History, Whiteness, and Rhetoric."

one another while also speaking strategically to white power. It is critical to note that the leaders of the mass meeting were not the only ones who employed this strategy: the immediate black audience engaged in this double-voiced discourse as well. This example then demonstrates that activists within meetings were not speaking only to themselves. Rather, they were speaking to anyone who responded to invitations to the meeting as they also prepared for activism outside the meeting. Here, the tertiary white audience illuminates how the mass meeting shifted from a preparatory space for protest to an actual site of protest.

During this meeting, Sherrod began his Scripture reading of Romans, but interrupted his reading to alert his immediate audience that the eavesdroppers had gathered outside the church: "I'm going to read it again for they're standing on the outside" (qtd. in Sitton).[12] From inside, the crowd could hear Sherriff Matthews and his group calling out the license numbers of the cars parked alongside the church. Sherrod's response to the group gathering outside illuminates an important dimension of speaking before an eavesdropper. Sherrod strategically positioned his reading for the eavesdroppers, modeling *parrhesia* for his meeting audience and speaking truth to the eavesdroppers. Nunley defines parrhesia as speech that is fearless or even dangerous (*Keepin'* 44-47). Here, we see how like Malcolm X speaking candidly to audiences of African Americans but aware of possible white listeners, Sherrod's resolution to proceed through the reading instructs his primary audience to speak frankly to one another even before watching eyes. Sherrod's strategic speech to eavesdroppers occurs while they are

[12] The details here come from Claude Sitton's *New York Times* account of this meeting and from Sokol. I will discuss Sitton and the *Times* as a meeting audience in the next section. For more information, see Wesley Hogan's *Many Minds, One Heart* and Jason Sokol's *There Goes My Everything.*

physically present, and in the case of this particular meeting, active in responding and intervening in the course of the meeting. Considering the volatile relationship between many hostile white sheriffs and black communities organizing in this period, the physical presence of these eavesdropping whites must have represented an enormous affective burden for the black audience. The entrance of the eavesdroppers surely brought with it intimidation, fear, and anger associated with the possibility of violence. Indeed, the mass meeting sometimes became a site characterized by emotional turmoil and immediate danger.

Sherrod continued his double-voiced reading of the Romans passage as Matthews and the group of 13 other law officers and whites entered through the back door of the church: "If God be for us, who can be against us. We are counted as sheep for the slaughter" (qtd. in Sitton). Save the deputy sheriff who lingered in the doorway smoking a cigarette, the small group of whites gathered in the back, whispering among themselves. After finishing the passage, Sherrod continued with the meeting, beginning another prayer: "Give us the wisdom to try to understand this world. Oh, Lord God, we've been abused so long; we've been down so long; oh, Lord, all we want is for our white brothers to understand that in Thy sight we are all equal. We're praying for the courage to withstand the brutality of our brethren" (qtd. in Sitton). Anticipating possible violence, Sherrod continued modeling a "double-voiced" strategy of engaging both his activist audience and the eavesdroppers. With the last line especially, he encouraged his black audience toward rhetorical and physical perseverance: to have courage to speak and act while feeling intimidation, fear, or anger. To the whites listening in, Sherrod admonished them to acknowledge and repent of the brutal abuse blacks have suffered at the hands of

white oppression. For both audiences, he spelled out the goal of the mass meetings, protests, and voting rallies: acknowledgement of the equality that all American citizens share before God.

Sherrod then led the meeting attendants in song, and as he did, he offered them an opportunity to enact the double-voiced strategy he had just modeled. After the prayer with Sherrod, the crowd began to sing, "We are Climbing Jacob's Ladder":

> We are climbing Jacob's ladder,
> We are climbing Jacob's ladder,
> We are climbing Jacob's ladder,
> Soldiers of the cross.
>
> Every [rung] goes higher, higher,
> Every [rung] goes higher, higher,
> Every [rung] goes higher, higher,
> Soldiers of the cross. (Work 220)

This hymn offered meeting participants an immediate opportunity to enact the *parrhesiastic* discourse Sherrod had previously modeled. Voiced joined together, the crowd sang, "Sinner, do you love my Jesus? If you love Him, why not serve Him?" (Sitton). As they sang these verses, the deputy stood in the doorway, swinging a flashlight and glaring. As a move toward the perseverance Sherrod prayed for, meeting participants kept right on singing, confronting white eavesdroppers while advocating for a community where claims to Christianity required justice to be a shared value (Sitton; Sokol; Hogan). In this way, the tertiary white audience's presence highlights the shift

from mass meeting as a training ground for protest to mass meeting as a site of actual protest: the mass meeting could be a space to enact risky, frank speech before a white audience.

Toward the end of this meeting, Lucius Holloway, the chairman of the voter registration drive, articulated the rhetorical purpose of the Terrell meeting by returning to the double-voiced strategy Sherrod modeled in his prayer. Speaking at once to his immediate audience and to Sheriff Matthews and his group hovering in the back of the sanctuary, Holloway stated: "Everybody is welcome. This is a voter registration meeting" (qtd. in Sitton). Here, his speech primarily honored and influenced the immediate audience, those seeking to register to vote and everyone helping them achieve that goal, but at the same time it also spoke to the segregationists who opposed such a purpose and claimed ill will on the grounds of a "secret" meeting.

In response to Holloway's statement of intent, Matthews, followed by the deputy, strode to the front of the sanctuary. To the audience of the meeting, he said: "I have the greatest respect for any religious organization but my people is getting disturbed about these secret meetings. I don't think there is any colored people down here who are afraid. After last night the people are disturbed. They had a lot of violence in Albany last night" (qtd. in Sitton).[13] Here, Matthews endeavors to recast the purpose of the meeting, attempting to obfuscate Holloway's claims to an open meeting to register voters, defining it instead as a clandestine meeting that whites presumably feared where black intentions were unknown. Significantly, Matthews is "welcomed" and "invited," yet still argues that the mass meeting is "secret." After a brief pause, he continued his address to the meeting

[13] Matthews is likely referring to riots in the neighboring Georgia county of Albany (Hogan 71).

audience, stating that he believes none of them "was dissatisfied with life in the county" (qtd. in Sitton). Then he asked all from Terrell County to stand up. Once the activist audience was standing, Matthews began:

> "Are any of you disturbed?"
>
> The reply was a muffled, "Yes."
>
> "Can you vote if you are qualified?"
>
> "No."
>
> "Do you need people to come down and tell you what to do?"
>
> "Yes."
>
> "Haven't you been getting along well for a hundred years?"
>
> "No." (qtd. in Sitton)

Through this performance by an eavesdropper, all meeting participants had the unique, if bizarre, opportunity to enact *parrhesia* in a direct exchange with Matthews: in this exchange, the activist audience collectively performs *parrhesiatic* discourse. They frankly said what is true: they cannot vote and have not been getting along well. Through their dialogue with Matthews, they also performed and affirmed the shared identity cultivated by leaders such as Sherrod. Employing the constitutive power of the word, meeting participants enact their shared activist identity by speaking as a group. Such speech resolutely refutes Matthews' suggestion that African Americans are satisfied with life in Terrell County.

Through prayers, hymns, speeches, and finally testimony, the meeting participants adopted a double-voice, leveraging *parrhesia* as a strategy not just to affirm and constitute their activist identity but to confront and perform in front of the eavesdroppers.

Thus the immediate audience enacted and sustained the shared political identity that was the purpose of the meeting. For the immediate audience, the performances cemented their commitment to the civil rights movement by requiring their willingness to speak about it in front of a hostile white audience. As Matthews' responses make clear, meeting participants did not back down in the face of his questions. Emboldened by Sherrod's frank, unyielding continuation with his readings and prayers, meeting participants testified with resolution to Matthews, even as the rest of his group looked on. Leveraging the genre repertoire they knew so well, the mass meeting audience became rhetors and spoke powerfully to local white Southerners. Participants spoke, sang, or prayed the unvarnished truth, even while likely feeling fear, anger, and intimidation.

While one meeting only offers so much insight into mass meetings' rhetorical situations more broadly, the eavesdropping audience I have identified in this Southwest Georgia meeting is not an unusual feature of the mass meeting. In fact, these eavesdropping audiences were a common occurrence. For example, activists report developing alternate routes from the meetings to their homes to avoid being followed by white onlookers (Rosetta xi). Moreover, accounts such as Chuck Fager's in *Selma* record leaders like Ralph Abernathy employing similar kinds of double-voiced strategies as Sherrod did in mass meetings.[14]

Besides the presence of local whites in mass meetings, news reporters such as Watters represent an additional meeting audience: the extended audience. I turn now to

[14] Fager recounts that the police planted a recorder on the pulpit and warned Abernathy and others to "watch what they said" (46). Later, in the middle of speaking in a meeting, Abernathy grabbed the recorder and used it as a prop, calling it a "doohickey," and speaking to the police directly while his primary audience roared with laughter (47).

coverage of civil rights mass meetings by the country's most prominent daily newspaper, *The New York Times* between the years 1953 and 1968.[15] Through *Times* reporter's accounts, the mass meeting appears to its extended audience as a significant site of African American protest through its political, organizational, and rhetorical functions. Reporters also spotlight the achievements of meeting rhetors: as journalists take the mass meeting up in greater detail, they focus on the individual contributions of men and women who participate in meetings. Importantly, *Times'* accounts also juxtapose the rhetorical achievements of civil rights mass meetings as well as other forms of nonviolent protest with white segregationists' antagonism and aggression. In this way, *Times* reporters draw attention to the extreme lengths some white Southerners would go to maintain the status quo, while highlighting the sophisticated rhetorical strategies activists at mass meetings devised to counter their hold to power. In addition, by making clear the varied agendas driving meetings, the *Times'* coverage assuages anxieties about the purpose and goings on of mass meetings.

From the beginning of the civil rights movement, leaders such as King understood the importance of sympathetic white reporters as interlocutors who might provide the counter story to the one told by many antagonistic white journalists (Rieder 180). Toward this aim, they often invited Northern journalists to attend mass meetings (Hogan). Moreover, leaders such as King believed these interlocutors provided access to an important extended audience, whites outside the South, and that speaking to the

[15] A more thorough investigation might consider a range of media covering mass meetings. My aim, however, is not to provide an exhaustive treatment of the mass meeting's work for national audiences; rather, I show that leaders strategically circulated the rhetorical work of meetings to gain a significant national presence through what I am calling an extended audience.

conscience of this audience was a crucial task for achieving desired social and legislative changes. As Jonathan Rieder argues, "[E]ver aware of the sympathy and indignation created by racist attacks on noble black protestors, SCLC crafted its spectacles of suffering with its eye always on the media, the White House, Congress, and public opinion" (180). For Rieder, this focus is one of the key reasons "why we can't really think of the mass meetings only as a black sanctuary. . . " (180).

From the *Times'* perspective, as early as the late 1930s, editors began to see the South as an important story. In 1947, the *Times* sent reporter John Popham to Chattanooga, TN, to set up its first regional reporting bureau in the South. From that point forward, the *Times* had a correspondent on location to cover civil rights developments. In 1958, Claude Sitton took over for Popham as Southern correspondent, and by many accounts his work dramatically shaped how the civil rights story developed on the national level (Roberts and Klibanoff 185-186). Given that civil rights leaders often defined mass meetings as open events, when white reporters such as Popham or Sitton arrived in town on assignment they too were welcome to join nightly meetings. Importantly, *Times* reporters proved to be significant allies for civil rights leaders. Historians note that many activists had Sitton's phone number and address in their back pockets, and when they faced hostility they often called Sitton rather than the local police (Roberts and Klibanoff 191). For contemporary scholars, these newspaper accounts are an incredible resource for scholars interested in mass meetings.[16] Sitton's multiple

[16] Besides news articles, some reporters have published memoirs that are also excellent resources for gaining firsthand perspectives of mass meetings and other events. For instance, Pat Watters' *Down to Now*: *Reflections on the Southern Civil Rights Movement* offers remarkable insight in to mass meetings.

articles, for instance, provide the records of the Terrell mass meeting in the previous section.

Sympathetic white reporters such as Popham and Sitton then afforded civil rights leaders the means to counter false depictions of mass meetings circulating in white Southern papers. When editor of the *Montgomer*y *Advertiser* Joe Azbell covered the 1955 Holt Street Mass Meeting, his front-page story called the meeting "top secret." No matter that thousands of mimeographed letters inviting Montgomery African Americans to participate in the boycott and the meeting littered the Holt Street auditorium (Roberts and Kilbanoff 119). Like segregationists in Georgia, Azbell defined the mass meeting as a hidden, clandestine event. To Azbell's Montgomery readers, the mass meeting appeared hidden and secret, suggesting that the group gathered within was uninterested in engaging with audiences outside. Such a depiction would have incited anxiety from the white community.

By contrast, in the *Times,* reporters more accurately represented what happened in mass meetings, thus circulating the important *non*-secretive political and rhetorical functions of meetings. For instance, in April of 1956, the headline of Popham's article read: "NEGROES TO KEEP BOYCOTTING BUSES: Montgomery Meeting Votes to Continue Protest as City Fights Integration Move." Encountering the article, *New York Times* readers observe African Americans' deliberative actions in Montgomery mass meetings:

> A Negro mass meeting unanimously endorsed tonight the continuance of a boycott against the city's transit system. Approximately 2,000 Negroes gave a standing vote in support of a formal resolution to 'carry on our

> mass protest.' This was in answer to recent declarations of Montgomery city officials that bus drivers or passengers who violated state or city segregation statutes would be subject to arrest. (Popham)

In a November piece reporting the end of the boycott, an article reveals how the mass meeting affords Montgomery's activist community a space to deliberate over national legislation. In response to the Supreme Court's affirmation of *Browder v. Gale*, the article notes that those gathered at a mass meeting the evening of November 13 voted to draw the boycott to an end: "Two days ago, the Supreme Court outlawed segregated seating on intrastate buses. Montgomery Negroes voted at two mass meetings last night to end an eleven-month-old boycott of city buses when the high court's mandate reached a Federal District Court in Montgomery" ("Montgomery"). While the boycott would not actually end for another few weeks, in this article African American collective political power is clear: in response to national legislation that will attend to their agenda, the group deliberates over the efficacy of their public protest and what actions they should take up next. The *New York Times* offers insight into the functions of the mass meeting and activists' plans for the future of the movement. By inviting *Times* reporters to these events, civil rights leaders are able to let a larger American audience learn about these goings on of the mass meetings, and by gaining a national audience through a white-owned daily, they present the mass meeting to a desired audience: sympathetic Northern whites.

Times' accounts also provided black leaders an opportunity to circulate the emotive power of the mass meeting. Journalists David Halberstam and Claude Sitton published pieces with headlines such as "Negroes Meet Nightly Despite Tension in

Delta" and "Songs Give Them Courage in a Mississippi Church as Voter Drive Continues." These reporters and others emphasize the mass meeting as one of the central strategies drawing movement participants and activities together. Through a focus on the significance of blacks meeting and finding strength in the songs they enact together, reporters cast light onto the meeting's constitutive roots in the African American worship tradition. However, importantly, they also describe the goings on and the development of the constitutive process: it is not one private to meeting activists, but one readers of the *New York Times* can witness from afar. In the 1960 coverage of the Atlanta movement, for instance, the front-page headline reads: "Thousands Support Drive to Integrate Dining places – Mass Meetings Held" ("Atlanta"). The article goes on to draw connections between the praying and singing that happens inside the meeting and the public marches; indeed, in this piece, it is difficult to distinguish between where the meeting ends and direct demonstration begins. Readers of the *Times* gained insight into the dual function of meetings: they observe how meetings provide an emotional refuge for meeting participants while also functioning as public protest. These examples demonstrate how having a *New York Times* reporter present at meetings helped leaders circulate the multidimensional rhetoricity of meetings to their extended audience, and they offer a window into the mass meetings for audiences to learn about rhetorical and activist process. This was a savvy rhetorical move indeed, for it afforded leaders an even broader sympathetic audience and some control over the story they received.

Lastly, by welcoming reporters such as Popham, Halberstam, and Sitton into meetings, civil rights leaders provided individual African Americans access to national conversations. Halberstam's treatment of a Delta mass meeting includes references to

rhetors such as Mrs. Irene Johnson, Charles McLaurin, Reverend Smith Carter, Dale Dronemeier, and more significantly he includes portions of each of their meeting performances. For instance, Halberstam offers this excerpt from Mrs. Johnson's exhortation: "We've got to go to Drew (Mississippi) and help those people loosen up. We've got to make them realize what's going on in this country because they have been living in such fear over there" (Halberstam). By publishing such excerpts, *Times* reporters made it possible for meeting participants like Johnson to speak in tones that are both frank and fearless, but due to their presence in the press, they do so before white and black readers of the *Times*. Importantly, in these accounts, the *Times* also records the eavesdropping audience too, so that African American rhetorical achievements appear alongside stories of segregationists' eavesdropping. Sitton's piece on the Terrell meeting was titled: "Sherriff Harasses Negroes at Voting Rally in Georgia" (Sitton). To the extended audience of mass meetings, civil rights activists' rhetorical savvy provides the counterpoint to the rhetorical failures of segregationists and enables readers to see the stakes of their mass meeting involvement.

This analysis of *Times* reporting makes clear that by inviting journalists to become an audience for the mass meeting, leaders strategically secured an inroad to speak to readers of the most prominent white-owned daily. Meeting participants thus acquired an extended audience and transformed the mass meeting into a rhetorical event with the potential to change the perspective of Americans outside the South. Through a national presence and the possibility of influencing this extended audiences' perspective, the mass meeting's rhetorical work in national dailies like the *Times* also powerfully shaped the work inside the meeting. Like the interanimation between the meeting and its

eavesdropping audience, the circulation of the meeting's power in national dailies also contributed to the significance of what happened on the inside. Gaining access to a national audience raised the stakes for rhetorical production by making it possible for the songs, prayers, and testimonies of the group to be heard by many. Ironically, the visibility gained through the *Times* also provided greater safety for what happened in meetings. When the *Times* ran Sitton's story covering Matthews' performance at the Terrell meeting, Attorney General Robert Kennedy read the piece and learned of Matthews' aggression. He immediately called the head of the Civil Rights Division Burke Marshall and ordered him to go to Georgia and to bring intimidation and harassment charges against Sherriff Matthews.[17]

As a rhetorical event with a clear purpose and much publicity, the mass meeting spoke powerfully to multiple audiences. These audiences are important to see in thinking about the functions of the meeting genre repertoire. It did not function only internally for African Americans and white allies constituting collective identities; rather, it developed in response to these varied perspectives. The extended meeting audience illustrates how it operated as a national stage for generating, sustaining, and enacting collective identity, while the eavesdropping audience reveals how meeting genres spoke locally to hostile whites. Both of these audiences raised the stakes for performance of songs, prayers, and testimonies as they created possibilities for rhetorical production in the meeting to circulate beyond the African American community to other interlocutors.

[17] Unfortunately federal protection only provided limited gains in Terrell. Six weeks after the mass meeting Matthews attended, the church where the group had been holding meetings was burned to the ground. At this point, meeting leaders began holding meetings in a tent (Hogan 74).

V. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how genre and audience serve as crucial terms for illuminating how the mass meeting functioned and for whom. As a genre repertoire of collective action based on the religious service, the mass meeting operated through an interwoven set of religious genres that relied on one another. The meetings in Southwest Georgia and Nashville, Tennessee, underscore the point and offer examples of the various purposes to which the genre repertoire was leveraged. In Sumter, for instance, speech and song work together to help the group to engender a collective identity and the will to continue meeting and working. Albany similarly illustrates how the fluidity between testimonies and songs provides a transformational spiritual and affective experience that helps activists stay united and resolute on accomplishing the task at hand. The meeting in Nashville shows that while many meetings moved fluidly from genre to genre, sometimes the presence of visiting leaders produced rhetorical moments that functioned at odds with the purpose of the rest of the meeting.

The meeting genre repertoire was not designed to speak only to those gathered inside: as the presence of reporters and segregationists in meetings illustrates, the genres of the meeting spoke to multiple audiences. This engagement with other audiences then importantly raised the stakes for the singing, praying, and testifying that happened inside the meeting. African Americans had opportunities to test out the possibilities for their collective and individual identities and the rhetorical uses of meeting genres toward these ends. As the collectively spoken prayer of Sherrod and other Terrell residents illuminates, they prayed together before God while also doing so in response to the white segregationists' presence, and in this way, they both asserted their faith and God and will

to resist white supremacist power. The coverage of meetings like this one in the *New York Times* points to the ways that the circulation of the genre repertoire helped engender a national political identity for Southern African Americans, both collectively and individually.

While in this chapter the focus has been on looking broadly at the genre repertoire of the meeting and the ways it functioned for multiple audiences, in the chapters to follow I move into analysis of how individual genres in the meeting repertoire—song, prayer, and testimony—functioned within the meeting and how they circulated beyond it. As these chapters will illustrate, each genre played a unique role in engendering activist identities. Genres function, Miller writes, as "keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community" (Miller 39). Together, the songs, prayers, and testimonies in meetings fostered sophisticated, rhetorically effective ways of speaking and acting in the civil rights movement, even as inhabiting them toward black freedom required adapting the genres as well.

Chapter 2:

The Making of a Singing Movement:

Coupling and Decoupling Sacred Music and Protest

> And when we would walk up to the churches, coming to the meetings, the people would already be there and the church was rocking with "A Charge to Keep I Have." The last verse of that old, old, old hymn is:
>
> To serve this present age
> My calling to fulfill
> Oh may it all my powers engage
> To do my Master's will. –Prathia Hall

Among the scores of works devoted to documenting and explaining civil rights history, one aspect of the movement remains agreed upon: song was fundamental to activists' work. In John L. Lewis's apt phrase, the civil rights movement was "a singing movement." Numerous activists have unpacked Lewis's phrase by describing what they experienced as a participant in a singing movement. Bernice Reagon, for example, explains, "[T]he songs . . . were considered essential for organizing. No mass meeting could be successfully carried off without songs. [African Americans saw] the songs [to

be] more powerful than spoken conversation" (2). At marches, on courtroom steps, in jail cells, and at meetings, activists sang. Their singing was both a response to recurring white oppression and a discursive means of remaking the situations they so desired to change. Through song, activists constituted and embraced a collective vision for themselves, found emotional release, and responded to oppression with nonviolence that testified to their dignity as human beings, people who sing.

Rhetoricians such as Kerran Sanger, Keith Miller, Troy Murphy, and Stephen Schneider have helped us understand why songs were so powerful for civil rights activists. Sanger recovers the rhetorical functions of freedom songs, which she describes as "perhaps the most powerful rhetorical behavior of all in the civil rights movement" (15). She argues that freedom songs provided activists with important resources for self-definition, and that they leveraged this power by constructing an implicit rhetorical theory. Miller and Murphy initiate more specific lines of inquiry as they engage in lyrical analysis of civil rights songs. For example, Miller shows how civil rights songs usefully employ everyday metaphors to reinforce familiar African American beliefs, and Murphy demonstrates that lyrical adaptations of "We Shall Overcome" were purposeful means of rhetorical invention ("City" 548 and 2). In a recent study of music education at the Highlander Folk School, Schneider highlights the powerful framing mechanisms of song for activists (143). Together this scholarship shows how songs offered activists' new self-definitions, familiar commonplaces, means of invention, and served as direct protest in their own right.[18]

[18] Besides rhetoricians, sociologists have also sought to understand how song worked to shape, constrain, and enable the remaking of social relations in the movement. In Roy's comparative study, *Red, Whites, and Blues,* he approaches song as a process or an

What remains unclear, however, is precisely *how* song gained the rhetorical momentum that it did: how did the civil rights movement become a "singing movement"? What rhetorical processes catalyzed the capacities of song to sustain and support activists' work? What rhetorical roles did this process rely upon? This chapter seeks to answer these questions as it attends to the insights made by Prathia Hall and Reagon above, that songs "rocked" the mass meetings and that mass meetings depended on songs to carry out their rhetorical purposes. As Hall elaborates and many other activists contend, the mass meeting and many of the genres that comprised it were religious, both in purpose and in discursive features (King, Lewis, Reagon, Carawan, Hamer). This interanimation, between the meeting, its genres, and religion, help to explain how the movement became a singing movement even as it also was a cause for movement fractures later on.

Extending the insights of Hall and Reagon and building on the work of Sanger, Miller, Murphy, and Schneider, in what follows I demonstrate that the mass meeting provided the crucial space for activists to learn and be persuaded to sing as a response to white oppression and as a means of remaking social relations. I argue that by

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embedded activity that enables the remaking of social relationships. Roy's study identifies three social functions of music that can emerge from its use as either a process or an embedded activity: bounding, bridging, and ranking (17). Bounding, according to Roy, means that music can "create and sustain consequential categorical distinctions among people" (17). In rhetorical terms, music then functions *constitutively;* it can generate new identities or sustain extant ones. For Roy, song also functions as a bridge. That is, it fosters cultural boundary crossing and enables "bridging" of social relationships. He claims: "Music is equally important sociologically in its ability to reach across boundaries and bridge social relationships" (18). An example here is "the diffusion of classical music beyond Europe or the popularity of World Music within it" (18). Finally, ranking, according to Roy, means intervening in extant social and systemic power dynamics, or in his words, "reinforcing social distinctions, reaching across them, and facilitating or inverting hierarchy" (17).

investigating the significance of songs in meetings, we gain a fuller sense of the rhetorical process that enabled the civil rights movement to become a singing movement as we also learn more about the unique functions of songs in the mass meeting. At meetings, participants practiced congregational singing as a means both of faith and of protest; they learned to recontextualize hymns and spirituals and then combine them with labor and children's music—coming together to create a specific king of song protest genre: freedom songs; and finally, they also connected their singing to the larger movement and its triumphs and failures. These outcomes functioned through a rhetorical process enabled by the unique space of the mass meeting: as an adapted church service, it provided an ideal context for people to build on their prior experiences singing in churches and for others to learn how to sing as an individual part of a larger collective. This rhetorical process relied in part upon individual activist roles such as song leaders, choral performers, composers, and music historians and archivists. The careers of Guy Carawan, Matthew Jones, and Reagon among others, offer examples of individuals who shaped the rhetorical work of singing at meetings and beyond. Through sophisticated strategies of selection, arrangement, composing, and remediation, activists such as Carawan, Jones, and Reagon were especially influential for catalyzing the rhetorical process of transforming song for protest in meetings.

The chapter opens by examining sacred song's role as strength and resistance in African American rhetorical history. After reviewing sacred song's history as a protest genre, I begin the work of illuminating how the mass meeting provided the context for song to garner even more rhetorical power. Through an analysis of the hymns sung at the 1955 Holt Street mass meeting in Montgomery, Alabama, I show how early in the civil

rights movement, people in mass meetings mostly sang familiar church music, and that these songs gained protest significance through participants' recontextualizations. These recontextualizations demonstrate how singing could be both familiar and entirely new at once: as the discursive features and spatial connections of the hymns remained the same, the temporal relationships shifted toward movement aims. Next, I turn to the Nashville movement in the early 1960s. In the Nashville meetings, Guy Carawan, a white man from California, introduces activists to new songs selected and arranged for protest, including children's songs, spirituals, and labor music. To persuade activists to accept his song selections, Carawan relies on a strategy I label narrative embedding. This process reveals how the freedom song repertoire expanded and activists developed new strategies for singing as protest. The final mass meeting stage I consider in this chapter is Jackson, Mississippi, in 1963. The Jackson meeting also serves as a space where activists learn new songs; this time a song composed by song leader Matthew Jones. In response to movement tragedies, Jones wrote "The Ballad of Medgar Evers," and the mass meeting provides the context for his first performance of this song. In the fourth and final section of the chapter, I examine how as sacred song was decoupled from its protest power, freedom songs began to circulate beyond the mass meeting as a mode of remembering the Christian nonviolent phase of the movement.

Freedom Singing: Sacred Music as Resistance in the African American Rhetorical Tradition

Writing in 1964, Julius Lester defined freedom songs in this way, "To paraphrase the definition of a minister, freedom songs should comfort the disturbed and disturb the

comfortable. . . Being a Negro is not a necessary prerequisite for singing freedom songs. Being willing to understand the Negro and his history is. It is here that the fabric of freedom songs is found" (qtd. in Gwin 124). Lester's definition captures the spirit of freedom songs. They can be any song sung by anyone toward enacting black freedom. More technically speaking, freedom songs are two basic types of songs: 1) group participation songs, usually songs selected from the African American tradition, and 2) topical songs, often composed for the movement (Spencer 83; Reagon, "The Civil Rights" 600) The group participation songs, like the popular "We Shall Overcome," or "This Little Light of Mine," were spirituals, hymns, or gospel songs selected and often adapted for the movement. The topical songs were songs such as "Legend of Danville" composed by activists like Matthew Jones (Spencer 83). Freedom songs thus serves as an umbrella term for describing a variety of songs, including hymns, labor music, gospels, and spirituals, united in their purpose of being sung for black freedom. Early in the civil rights struggle, freedom songs were mostly comprised of familiar songs selected from the music of the church, and these hymns, spirituals, and other songs *became* freedom songs because they were being sung for civil rights ends. Later, the freedom song repertoire expanded to include other selections and became more diverse.

This diverse group of songs were all performed and enacted in the tradition of African American religious singing. In terms of song selections, the group participation freedom songs were the most common, and these were often selected from African American religious history. Songs such as "Ain't Nobody Gonna Turn Me 'Round," "Wade in the Water," and "We Shall Overcome" were adapted from earlier versions sung in religious contexts. Adaptations generally entailed shifting the lyrics slightly. For

example, the gospel song, "Woke Up this Morning with My Mind on Jesus," became "Woke Up this Morning with My Mind on Freedom." Even the freedom songs that were not religious—labor songs such as "Solidarity Forever," for example—were most often sung in the styles of black worship. In an essay, Reagon describes this process,

> The freedom songs—though recorded, transcribed, committed to the written page, and read—truly came to life within the context of an older Black oral tradition where song and struggle were inseparable. The power of the songs came from the linking of traditional oral expression with everyday Movement experiences. . . . Most of the singing during Movement activities was congregational: songs learned in the singing, unrehearsed. The African American congregational singing tradition has its own set of aesthetics and principles governing the birthing and executing of a song, its own parameters defining the range and use of the vocal instrument, and its own role for singers within the group. (599, "The Civil Rights")

As Reagon writes, no matter where movement music came from, it was integrated into a much older tradition of African American religious singing. Reagon's point is important for understanding how a broad, inclusive set of songs came to be understood as freedom songs. Leaders drew on the African American congregational singing tradition to help large groups of people sing diverse songs for civil rights ends including voting rights and desegregation.

The freedom songs thus emerged from a much longer history of sacred singing in southern African American culture extending back to enslavement. As scholars such as

Albert Raboteau and Lawrence Levine have demonstrated, spirituals were incredibly significant to African Americans as cultural and religious expression, as well as a mode of resisting white slave owners. Raboteau explains that for enslaved men and women, spirituals synthesized white religious traditions and African music. Raboteau writes,

> Hindered from learning to read and write by law or by custom, slaves learned the Bible by hearing it preached . . . In particular, the songs known as spirituals brought the biblical characters and stories vividly to life. Spirituals brought together Protestant hymns and African music styles into a distinctly creative and expressive synthesis. People sang them at work and at prayer, in groups and alone. Spirituals were not only sung, but they engaged the whole body in hand-clapping, foot-stamping, head-shaking excitement. (48)

Raboteau's account emphasizes how song, as an embodied rhetorical form, offered renewal and revival for enslaved people. As an oral mode of communication, songs explained and intersected with the biblical stories that enslaved people learned by hearing. For example, enslaved people sang songs like "We Are the People of God," with lines like, "I really do believe I am a child of God. I'm born of God, I know am" (qtd. in Levine 589). As this song suggests, spirituals remade complex stories such as the Exodus narrative of the Israelites into concise statements that were sung in the style of African music, for instance including dancing and call-and-response. The embodiment of the spirituals, thus, took on resonances with African spiritual styles that made the singing uniquely African American.

The function of the spiritual to bolster enslaved people's spirits and to foster community also provided a counterpoint to white slaveholders' view of African Americans as property and their efforts to dehumanize black people. In this way, singing functioned as a type of resistance. However it is important to note that song was never just resistance. Lawrence Levine argues,

> Thus to maintain that Black music and song constituted a form of Black resistance does not mean that it necessarily led to or even called for any tangible and easily identifiable protest, but rather that it served as a mechanism by which Blacks could be relatively open in a society that rarely accorded them that privilege, could communicate this candor to others whom they would in no other way be able to reach, and could assert their own individuality, aspirations, and sense of being in a repressive society structured to prevent such affirmations. (588)

Levine's point makes clear that the resistance afforded by singing was deeply intertwined with its function as cultural and spiritual expression. In singing songs like "We are the People of God" and others, enslaved people communicated with one another and testified to their dignity. This singing countered slave owners' understanding of enslaved people as an "inferior species" as well as legal definitions of slaves as property, and in this way, the spirituals served as an ongoing form of resisting whites' perceptions of African Americans. As Raboteau and Levine together help illustrate, sacred music was important to enslaved men and women as a means of community, humanization, self-expression, culture, and as such, it functioned as resistance in the context of slavery.

Given the significance of sacred music to enslaved people, it is unsurprising that it also provided an important genre for African Americans and other abolitionists in their quest to abolish slavery. Abolitionists appropriated hymns and spirituals to argue for their cause, as did women and other reformers. Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Frederick Douglass are a few notable examples of individuals for whom sacred music was important. For example, spirituals figure prominently in Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written By Himself*. In one moving passage, Douglass writes,

> I did not when a slave understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself within the circle; so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear. They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension; they were tones loud, long, and deep; they breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. . . . To those songs I trace my first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery. I can never get rid of that conception. Those songs still follow me, to deepen my hatred of slavery, and quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds. (17)

This much-cited passage illustrates Douglass's view of the importance of sacred music for enslaved people. Literary scholar David Messmer takes the point further to read this passage as Douglass's challenge to the written word. He writes, "[T]he slave songs provide a means of not only demonstrating Douglass's capacity to participate in a subjective discourse that exists outside of writing, but also affords him an opportunity to

challenge the primacy of the written word that generates such a need in the first place" (9). According to this view, Douglass's invocation of the spiritual in his written text serves as a form of resistance to dominant discourse and it calls our attention to song as a mode of rhetorical intervention beyond the written word. On several levels, then, sacred song provided Douglass and others with a powerful rhetorical tool in the context of abolition.

Besides individuals like Douglass, white abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison, Lydia Sigourney, and others were involved in the creation and publication of antislavery hymnbooks for collective singing toward abolishing slavery (Spencer 42). Jon Spencer notes that "[b]etween 1834 and 1856 abolition verse, or what Garrison called 'fugitive poetical effusions,' were compiled into a dozen songbooks and hymnals" (36). In 1834, Garrison published a book titled *A Selection of Anti-Slavery Hymns, for the Use of Friends of Emancipation* (1834). Two years later Maria Weston Chapman published *Songs of the Free and Hymns of Christian Freedom* (1836). Her hybrid text brings together some of the hymns from Garrison's text with reform poetry, including a large selection by women. In her preface to the volume, she writes, "Those who are laboring for the freedom of the American slave, have felt their need of aid which has ever been sought by those in all ages who have striven for the good of their race;--the encouragement, consolation and strength afforded by poetry and music. This generally expressed feeling was the origin of the present book of hymns. . . ." (qtd. in Spencer 38). Over the next several decades, dozens of antislavery hymnbooks were produced throughout the Northeast, and these collections formed the basis of singing in protest against slavery in churches and primary schools. This feature of song's protest history

reveals an important antecedent for the work of white collaborators such as Carawan in the civil rights movement.

As this overview illustrates, sacred music was important for African American resistance during slavery and for the cause of abolition. However, during Reconstruction and the early twentieth century, African American sacred music was in many ways decoupled from its protest power for a time. Levine writes, "As Blacks became more increasingly literate and geographically mobile and the culture of the world around them became more accessible, their expressions of resistance tended to be lodged in more purely secular music. If during slavery it was the secular songs that were occasional and the sacred songs that represented the ethos of the Black folk, in freedom this balance gradually began to reverse itself" (593). Even if sacred music was not employed for protest in this period, it lived on in churches as African Americans sought to institutionalize their worship services. During the early twentieth century, African Americans in churches began to sing gospel music in the traditions of Charles Tindley, the rural blues, and the Holiness-Pentecostal style (Burnim 67). This music was not overtly politicized, but it operated as a subtle form of resistance in its stark departure from the musical styles animating white churches. As Mellonee Burnim writes, gospel music was both "exciting and disturbing" because it challenged the extant church establishment (67). So while gospel songs may not have been the primary source of protest singing in this period, they still helped to foster connections between resistance and sacred singing.

In the middle of the twentieth century, as large groups of African Americans in the Southern United States began campaigning for desegregation, they revived the protest

possibilities latent in the sacred music of African American tradition. As this overview reveals, civil rights activists were revisiting the resistance spiritual music afforded African Americans in the context of slavery even as they were adapting the forms to catalyze more overt, tangible protests for desegregation, voting rights, and racial equality. Not only were they adapting extant songs, but they were also revising a musical style, congregational singing, to become a powerful collective response to racist oppression. Through both of these moves, civil rights activists revived a protest tactic operative during abolition. This chapter argues that this recoupling of sacred song and protest was carried out largely through the engine of the mass meeting. At mass meetings all across the South, African Americans sang old songs such as hymns, spirituals, and gospel songs, and they learned new and unfamiliar songs, some with secular histories and others composed for the movement, most often in the context of African American churches and regularly performed them in the African American tradition of congregational singing.

Coupling Sacred Music and Protest: Recontextualizing Familiar Hymns in Montgomery, Alabama, December 1955

As Levine notes, congregational singing in black churches in the early twentieth century was subtly resistant. For in this moment, the styles of black worship subverted the dominant, mainstream forms of many white churches. Yet, congregational singing in African American churches, for the most part, was separated from political protest. In the civil rights movement, congregational singing came to function as overt, political resistance, expanding on the long history of singing being leveraged for African American freedom during slavery and the abolitionist era. The mass meeting was key to

this transition as it provided a space in-between the safety and security of hideaway contexts like the hush harbor and out-in-the-streets protests and marches. In the mass meeting, large groups of people enacted the familiar experience of singing in the congregational style and in the space of the church but shifted this singing toward responding visibly and collectively to the racial oppression they sought to change and remaking their situations.

Early in the movement, this shift was initiated through the singing of familiar hymns like "Onward Christian Soldiers" and "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" in the context of the mass meeting. Before, these songs resonated in churches as worship songs; in the mass meetings these songs and the experience of singing them as a congregation became connected to civil rights exigencies. In this way, these songs were recontextualized through singing in the mass meeting, and these recontextualizations helped create connections between and among the sounds of congregational singing and collective protest, building on the long history of sacred music as resistance in the African American tradition.

I borrow the term recontextualization from Min Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner.[19] Recontextualization involves repurposing a phrase or sentence within a new temporal-spatial context. By adopting a temporal-spatial perspective, we can see rhetors' acts of seeming repetitions of dominant discourses as meaningful and purposeful recontextualizations (30). As they write, "Recontextualization . . . makes it possible for ostensibly identical utterances to carry significantly different meanings and significance in different contexts" (30). Miller has described similar practices as important ones in the

[19] For Lu and Horner, recontextualization is an important means of recognizing student agency over dominant academic discourses.

African American tradition when thinking about speech genres. Surveying King's speeches and writings, Miller argues King borrowed much of his language from African American folk religion and white liberal homiletics. Miller identifies this strategy as "voice merging," and he argues that it "enabled King to borrow sermons and skillfully intertwine his language and his identity with those of his sources" (*Voice* 5-6).[20] Recontexualization names an extension of borrowing. For my aims here, recontextualization refers to meeting participants and song leaders' recalibration and repurposing of older, familiar songs through the temporal-spatial connections made available through the space of the mass meeting. Through the arrangement of the meeting script, the connections made possible through the meeting space, and the song selections, meeting participants repurposed hymns and other familiar music as freedom songs.

To illustrate how familiar hymns were recontextualized and how this helped foster new connections between congregational singing and protest, I turn to the one of the more familiar moments of the early civil rights movement, Montgomery, Alabama, 1955. The Holt Street mass meeting held on December 5, 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, offers an illuminating example of how the process of recontextualizing familiar hymns was carried out. The Montgomery story is a familiar one, as popular narratives of the civil rights movement often mark Rosa Parks sitting down on a bus and Martin Luther King, Jr. standing up to speak after as the origin of the movement. In this widely-circulated narrative, the important facts are these: On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, inciting what would

[20] Vorris Nunley also writes about improvisation in the African American tradition. For more on this practice, see his chapter in *African American Rhetoric(s): Interdisciplinary Perspectives*.

become a yearlong boycott of segregated buses. Four days later, the newly formed Montgomery Improvement Association held their first mass meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church, where a young Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., urged the several thousand attendees to join in nonviolent direct action protesting segregated bus rides, and more broadly, standing for black freedom (Miller, Rivers and Weber, Wilson).

While numerous scholars and historians have complicated this origins story, the first mass meeting at the Holt Street Baptist Church is nonetheless illustrative for demonstrating how civil rights leaders generated momentum for protest, the importance of congregational singing for fostering collective participation, and the role that the familiar hymns of the black church played in this process. As an example of a mass meeting from the early phase of the civil rights movement, it demonstrates the significance of the meeting space as a site where activists tested out hymn's protest potential. Indeed, at this first meeting, the audience sang two traditional hymns, "Onward Christian Soldiers," and "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms," to get the evening started. Since these songs would be familiar to most, within the context of the mass meeting, participants recontextualized their singing of these hymns in part because the mass meeting was both like and unlike a church service: King and other leaders such as Ralph Abernathy strategically designed the meeting program to blend the familiarity of the church service with explicitly political moments. This strategy is evident in the arrangement of the program:

Opening Hymn:	"Onward Christian Soldiers"
Second Hymn:	"Leaning on the Everlasting Arms"
Prayer:	Revered W. F. Alford

Scripture Reading:	Psalm 34, Reverend U. J. Fields
Address, or "Pep Talk":	Martin Luther King, Jr.
Resolutions:	Reverend Ralph Abernathy
Closing Song:	"My Country 'Tis of Thee"
Benediction:	Reverend Roy Bennett (Wilson 305)

Like a church service, the mass meeting began with hymns, moved to prayer and Scripture Reading, and ended with a song and a benediction. However, the two genres preceding the finale of the meeting—King's address and Abernathy's resolutions—were unique to the context of the mass meeting. Thus the blending of church service with political genres served to create an apt context for shifting familiar hymns toward the protest happening in Montgomery. These familiar hymns gained new resonances as they were sung in anticipation of the explicitly political moments in the meeting. The strategic arrangement of the meeting genres thus positioned participants to recontextualize the hymns and their singing.

The mass meeting, as an adaptation of the church service, was devised as the vehicle for inviting Montgomery African Americans to participate in the protest against desegregation of buses and other public spaces. Thus, the rhetorical situation of the mass meeting is also important for seeing how participants shifted their understanding and enactment of these familiar hymns. Singing hymns in a church in the congregational style just a few days after Rosa Parks initiated a historic boycott made congregational singing especially exigent. The entire town was paying attention to this event. Thus besides the energy surrounding the impending protest, the mass meeting genres influenced multiple audiences, heightening the exigence of the meeting as well. As Kirt Wilson notes, the

Holt Street mass meeting was akin to a football game in terms of publicity and attention. Reporters such as Joe Azbell were present; the entire event was streamed through loudspeakers for those who could not fit into the church (Wilson). As a site of simultaneous worship and protest, the mass meeting enabled the people inside to experience the comfort of singing old songs with the thrill of doing so before a watching city. This type of singing provided the safety of the church yet the possibility for it to speak to other audiences. In this way, the meeting was the ideal space for activists to practice and enact familiar religious songs as protest. In the wake of Parks' refusal, people sang remembering her action as one of the reasons they gathered, and as they did so, they drew on the history of sacred song as a response to white oppression. They performed their religious investment and spiritualism for all those paying attention. In the context of the meeting, with its large size and extensive publicity, activists began to develop new associations with singing: public, organized protest; collective political identity; and widely shared political and social goals, in this case, desegregating buses and public spaces. Through this singing, they constituted themselves as activists who leveraged the language and resources of Christianity and developed the ethos for the movement.

Scholars have noted that the civil rights movement became a singing movement in large part because of the black church's role as an institutional base (Roy 183). For adults even today, the church is the main site where collective singing happens. It is also one of the few places where groups of ordinary people participate in musical experiences, rather than observe performances. In church, the songs are about a collective voice joined toward one end. In Roy's words, "But religious congregations are the main sites by which

Americans are socialized into the practices that distinguish musical performance from musical participation" (Roy 184). In the civil rights movement, leaders understood that participants' prior knowledge of musical participation from their experiences in church was an important resource (Reagon, "The Civil Rights" 600). As the previous section demonstrated, African American rhetorical history had long relied on musical forms to counter oppression, and they sought to draw those experiences into the movement's repertoire of direct action. However, these experiences in themselves were not enough to make singing protest; meeting participants had to learn to couple sacred song with direct-action protest. In this way, African Americans in Montgomery had long been preparing for protest by singing hymns and sacred music at churches, and in the mass meeting they began to see and experiment with the new actions their singing could be leveraged toward.

The strategically arranged meeting program established the purpose and philosophy of the Montgomery movement, and the rhetorical situation of the meeting provided meeting participants with opportunities to enact Christian nonviolence as their collective, political identity through song. The selection of familiar hymns played an important role for both these purposes: constituting a collective identity and demonstrating the efficacy of Christian nonviolence as a strategy for leveraging this identity. Persuading African Americans in Montgomery to see themselves as a collective force was, of course, no easy task because in Montgomery, as in many other Southern towns and cities, collective identity and shared vision were complicated by issues of class, religious denomination, and gender, among other factors (Wilson 309). King reflects on the challenge of the task: "The biggest job in getting any movement off the

ground is to keep together the people who form it. This task requires more than a common aim: it demands a philosophy that wins and holds the people's allegiance; and it depends upon open channels of communication between the people and their leaders" (*Stride* 84). For King and other leaders of the MIA, this philosophy was Christian nonviolence, a blend of "U. S. citizen and a Christian 'brother'" (Wilson 309). As Wilson describes it, "One's national citizenship would be exercised through the right of protest. One's Christian identity would be exercised through love and service" (309). Thus, the collective singing of the familiar hymns served as one mode for constituting this type of collective and public identity. As the program above illustrates, the songs were the only moment in the meeting when participants joined their voices together, collectively speaking about their desire to desegregate buses in Montgomery. The hymns were thus crucial for constituting the Montgomery community as a collective unified around their central goal of extending the boycott. Further, the hymns offered them a mode to experiment with collective Christian, nonviolent action as the strategy they would use for this work. In this way, "Onward Christian Soldiers" and "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" became associated not just with movement goals but also with collective action.

In the meeting that night, this process of shifting familiar genres relied on explicit lyrical connections to the movement goals and philosophy. Here, meeting leaders' selection of hymns strategically provided participants with familiar songs that gained new meaning. "Onward, Christian Soldiers," the evening's first hymn, depicts Christianity as a type of spiritual "battle," one where the Christian is "mighty," "happy," and triumphant as a follower of Christ. Before any individual spoke the evening of Montgomery's first mass meeting, the crowd sang:

Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,

With the cross of Jesus going on before.

Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe;

Forward into battle see His banners go!

Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,

With the cross of Jesus going on before.

Onward then, ye people, join our happy throng,

Blend with ours your voices in the triumph song.

Glory, laud and honor unto Christ the King,

This through countless ages men and angels sing. (Baring-Gould)

As the words of the hymn indicate, "Onward, Christian Soldiers," appeals to the unity provided by the Christian faith. As a church undivided, the "happy throng" finds victory and triumph. Significantly, this hymn forwards this vision of a unified, victorious church through war imagery, depicting the Christian as one who will ultimately win an otherworldly war. In King's description of the crowd singing the hymn at the Holt Street meeting, "The opening hymn was the old familiar 'Onward Christian Soldiers,' and when that mammoth audience stood to sing, the voices outside swelling the chorus in the church, there was a mighty ring like the glad echo of Heaven itself" (*Stride* 50). As the first hymn of the Holt Street meeting, "Onward, Christian Soldiers," defined the types of "weapons" that were viewed as suitable for protest: Christian unity, joy, happiness, and

singing, and it offered the audience an opportunity to practice leveraging this type of action.

However, this hymn would not have immediately struck the audience as a protest hymn. Written in 1865, "Onward Christian Soldiers" was composed by Reverend Sabine Baring-Gould in England at the end of the Civil War. For years after it was written, the hymn was sung in Sunday school and at school devotional services (Reagon 600). According to Reagon, "[I]it was often sung without fervor, with the congregation minding text and melody—that is, until it became the contemporary anthem of the Montgomery bus boycott" (600). The mass meeting was the context for reviving the fervor of the song and connecting it to protests and resistance. By the time African Americans in Montgomery, Alabama, sang "Onward Christian Soldiers," they repeated words sung for close to a hundred years by those who claimed Christianity. Yet, that Monday evening in December the familiar words took on entirely new meaning: "Onward Christian soldiers marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before" (Baring-Gould). The experience of singing the words was at once familiar and new; and that was the point. In the context of an evening devoted to looking forward to protesting oppression in Montgomery, meeting participants reminded themselves of the African American history of struggle through familiar hymns. As King puts it, "One could not help but be moved by these traditional songs, which brought to mind the long history of Negro's suffering"(86). The hymn "Onward Christian Soldiers" affirmed that the civil rights struggle was a battle. Moreover, it established that they would act as Christian "soldiers" sing rather than rely on violence or force to accomplish their ends. Singing

hymns that evening, audiences experienced them anew amidst the excitement and energy surrounding Parks' refusal and the impending decision to keep going with the boycott.

The carefully chosen hymns fostered such recontextualizations, for not just any song would be ripe for association with protest. In the context of the meeting, the lyrics of both "Onward Christian Soldiers" and the second hymn, "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms," forwarded the larger agenda of the movement: developing unity, promoting nonviolence, and fostering a shared vision for the protest ahead. Like "Onward, Christian Soldiers," "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" also depicts Christians as powerful as a unified collective. Where "Onward, Christian Soldiers" invokes battle imagery, the lyrics of "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" offer future-oriented images of the joy, hope, and peace of a community united in their beliefs and goals:

> What a fellowship, what a joy divine,
> Leaning on the everlasting arms;
> What a blessedness, what a peace is mine,
> Leaning on the everlasting arms.
>
> *Refrain:*
> Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms;
> Leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms. (Carpenter and Williams 371)

Like "Onward, Christian Soldiers," this hymn depicts the strength found in unity, as the first line illustrates. "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" however orients the group toward the future hope they share because of their faith. As Reagon writes, "This hymn . . .

expresses joy, peace, and safety, and it was a flag bearer for Montgomery participants who risked everything to change things in their community. The year 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, was not a safe time . . . Yet wrapped in the arms of this raised song, the mass meeting created a singing that established a safety zone for the moment" ("The Civil Rights" 601). As Reagon points out, one of the functions of this hymn is to create momentary feelings of safety through singing. In this way, the hymn fostered connections between singing in protest and singing in faith. The experience of testifying to fearlessness in the context of the mass meeting helped associate singing with courageous action. Following "Onward Christian Soldiers," this hymn offered comfort and hope for those engaged in the battle. It thus primed Montgomery African Americans to turn to familiar hymns in the times of stress and danger they would inevitably face during the protest.

In terms of the songs, in every meeting after this one meeting participants would continue to recontextualize the hymns they sang, developing stronger associations with singing as collective protest. Moreover, as the movement garnered national attention and multiple audiences listened in on African Americans gathered in mass meetings, singing became more obviously intertwined with direct action. The Holt Street meeting demonstrates that early in the movement, civil rights leaders turned to the music of the church almost exclusively, drawing hymns, gospel songs, and spirituals into their repertoire of collective action songs. This selection was in part due to issues of age, leadership, and community make-up. For the Montgomery movement, it made sense to draw on hymns such as "Onward, Christian Soldiers" and "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" because these were songs people already knew from years of singing them. The

mass meeting provided the context to recouple these hymns with their potential for protest and resistance. Early in the civil rights struggle, freedom songs were familiar songs, mostly the music of the church; these hymns, spirituals, and other songs *became* freedom songs because they were being sung for civil rights ends. This important recontextualization happened at mass meetings.

While the Holt Street Meeting began with hymn singing, as the program illustrated the evening closed with a patriotic song, "My Country 'Tis of Thee." Numerous accounts emphasize that congregational hymn singing was the most important musical resource in Montgomery (King, *Stride*; Reagon, "The Civil Rights"). However, the inclusion of a patriotic song is indicative of a move that would become more and more important as the movement expanded—selecting songs with diverse histories to become part of the freedom song repertoire. Over the course of the late 1950s and early 1960s, freedom song became a more broad descriptor applying to a repertoire of songs that included many songs that were not religious. At the height of the movement, religious songs such as "This Little Light of Mine" and "Wade in the Water" only comprised about 25 percent of the 28 songs considered the "canon of civil rights songs" (Roy 192). By contrast, approximately 2/3 of the songs in the canon had union roots (Roy 192). The recontextualization process in Montgomery thus provides a window in to the strategy civil rights leaders would continue to employ at mass meetings over the next fifteen years, using the process to expand the freedom song repertoire considerably. Songs with union roots too were recontextualized for civil rights protest at mass meetings, which remained loosely based on the format of the church service throughout the movement. Freedom songs were not a random collection of resources; through

recontextualizations that occurred in meetings, they became a cohesive set of songs enacted through the familiar experience of congregational singing in a context similar enough to a church to make the action feel genuine but different enough to connote the protest, resistance, and greater African American freedom being sought outside.

From Hymns to Freedom Songs: Adapting Secular Songs, Spirituals, and Children's Music as Freedom Songs Nashville, Tennessee, May 1960

The Montgomery mass meeting offered a look into the recontextualization process through which leaders helped to establish sacred song as an important resource and available action for the movement. By selecting hymns and singing them in the congregational style at the mass meetings, Montgomery leaders demonstrated how sacred music might be recoupled with protest for civil rights goals such as boycotting segregated buses. As the movement wore on over the end of the 1950s and into the early 1960s, song leaders new to the scene continued selecting songs beyond the context of the church, such as labor songs, children's songs, and even much older spirituals that had fallen out of use. Further, as we will see in the next section, they composed new songs for the movement. Thus, in this period of the movement, song leaders, vocalists, and songwriters became necessary activist roles (Roy). The song leaders in particular helped audiences to recontextualize all types of songs through congregational singing at mass meetings, and they devised strategies to help people accept the unfamiliar songs. The difficult work of song leaders in the civil rights movement was to protect and enhance the use of song as a unifier; this was not an easy or simple role particularly as the movement base expanded to include whites and Northern blacks as well. With a more diverse group of activists

came different experiences with singing and music and different ideas about what songs were best suited for protest.

For a time, song leaders like Carawan and Cordell Reagon were successful in expanding the repertoire of freedom songs, uniting activists around song selections, and helping them to recontextualize the new songs into the experience of congregational singing. Turning to the Nashville movement in 1960—arguably the very moment when the civil rights movement became a "singing movement"—a May mass meeting offers insight into how this process worked, and the rhetorical strategies songs leaders leveraged to achieve these goals. At the Nashville meeting, two song leaders, a local African American woman and Carawan take turns leading participants in times of singing.[21] The local song leader in the meeting continues the work of helping meeting participants recontextualize worship singing as protest singing, and the leadership of the visiting song leader, Guy Carawan, builds on people's experiences singing in church to introduce them to other musical resources through stories about the new songs. Through a strategy I label narrative embedding, Carawan introduces the songs he has selected with a rationale for their acceptance into people's repertoire of freedom songs. By doing so at mass meetings, Carawan seeks to help audiences draw on their prior experiences with song as worship and as protest to embrace the new songs as an extension of what they already know and believe.

The expanding musical repertoire was an important strategy for drawing new people into the movement and keeping the growing movement unified. Activist Bob Zellner describes this function of song: "whatever your ideological commitment or

[21] Unfortunately, the archival records do not reveal the name this female song leader.

intellectual involvement, or your fears – the movement's music leveled us all to the same emotional and spiritual plain" (qtd. in Sanger 148). Ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino explains that this is one of the crucial roles of music in social life—forging social intimacy and collective identity on both a discursive and embodied level. He writes, that songs enable the "public presentations of the deepest feelings and qualities that make a group unique. Through moving and sounding together in synchrony, people can experience a feeling of oneness with others. The signs of this social intimacy are experienced directly—body to body—and thus in the moment are felt to be true" (2-3). For a time, songs provided a means of joining together, through voice, body, and emotion, across the inevitable conflicts and fractures that occurred during protests, and it enabled large groups of diverse people to collectively voice their shared beliefs and vision of change in spite of differences. The new songs were key to developing and expanding on these capacities of song to unify activists. They were also important to help create freedom songs as a unique repertoire, based in the music of the black church but also purposefully created for the civil rights movement. However, it required rhetorical work to develop this freedom song repertoire and to persuade activists to accept new song selections.

The Nashville scene demonstrates how the mass meeting played a key role in this process of providing civil rights activists with practice in singing new songs as freedom songs and the strategies necessary for integrating these songs into the repertoire as freedom songs. Before analyzing the May 1960 mass meeting, it is important to understand the context surrounding this event, particularly since Nashville civil rights rhetoric remains relatively understudied in the field. While many sites of civil rights

activity faced internal struggles and fractures, each set of issues was unique to the local context. In Nashville, these issues largely centered on age and class. Initially the Nashville Movement's structure resembled Montgomery or Birmingham, with leadership centralized through the Nashville Christian Leadership Council. Through this organization, minister Kelly Miller Smith and other longtime Nashville residents devised three objectives: to increase voter registration, to raise black employment, especially in the Police Department, and to desegregate lunch counters and restrooms at downtown stores. Their strategy for achieving these goals was through what they at first called "Christian social action" but would later call nonviolent direct action. Through workshops, activists devised thoroughly theological plans for direct action that they would enact before the community as Christian moral and religious responses to oppression, violence, and injustice. The very first effort of the NCLC was an attempt to draw white clergymen into their plans, imagining they might be sympathetic to the NCLC's project. Next, when white clergymen proved less than enthusiastic, the NCLC initiated dialogues that took place at two local stores, Harvey's and Cain-Sloan. At one of the dialogues, a resident claimed desegregation might happen "but not in our lifetime" (qtd. in Houston 80). The NCLC then turned to local students, almost "as an afterthought," in an attempt to get more volunteers to help as they turned to more direct means of protest (Houston 81).

The students in Nashville radically altered not just the Nashville campaign but also the course of the civil rights movement broadly. Black and white students such as John Lewis, Diane Nash, and Paul LaPrad would go on to become important players in all the major civil rights battles. As historian Ben Houston writes, "It is no exaggeration

to say that the Nashville sit-in movement proved to be a model for activism as much as the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In 1961 these same students would rescue and extend the Freedom Rides, capturing the attention to the entire world. . .” (Houston 107). In Nashville, the student activists successfully desegregated lunch counters in downtown stores in the spring of 1960. While the students embodied and enacted the strategies of Christian social action the NCLC believed in, the NCLC board and longtime Nashville residents continued to provide the leadership and economic support. For instance, after students were arrested and imprisoned, the NCLC raised fifty thousand dollars to support the rest of the campaign (Houston 90).

In May 1960, when Nashville activists had successfully accomplished the first of the NCLC’s goals, leaders faced the challenge of keeping the students and the rest of the community united as they sought to work toward new objectives. Toward this goal, the NCLC organized a mass meeting to honor the students’ achievements and lay the groundwork for new campaigns. One of the key rhetorical tasks for this meeting was to keep the students and adult activists working together and agreed in terms of collective identity and vision for future campaigns. While the most obvious difference between the two groups was age, class was also an issue. The established black community in Nashville was solidly middle-class with a decidedly “white collar character,” where many of the students came to Nashville from rural or blue-collar backgrounds. The musical selections for the meeting demonstrate how songs were strategically selected and presented in order to help achieve unity among activists and prepare them to continue working collectively.

In this meeting and in the civil rights movement more generally, Guy Carawan, with his wife Candie, was influential for musical leadership and song leading.[22] Carawan's musical leadership in the movement was unique. Unlike most other song leaders, Carawan was never officially or organizationally included in civil rights leadership. Much of his authority in the movement came from his connections to the Highlander Folk School (Turner). Through this musical leadership, he sought to persuade activists to adapt and leverage specific songs that he believed offered important resources for uniting activists around nonviolence and Christianity and that he saw as cross-culturally inclusive.[23] At the 1960 Nashville meeting, Carawan works toward promoting and disseminating spirituals as well as other songs he sees as well suited for Nashville's needs and these broader goals of the movement. Through his song selection, he appeals to as wide a group as possible, giving attention to the variety of ages represented in the Nashville movement. Carawan begins by gesturing to the students with two freedom songs familiar to them, "We Shall Overcome" and "Fighting for Our Freedom."

In the May meeting, organizers allotted two dedicated segments of music. These portions of the meeting helped audiences continue to recontextualize hymns through the familiar experience of singing in a context like a church service. However, these musical moments in the meeting reveal how activists move beyond adapting familiar hymns to

[22] Candie and Guy met and began dating in 1960, and she began to work with him on his music projects in 1961. I will discuss her involvement with these later projects in the fourth section of this chapter.

[23] Carawan came to Highlander in 1959 at Pete Seeger's encouragement. At UCLA in the 1950s, Carawan had studied with renowned folklorist Wayland Hand. Hand warned Carawan not to blend folklore studies with politics. Despite Hand's warning, Carawan's activist career draws heavily on his background studying and collecting the musical histories of oppressed groups. Guy became the musical director at Highlander in 1959, taking over for Zilphia Horton.

learn to sing new unfamiliar songs. The first time of singing operates much like the hymn singing in Montgomery as the local song leader appeals to the resident Nashvilleans with two hymns. The second time of music operates much differently. In this lengthy portion of the meeting, Carawan introduces children's songs, labor songs, and unfamiliar spirituals to activists and aims to help them see these songs as relevant for civil rights goals and protest. Through what I refer to as narrative embedding, Carawan attempts to broaden the activists' musical repertoire and to contribute to the larger movement's freedom repertoire. Narrative embedding describes how Carawan argues for the significance of songs through stories about their prior use.

As I noted earlier in this chapter, freedom songs describes a wide variety of types of songs held together by a central purpose: singing toward greater African American freedom. Carawan was influential in bringing new songs into this repertoire, and it was at mass meetings, and other musical workshops, that he disseminated his selections. The Nashville mass meeting suggests he expanded the repertoire of songs with two apparent goals in mind: 1) helping activists overcome fractures, which in Nashville were age and class; and 2) forwarding inclusive, cross-cultural musical histories. Where it is widely noted that Carawan encouraged spirituals as important protest songs, this meeting demonstrates that he also forwarded other songs less closely tied to African American rhetorical history. This meeting also demonstrates how these new songs were sung in the style of congregational worship, building on the work of the early movement of singing hymns regularly at mass meetings and other events.

Like most other meetings, the Nashville meeting opens with several songs. This first singing portion of the meeting is led by the local leader, and it included the hymns

"What a Fellowship," and then a spiritual, "We are Climbing Jacob's Ladder." The female song leader introduced both of these songs, and in the interlude between the songs, she urged the meeting participants to recognize it was important for everyone to sing together. After the opening hymn, "What a Fellowship," she offered this encouragement: "May we sing a spiritual 'We are Climbing Jacob's Ladder.' I noticed there are a quite a few who were not singing, and perhaps you did not know that number. But I contend that everybody who has a soul can sing. Now, sing a little bit. Now, so we all join and help sing this spiritual" ("Nashville"). This leader encouraged group involvement with singing, noting that it depends on participation of the group. As she puts it, everyone must "help" to sing: the songs are unique as the only moment when everyone present speaks at once. Importantly, she begins the meeting by emphasizing the collective power song holds in mass meetings and forwarding familiar songs as the genre through which to do that work.

After individuals read Scripture and deliver prayers, the meeting turned to a second time of singing. The Moderator invites Guy Carawan to lead the next portion of songs: "And now, Mr. Brother Guy Carawan, who has been with us at these meetings before, will lead us in the singing" ("Nashville"). Through his introduction, the Moderator assures the crowd of Carawan's ethos: he has been participating in mass meetings and active in the Nashville movement. In Carawan's portion of music leading, he offers songs that attempt to add resources to activists' repertoire. He leads the crowd in singing 6 songs:

- "We Shall Overcome"
- "Fighting for Our Freedom, We Shall Not Be Moved"

- "If we could consider each other a neighbor, a friend, or a brother, it could be a wonderful, wonderful world, it could be a wonderful world"
- "The Ink is Black, the Page is White"
- "How Can I Keep From Singing"
- "Michael Row the Boat Ashore" ("Nashville")

As this list should indicate, Carawan offered a wide selection of songs with diverse histories and cultural resources. The first two songs represent songs selected and brought into the movement, and these songs would have been familiar to the students and probably to many activists in Nashville. The next four songs are texts selected by Carawan for this meeting, and ones he believes help develop the Christian nonviolent aspect of movement identity.

After the two familiar songs, Carawan turns toward teaching everyone present, including the students, new songs. By offering them musical history lessons, Carawan seeks to help meeting participants to integrate the new songs into their prior understandings and associations with singing sacred songs and freedom singing. At this point in the Nashville movement, people had been singing at mass meetings for nearly a year, more thoroughly recontextualizing church songs each time they sang them. Building on this process, Carawan brought new songs to Nashvilleans, and he encouraged them to accept the histories and contexts in which his selections were produced but to recontextualize them and connect them to the civil rights goals. Toward this aim, he offers historical evidence to embed his selections into their prior experiences of singing

and to persuade activists to accept them. As Carawan moves next to a children's song, he offers this narrative:

> I'll teach you a children's song if you don't already know it. It's called 'If we consider each other a neighbor, a friend, or a brother, it could be a wonderful, wonderful world, it could be a wonderful world.' It comes out of an old book put out by the United Nations of children's songs called *Big Subjects for Little People*. Y'all see if you can't pick this up and go home and teach it to your children. If they don't know it, you just have 'em ask Reverend Millings (laughter). They should know it now. ("Nashville")

By turning to the UN songbook from a different context, Carawan strategically attempts to add new resources to the Nashville movement's song repertoire. Children's songs and songbooks shift the crowd's attention toward an age group different from themselves; there is no indication that children were present at this mass meeting, thus everyone singing this children's song would have been thinking about age from the perspective of difference. In Nashville, this practice would have been strategic, as the meeting itself was designed to help ease tensions between student activists and the adults in the NCLC. Students, who had carried off the sit-ins, felt that their leadership and vision should be recognized as important. For the NCLC's part, they had provided the momentum to get the Nashville movement started and the funds to sustain it. This mass meeting, as an event dedicated to the students, represented an attempt to persuade the students to remain active. The children's songs thus offer Carawan an opportunity to continue this work of keeping the student activists and the adult community in Nashville united by drawing on

songs targeted to an entirely different group: children. In so doing, Carawan also extends the movements' goals to include speaking to, and persuading, children of the possibilities of a different, "more wonderful," world. In addition, he continues developing the ethos of the movement as spiritual, peaceful and nonviolent.

Carawan's narrative embedding of this song reveals his emphasis on Christian nonviolence as well as his interpretation of how to enact this philosophy collectively. In selecting it for the meeting and narrating its significance, Carawan sought to persuade activists that children's songs served as a powerful mode of enacting nonviolence. Together, all joined voices and sang:

> If we could consider each other
>
> A neighbor, a sister, a brother
>
> It would be a wonderful, wonderful world
>
> It would be a wonderful world, oh yes
>
> It would be a wonderful world.
>
> If we could consider each other
>
> A neighbor, a sister, a brother
>
> It would be a wonderful, wonderful world
>
> It would be a wonderful world, oh yes
>
> It would be a wonderful world. ("Nashville")[24]

[24] The strategies for teaching groups the lyrics to the new songs, such as this one, at mass meetings varied. Often a song leader would "line" a hymn or song out, meaning he would sing the song line-by-line, having the group sing each line after him. This practice, also referred to as "call and response," was long important in African American worship. Another strategy for teaching new songs was simply to pass out sheets with the lyrics

As the lyrics of the song indicate, this song subtly forwards goals associated with this phase of the civil rights movement: the ideal of "the beloved community" in which African American children are safe and all African Americans enjoy equality with others. In this way, Carawan's selection and framing of the song align with other strategies leveraged in Birmingham and elsewhere that appeal to audiences' empathy for children and view of the broader goal of the movement, achieving better relations among races.

Carawan's next selection, "The Ink is Black, the Page is White," continues this theme of expanding freedom songs' emphasis on "the beloved community" and Christian nonviolence. As a song turning on racial imagery, this song seems an attempt at fostering interracial unity as a major goal of the civil rights movement:

> The ink is black, the page is white
>
> Together we learn to read and write
>
> Read and write
>
> And now a child can understand
>
> This is the law in all the land
>
> All the land
>
> The ink is black, the page is white
>
> Together we learn to read and write
>
> Read and write
>
> The slate is black, the chalk is white
>
> The words stand out so clear and bright

---

written on them. At this Nashville meeting, the audio recording suggests that everyone was given a song sheet as there is no delay between Carawan's singing and the crowd.

Clear and bright

And now at last we plainly see

The alphabet of liberty

Liberty

The slate is black, the chalk is white

The words stand out so clear and bright

Clear and bright ("Nashville")[25]

Importantly, both of the two children's songs forward movement goals without invoking God. These song lyrics again depict a movement ideal—interracial unity—but they do so without appealing to religious language or imagery. Instead, the song appeals to a vision of safe, peaceful children of all races, and the freedom availed though literacy. By singing these two songs in the style of congregational singing in the context of the mass meeting, the group's singing of them associate the lyrics with faithful protest, thus helping to connect it to freedom singing in the style they are now well practiced at. Working in support of the Christian solider and the type of citizenship they were practicing in Montgomery, they expanded the freedom song repertoire to include a wider group of activists who might be less closely connected to church traditions in the South. Both of these aspects of this event demonstrate how as the freedom song repertoire expanded, the mass meeting's connections to the church service became less overt.

[25] The lyrics for the songs I include here come from both my transcriptions of audio and my consultation of liner notes for the albums *Voices of the Civil Rights Movement, We Shall Overcome,* and *A Walk in the Sun and Other Songs and Ballads*. At times the audio for the songs is unclear or difficult to transcribe, and here I turned to versions of these songs circulated at the same time for civil rights ends and political purposes.

Meeting participants are singing, but they are adapting this action by responding to Carawan's stories and singing unfamiliar songs he has selected.

The group continued expanding their experiences of freedom singing as Carawan introduced two other unfamiliar songs. These two songs derive from a tradition Nashvilleans likely encountered as new: Quaker religious history and the Sea Islands of South Carolina. Both of these groups align with movement strategies and goals of Christian nonviolence. In his narrative about the Quaker hymn, Carawan emphasizes how singing afforded the Quakers, a notoriously pacifist group, a mode of protest against religious oppression and persecution:

> Now I'm gonna sing you a song that is a very old Quaker hymn. This goes way back to the days of the British Isles when the Quakers were being persecuted for their religion and many of the first colonists who came to this country from the British Isles were Quakers seeking religious freedom. This song is about how their leaders were all put in jail and their faith that would still find a land and time when everyone could worship God the way they pleased. It's called 'How Can I Keep From Singing.' ("Nashville")

This attempt at narrative embedding relies on identifactory appeals. Carawan seeks to help the group identify with another group working toward freedom in the context of the United States, the Quakers. The references to their persecution and quest for freedom serve as moments for meeting participants to align themselves with Quakers and adopt one of their songs as their own. Through this narrative embedding, Carawan attempts to convince participants to invest themselves in these new songs and get behind them to

expand their repertoire. The lyrics of "How Can I Keep From Singing" illustrate why Carawan saw it as a fitting selection:

> My life flows on in endless song;
> Above earth's lamentation,
> I hear the real, tho' far-off hymn
> That hails a new creation;
>
> No storm can shake my inmost calm
> While to that rock I'm clinging;
> Since love is Lord of heaven and earth,
> How can I keep from singing? ("Nashville")

Like the children's songs, this selection forwards peace as an ideal, but it does so through religious themes and imagery. While this hymn turns on themes that would have been familiar to Nashville activists, the song and its history represent a new resource that Carawan attempts to add to their repertoire of freedom songs. Through this religious song from a different context, activists bolster their reliance on Christian nonviolence and recall its success in securing religious freedom for Quakers. This song thus also expands the repertoire along the lines of maintaining nonviolence as a strategy and promoting interracial unity as a goal.

Carawan's final song selection continues this work by including another religious song used for protest, but this time by an African American group. Turning to the music of the people of the Sea Islands, Carawan sought to introduce Nashvilleans to a spiritual that had influenced and inspired African Americans in the nineteenth century: "Here's a

song that comes from down in the Sea Islands of Georgia in South Carolina way back in the days when the only way you could get out to those little islands was by long boat driven by slaves. Known for their beautiful singing. This is a spiritual, and this is a hymn which they used to row by. You'll have to learn it" ("Nashville"). In his work at Highlander, Carawan advocated for the adoption of unfamiliar spirituals as civil rights songs. He believed they were an important resource for movement activists. Schneider notes, "Carawan quickly realized that spirituals might provide the civil rights movement with much the same framing resource that labor songs and folk music had provided the labor movement" (157). Like the childrens' songs and Quaker hymn, spirituals forward Christian nonviolence and attest to their significance for protest. For this Nashville meeting, the audience sang along to Carawan's chosen spiritual:

> Michael rowed the boat ashore, hallelujah!
> Michael rowed the boat ashore, hallelujah!
>
> The river is deep and the river is wide, hallelujah
> I'll meet my mother on the other side, hallelujah
>
> Michael row the boat ashore, hallelujah
> Michael row the boat ashore, hallelujah ("Nashville")

Even though this spiritual was from the African American tradition, it was likely new to Nashville activists. In this way, "Michael Row the Boat Ashore" expanded the freedom song repertoire by recalling spirituals' significance for enslaved people in South Carolina. Like the Quaker hymn, this song would have underscored for activists the efficacy of

Christian genres as protest. By including this unfamiliar spiritual, Carawan sought to continue the work of recoupling sacred African American music with civil rights goals and protest power.

All together, this time of music led by Carawan offers insight into how the freedom song repertoire expanded, relying continually on congregational singing and the mass meeting context to accomplish this work. Carawan's careful song selections and instructive narrative embedding of the songs illustrates the important roles song leaders played in developing song as a mode of collective action.

Composing New Songs in Response to Tragedy: Jackson, Mississippi, Winter 1963

Guy Carawan's role in the Nashville movement demonstrates how song leaders selected new songs for the freedom song repertoire and introduced them to activists to be sung in the congregational style. Through his narrative embedding, Carawan introduced Nashvilleans to unfamiliar songs that they might sing as protest. In so doing, he expanded both the process for teaching songs and the repertoire of songs themselves. Carawan represents a unique and important activist role: song leader. As a peripheral figure to the actual movement, his strategies for musical leadership are unique to his activist and rhetorical identity. Besides song leaders who served as song selectors and teachers, the movement also relied upon other musical activist roles, such as songwriters and vocalists. While the meeting most often featured times of music where everyone sang together, meetings sometimes included a featured vocal performance, where the activist work of songwriters and choral performers could be showcased while the rest of the meeting participants listened in. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)

Freedom Singers are one example of how these two roles came together to produce important activist music and performances. In late 1963, one of the SNCC Freedom Singers, Matt Jones performed at mass meetings in Jackson, Mississippi. Jones' performance at the meetings, as well as his activist role in the Mississippi Movement, reveals how songwriters and choral performers expanded the freedom song repertoire even further. In so doing, they also developed new functions of songs. In the case of the Jackson mass meeting, we see how Jones helped develop the capacity of song as a mode of lament.

The story of Medgar Evers' involvement in the Jackson movement provides the backdrop for Jones' performance. Evers was an active and influential leader in the Mississippi Movement beginning in1954. When his attempt to integrate the University of Mississippi's law school in 1954 was unsuccessful, he began working with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Jackson. In this role, he was influential in James Meredith's successful attempt to attend the University of Mississippi in 1962 (Payne 285). After Meredith's campaign, Evers and the rest of the NAACP began work in Jackson to desegregate public places and to end discriminatory hiring practices. The Jackson movement was initially slowed by the NAACP's conservative leadership. Leaders such as I. S. Sanders, Sam Bailey, and Reverend R. L. T. Smith were not eager to encourage or support direct action campaigns, even after the SCLC's success in Birmingham in May 1963. These leaders argued for more negotiations with Jackson's Mayor Thompson; on the other side of the strategy table, Charles Jones, Edwin King, and John Salter advocated for massive demonstrations. The two groups

came together in a compromise, agreeing to begin direct action protest after one more attempt to negotiate with Thompson (Dittmer 157-160).

Evers composed a telegram to Thompson, alerting him that should he reject their demands, they would demonstrate. In spite of this clear message, Thompson refused all demands. The next morning, African Americans initiated a sit-in at the Woolworth's lunch counter in downtown Jackson. This sit-in devolved into mass chaos as crowds of whites beat and kicked demonstrators. While initially it appeared the demonstration had convinced Thompson to give in, by the end of the day he stood firm. Movement leaders decided to move forward with more demonstrations. For the next few days, protestors marched and sang in huge numbers. On Friday, May 31, for instance, hundreds of young black protestors marched on Farish Street in downtown Jackson. By the end of this protest, policemen had arrested 450 of the marches. These young activists were taken to a temporary prison at the state fairgrounds (Dittmer 163).

In spite of the growing momentum, national NAACP leaders and local conservatives called for an end to mass demonstrations. While this move angered many, including Dave Dennis and Jerome Smith of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Jackson movement shifted the focus from mass demonstrations to voter registration campaigns. This strategy would serve as the movement's focal point throughout the rest of the year. Shortly after this shift to voter registration, Evers and others attended a mass meeting on June 12, 1963. Upon leaving the meeting and arriving at his home, Evers got out of his car and was shot and killed in his driveway by a member of the White Citizen's Council.

A few days earlier, north of Jackson in Winona, Mississippi, civil rights activists June Johnson, Fannie Lou Hamer, Annell Ponder, and Euvester Simpson were arrested and viciously beaten by policemen on their return trip from XX workshop. In an attempt to secure bail for these women, SNCC's Lawrence Guyot traveled from his station in Greenwood to Winona, only to be beaten and arrested himself upon arrival. In his jail cell, Guyot observed his radio was disconnected; shortly after his release the following day he discovered why. The imprisonment and beatings of Guyot and others had coincided with Evers' assassination (Payne 285). John Dittmer writes that the Jackson movement never fully recovered after Evers was killed (169).

Yet in spite of their grief and disillusionment, activists did continue working. In fall of 1963, The Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) devised plans for a voter registration protest to carry on the success of the Freedom Vote held statewide during the summer. COFO's strategy was to participate in the regular election by having a separate registration and running candidates who represented the interests of African Americans. This protest was designed with two goals in mind: 1) to demonstrate that large numbers of African Americans did indeed want the vote, and 2) to mock the regular election by showing that the candidates on the official ballot failed to represent African Americans. Aaron Henry was the candidate for governor, and his running mate was Ed King (Payne 295).

To rally African Americans around Henry and King and to encourage them to participate in the election, mass meetings were held in Jackson and throughout the state. Even as spirits ran high for the protest, meetings in Jackson were both determined and mournful. For example, at the meeting held the Friday evening before the election, the

meeting program includes rally songs as well as Jones's ballad, a song of lament composed in response to Evers' death and the bombing of the 16th Street church in Birmingham, Alabama. Throughout this November event, meeting speakers frequently reference Evers, reminding those gathered of his absence and his legacy. Jones' vocal performance provides the moment in the meeting for expressions of grief, as his song narrates Evers' life and laments his untimely death. Through their musicking along to Jones' singing, meeting participants engender new exigencies for the movement—remembering Evers and the four girls killed in Birmingham and using these memories to inspire further actions. The other musical genres, prayers, and speeches work with this theme of determination in the face of tragedy, reinforcing that Evers' death should urge activists' onward in his memory.

Together this meeting's program of music provided meeting participants opportunities to engage in complex affective expression. The program is as follows:

Opening Songs: "This Little Light of Mine"

"Set on Freedom"

"Everybody Wants Freedom"

"Keep Your Eyes on the Prize"

Dave Dennis introduces first speaker, Allard Lowenstein

Speech by Lowenstein

Speech by Ed King

Dave Dennis introduces Special Music

"When All the Votes Come Rolling In"

Performance by Matt Jones, "Ballad of Medgar Evers"

Speech by Sam Bailey

Closing Song: "We Shall Overcome" ("Jackson")

The first four songs on the program represent songs familiar and accepted as freedom songs. Through these songs, activists testify to their will and energy to keep working toward freedom. Songs like "Set on Freedom" and "Everybody Wants Freedom" provide moments for joy and enthusiasm, as the lyrics and sounds of these songs are upbeat, forward-looking, and hopeful. The song that begins the second time of music, "When the Votes Come Rolling," is equally upbeat and hopeful. This song, set the tune of "When the Saints Come Marching In," looks forward to how many African American votes the Mississippi movement will be able to count after the upcoming election.

As the program makes clear, this meeting included some group singing but also a time of listening to the performance of Jones. While participating in music through singing is certainly one important mode of activism, what Christopher Small calls "musicking," is another. Small argues that "musicking" means "[t]o take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing" (9). Thus, for my purposes to music is to participate in the civil rights movement through the range of musical activity identified by Small. While we could think about Small's theory as applying to any mass meeting, including the Nashville and Montgomery ones considered earlier in the chapter, it is an especially apt mode of

analysis for meetings that include vocal performances, such as this Jackson meeting, where meeting participants listen along to a featured singer. Here, musicking describes a mode of musical activism that generates and encourages collective bonds but does not necessarily require the audience to sing along. For as Small argues, musicking emphasizes how musical performance can heighten collectivity among those variously engaged: "What it is we are doing, we are all doing it together—performers, listeners (should there by any apart from the performers), dancers, ticket collectors, piano movers, roadies, cleaners, and all" (10). Importantly, it was the songwriters and vocal performers like Jones who helped develop this aspect of civil rights participation: listening as musicking. Through this type of musicking at the Jackson meeting, participants express joy, sadness, rage, sorrow, and grief. As they do, they connect singing and music to the movement's larger story, which at this point includes deep and personal losses. Musicking at the mass meetings thus helped to further expand the freedom song repertoire and create unique modes of musical participation.

Meeting participants' thus musick with Jones as he performs "Ballad of Medgar Evers." Through their listening, meeting participants engage with Jones in expressing grief and loss in response to the death of Evers. They also respond to the larger story that Evers' death, and his life, points to: how his death occurred because of ongoing white supremacists' violence that resulted in many other losses, such as the four girls who were killed in Birmingham in September 1963. Their musicking is both a response to events that have already occurred and the beginning of a new story; as they all remember Evers together, Jones' song moved beyond remembering his death to remember his life too, and to use these memories inspire his own, and others, ongoing, embodied activism. This

musicking begins with the framing history of Dave Dennis, who introduces Jones and his performance to the group. Dennis explains to the Jackson meeting participants the connection between the song, Jones, and the memory of Evers. He says,

> Now we have somewhat of a special occasion. Tonight, a person to dedicate to us, to the Mississippi people, in memory of a great man who lived here and who fought here, who died here. A man whom we all knew, and a man whom we all loved. A man who might not be able to walk with us physically but shall forever live within our hearts as long as we do. This man who is going to dedicate this particular song is a man . . . who has worked with the SNCC in Danville, VA, all of us have heard of what happened there. He has been abused and has been scorned too. Praise be to God, he is still here to talk to us about it. Without any further ado. I'd like to present to you, Mr. Matthew. ("Jackson")

Dennis's introduction works in much the same way Carawan's narrative embedding did in Nashville. Except here Dennis is reminding Jacksonians of their *own* history and memories in order to persuade them to accept the song and music alongside Jones. After Dennis introduces Jones, Jones too offers some introduction to his song. He states,

> This song tells you exactly how the death of Medgar Evers affected the whole United States. I think I was in Danville at the time. And I thought about the song. But the song really became a reality when [four] kids in Birmingham died. I knew that something had to be done. I hadn't done enough. Going to jail is not enough. We have to lay our bodies on the line continuously. ("Jackson")

Like Dennis, Jones explains that he wrote the song to remember Evers' death. His story, however, shifts from memory to embodied action. In response to Evers' death and then later the death of children in Birmingham, Jones wanted to *do* something, and he understood that musicking was something civil rights activists did together, and that in itself, it provided a means of laying one's body on the line. Jones too seeks to persuade meeting participants to accept his song, and he is concerned with providing the connections between his composing and performance and the continued activism of the group. In this way, we might think of the strategies of Dennis and Jones as framing histories, or stories that narrate a new song's explicit connections to the movement itself.

Jones' performance of the ballad then builds on the framing histories that precede it. Through his performance, Jones provides the musical means for Jackson participants to connect musicking at meetings to the broader story of the civil rights movement. The ballad begins:

> In Jackson, Mississippi in 1963,
>
> There lived a man who was brave,
>
> He fought for freedom all of his life,
>
> But they laid Medgar Evers in his grave (van Rijn 101)

Through the opening stanza, Jones recalls the specific time and location of Evers' death. The next stanzas tell the rest of the story and then moves to describing Evers' life on earth and in his "heavenly home":

> He spoke words of truth for all men to hear,
>
> Black and white alike for to save,
>
> Then a hate-filled man, named Byron de la Beckwith,

Laid Medgar Evers in his grave.

Medgar had some company in his heavenly home,

Those little children from Birmingham,

Like Christ they died for you and for me,

They died for you to be free. ("Jackson" and van Rijn101)[26]

Through their collective musicking, Jones and the meeting participants remember Evers to motivate their activism. They recall the tragedy of his assassination, including naming his killer. The final stanza continues this theme of detailing lost lives with references to the children killed in Birmingham. The song offers two intertwined themes toward shaping memories of Evers. The first is that he did not die in vain; though he was brutally murdered by a "high-powered rifle" that "tore out his heart," Ever now lives in "his heavenly home." Evoking the image of Christ as necessary sacrifice, the song prompts listeners to associate the deaths of Evers and the children with meaningful, even powerful sacrifices. This theme encourages a second: these sacrifices are calls to action. The final line makes this explicit, "They died for you and for me, They died for you to be free" (van Rijn 101). Through these interlaced themes—Evers' new life in his "heavenly home" as a call to action—Jones draws listeners into the shared experience of contrasting these movement tragedies with the life of Evers.

This song includes some features of the traditional murder ballad, naming Evers' killer for example. However, Minrose notes it seems more strongly composed in the African American tradition: :[I]ts sonorous, mournful rhythms, deep seriousness, and

[26] This version of the song comes based on my transcription and the version included in Guido van Rijn's *Kennedy's Blues: African-American Songs and Gospel Songs on JFK*.

appeal to human dignity and freedom all seem to derive from African American music traditions going back to slavery" (141). Jones was not the only one to compose a song in response to Evers' death. Bob Dylan, Phil Ochs and Bob Gibson, and Dick Weissman also composed and performed such songs. But it was only Jones and the Freedom Singers who he would later perform the song with Jones were African Americans in the trenches as activists (Minrose 126). Jones' performance thus uniquely evokes the memory of Evers, as he sings with other activists as an activist himself.

This time of musicking along to Jones' song illustrates yet another way the freedom song repertoire expanded and another strategy musical activists developed toward this end, composing new songs to be included in movement music. In writing new songs, songwriters like Jones made it possible for song to lament movement tragedies and express the complex emotional dimensions of civil rights activism. Performing these songs in the semi-private space of the mass meeting offered participants the opportunity to feel the lyrics and music together, remembering Evers and reflecting on what his life means for the Jackson movement. In so doing, this song provided a moment for grief, sadness, rage, and fury—the affective dimensions of walking the long, hard road to freedom during the civil rights movement. "The Ballad of Medgar Evers" serves as a site of memory, and as such, it creates memories of Evers' death that urge activists to keep working even as they remember the tragedy that can await anyone who fights for black freedom in a place like Mississippi.

Decoupling Sacred Song and Protest: Remembering Freedom Singing in the Wake of Black Power

At the middle and end of the 1960s, song leaders like Carawan and Reagon sought to compose freedom songs for uptake by new audiences through their creation of print songbooks. In creating songbooks, they remediated freedom songs from mass meetings and other events for wider audiences. These texts explained the civil rights movement, its goals, strategies, and ideologies by arranging the songs and narrating their significance. In this way, the same types of moves that activists leveraged to help activists accept the songs as freedom songs, narrative embedding, for example, became used for two new purposes: 1) first, to persuade new audiences to sing freedom songs with activists, and 2) second, to remember the movement's reliance on freedom songs.

The concept of rhetorical velocity is helpful for understanding how activists sought both to increase musical activism and to remember the musical significance of song to the movement. Jim Ridolfo and Danielle DeVoss develop the term rhetorical velocity to describe how rhetors strategize to keep texts in circulation. They write, "Rhetorical velocity is, simply put, a strategic approach to composing for rhetorical delivery. . . In the inventive thinking of composing, rhetorical velocity is the strategic theorizing for how a text might be recomposed . . . and how this recomposing may be useful or not to the short or long term rhetorical objectives of the rhetorician" (Ridolfo and DeVoss). As Ridolofo and DeVoss make clear, rhetorical velocity names the ways that rhetors strategically seek to keep genres circulating and to account for the short and long term changes that might work against the rhetorical ends of the text.

Guy and Candie Carawan were among the first to create a civil rights songbook. In 1963, they published *We Shall Overcome*.[27] This text circulated freedom songs in celebration of what the movement has achieved through Christian nonviolence, and it worked to persuade wide audiences of the significance of freedom singing to these triumphs. In the introduction, the Carawans write, "The songs in this book sing a special kind of short history of many of the major developments and events of the nonviolent movement in the South" (7). Like the song leading Carawan employed in mass meetings, throughout the songbook he and Candie emphasize the songs importance as *nonviolent* action. The sections of the book, "Sit Ins," "Freedom Rides," "Albany, Georgia," "Voter Registration," and "Greenwood, Birmingham, . . ." are arranged to establish that the songs provide the history of activists' protests. Through this arrangement and emphasis, the Carawans establish their view of the movement as succeeding through its use of songs to promote nonviolence and to offer new audiences the resources to participate in the movement. The tone of the songbooks is celebratory: the Carawans circulate these texts so that new audiences can encounter these songs as effective modes of nonviolent protest and even perhaps sing the songs in new contexts in solidarity with the movement. Their long-term objective is that new audiences might join the civil rights protestors in singing freedom songs in this mode.

As Black Power ideologies were embraced by activists at the end of the 1960s, activists like Carawan and Reagon turned to archiving and preserving songs not to circulate them for new audiences to sing but instead to *remember* that the civil rights movement was, in its classic phase, carried out through Christian nonviolent actions like

[27] Carawan worked with his wife Candie to compose these books, and they are presented as co-authored, collaborative works.

song. Like "The Ballad of Medgar Evers," outside the meeting the songs included in civil rights songbooks operate as sites for remembering important movement events. Freedom songs then ultimately proved an unsustainable mode of rhetorical protest for reasons no one could have predicted: the very institution that helped the movement become a singing movement, the African American church, became one of the reasons why freedom songs could not be readapted for further protest use as many activists abandoned Christian nonviolence. Songbooks of the late 1960s created by the Carawans and Reagon reveal their attempt to keep the genre in circulation as a site for remembering the movement, and in so doing, they helped to foster the sense that "the civil rights movement" had ended in a certain sense and a new movement was on the rise.

For example, in 1968 the Carawans published a second songbook, *Songs of the Freedom Movement.* This text takes a very different tone from the one composed just a few years prior. In the introduction, the Carawans begin by noting that some believe that the days of singing for black freedom over. They include words of Stokley Carmichael as their epigraph: "No more long prayers, no more Freedom songs, no more dreams—let's go for power" (qtd. in Carawan 9). Their introduction subtly questions this move, noting these changes without commentary. They do comment on the shift in movement strategy in their "preface to epilogue." Here, they establish that freedom singing is growing increasingly unpopular. They write, "As Dr. King and others labor on in a spirit of non-violence and interracial unity, another approach to social change is gaining ground. Referred to commonly as 'the new mood' or the 'black power' drive, it is being given form by SNCC and CORE. . . . An important part of the new mood is a growing cynicism about non-violence" (212). Through their introductions and this final note, the Carawans

suggest their songs commemorate a time past, when freedom singing was efficacious as a mode of protest and social change. In so doing, they argue that as the movement shifts away from nonviolence, it also shifts away from freedom songs. The noticeable change in tone from their earlier text suggests they do not see this shift as one to celebrate. They also subtly suggest that this text marks the end of their career as current historians in the movement.

Responding to ideas about Black Power, in 1967 Reagon too turned to preservation and remembering freedom songs as an attempt to keep the songs in circulation. Reagon takes up this role of archivist activist from a different perspective from the Carawans. While like Guy Reagon was a song leader in the Albany movement, unlike Guy and Candie, Reagon was African American and truly a local participant in the movement. Born and raised in Albany, Georgia, Reagon joined SNCC as a field secretary and song leader in 1962. As an on the ground activist, Reagon was influential in establishing sacred song and its history as important during the movement through her leadership at mass meetings. With Matt Jones, she was a member of SNCC's Freedom Singers, a group led by Cordell Reagon, to whom Bernice Reagon was briefly married. The SNCC singing group was designed to "build audiences, spread the word about organizing efforts, and help with fundraising drives" (Minrose 139). The Freedom Singers performed for about a year from December1962 to September 1963, circulating music from mass meetings to broader audiences and creating opportunities for wider audience participation.

Like the Carawans, Reagon recognized that their usefulness as a protest tool had largely fallen out of use. Without exigence for singing them, freedom songs might be

erased and forgotten. From the late 1960s to the present, Reagon has worked against this erasure in her creation of songbooks, albums, scholarly work, as well as performances and lectures. While analysis of all these memory texts is beyond the scope of my work here, I wish to draw attention to the impulse of Reagon's work: she seeks to employ a new type of activism that remembers the usefulness of freedom songs as a strategy leveraged to the major gains of the movement. She also works to circulate these songs and their connections to the sacred music of the church. The songbooks and musical memory work composed by Carawan and Reagon reveals how they recomposed songs for audiences beyond the meeting and also how they recognized that as Black Power became a popular movement ideology, freedom songs became unsustainable as rhetorical actions. Their later songbooks and archiving preservation thus works against the erasure and forgetting of freedom songs made possible in the context of Black Power.

Conclusion

Writing in 2001, Reagon claims, "During the Civil Rights Movement our freedom songs no longer operated in code. Whether you sang 'freedom' during the sixties or the older traditional text with the word 'Cannan,' in essence the song says, I must leave or change where I am, and I want you to go with me" (3). The civil rights movement became a singing movement, in part at least, because song leaders, vocalists, composers, and current historians like Reagon and others drew on their significant expertise to *transform* songs. This process was often carried out as mass meetings, where the very space and context of the meeting helped to shift the experience of singing toward direct protest.

The space of the mass meeting provided an avenue for recontextualizing old, familiar songs, circulating the histories and importance of unfamiliar songs, and spreading the spirit of innovation that came to characterize activists' approach to singing. The Montgomery meetings early in the movement demonstrate that at first, leaders helped audiences recontextualize old, familiar songs as forms of civil rights protest. In these meetings, the hymns served as a reminder that the meeting was similar to a church service; the audiences, publicity, and patriotic song served as cues helped people recognize that the meeting was transformed for protest. Turning to the Nashville movement in the early 1960s, the local song leader and Guy Carawan help to show how the freedom song repertoire expanded to encompass new, unfamiliar songs and the rhetorical processes necessary to accomplish this goal. The May 1960 meeting demonstrates how the range of musical leadership, from local churchwomen to Highlander staff visiting, offered audiences a blend of recontextualizing old hymns and stories about the importance of new songs from unfamiliar contexts. Carawan's leadership in particular demonstrates how leaders developed rhetorical strategies for teaching new songs; in his case, he employs narrative embedding as a means of persuading audiences to accept his selections and add them to their store of musical resources. Finally, Matthew Jones' role in Delta meetings illustrates how he introduced meeting audiences to new songs written specifically for the movement. Through the framing history provided by Jones as well as Dave Dennis, the "Ballad of Medgar Evers" offered meeting participants with a moment to grieve and to remember at the same time the song prompted further action.

The rhetorical processes that occurred in meetings shaped the musical activism that happened outside of them as well. While we know much about direct action protests that involved singing, the mass meeting also points us to consider another form of musical activism, songbooks. Texts like these remind us that activist identities, like the songs themselves, evolved and expanded with the demands of the movement. As a site of memory and rhetorical narrative of the movement, songbooks illustrate one way that activists sought to remediate music and to preserve it. This practice relied upon activist-archivists, individuals like Carawan and Reagon, who recognized that if no one recorded and preserved the musical memories of the movement, then they might be lost for the future. For as Carawan and Reagon both argue, the musical memories of the movement are among the most significant for promoting ongoing participation in the constant struggle for African American freedom in the United States.

Chapter 3

Reverence and Resistance:

Civil Rights Prayers in Mass Meetings, Prayer Books, and Direct-Action Protests

> This [mass meeting] was . . . the first time I heard the text in some of the old prayers, and it felt as if they were saying exactly what we were going through. "Lord, you know me, you know my conditions, and I'm asking you to come by here and see about me" was prayed every second Sunday in Mt. Olive Baptist Church, No. 2, by the mother of the church. But when she did it in a mass meeting just before a march, those words named our situation.
>
> –Bernice Johnson Reagon

At most mass meetings, immediately before or after there was singing, there was prayer. Like the songs, the prayers were sometimes familiar, but they also became new, personal, and immediate in the space of the mass meeting. Many began to see prayer as a powerful mode of responding to oppression, preparing for protest, or even direct action in itself. As Johnson and others prepared to march through Albany, Georgia, in 1961

protesting segregated public facilities, for instance, an old prayer became profoundly immediate. Expanding on the points she makes in the epigraph above, Johnson goes on:

> It was like an amazing light of understanding opening up within me. That prayer, which had sounded old, was new and immediate; it was about us, pressed down by racism and wanting the power in the universe to be with us as we marched. I became more aware that there are different kinds of knowing. You can know a lot of data, but sometimes the journey you walk with your life allows you to really know what in this case, a prayer, is expressing. Your understanding is deepened because you have been changed by the path you are now traveling. (150)

The Albany movement and mass meetings provided the context for Johnson to rethink the actions enabled by an old, familiar prayer. Once a mode of petition on a Sunday morning, in the mass meeting the prayer became operative as a mode of resistance—words to hold on to while marching in response to the racism of Albany's white residents. This repurposing of an old prayer was not an unusual occurrence; Johnson names a powerful and frequent moment of availing prayer's possibilities for helping carry out marches and other direct action campaigns.

In Albany and elsewhere in the 1950s and 1960s, civil rights activists like Johnson began paying attention to how prayers, as the contemplative, hopeful moment of church services, might function toward the purposes of desegregation, voting rights, job equality, and remaking relations among races. Such attention sometimes prompted subtle or even strategic revisions to the practice of prayer: old prayers gained new meaning and possibilities in the space of the mass meeting; silent prayers provided opportunities for

reflection on democratic freedom and goals; deliberative prayers spoke with God about how activists hoped future marches and campaigns might go; and embodied, gestural prayers—bowed heads, kneeling bodies—offered a silent, unsettling response to the cruel words or actions of oppressors, whether the context was jail, streets, church steps, or pool entrances. It is the work of this chapter to illuminate these functions of prayer. In what follows, I detail these religious-rhetorical and sociopolitical functions of the genre by examining how activists prayed together within the mass meeting. As I do in each chapter, I look first to how the genre functions in the space of the mass meeting, and then move on to other contexts such as streets, church steps, entrances to public pools, and prayer books.

For the purposes of my work here, I define prayer as discursive or embodied communication with a divine audience.[28] Since all of the prayers I treat in this chapter are Christian, by divine audience I mean the monotheistic God of Christianity.[29] However as the Christian prayers of black people, many of these prayers evoke African spirituality, seeds of liberation theology, and other ideologies reflective of local contexts and African

[28] In his book *Spiritual Modalities*, William FitzGerald raises the question, "Is recycling prayer?" (117). He leaves the question unanswered, and so will I – I do not have an answer nor I do wish to argue the point here. However, as should be obvious, my definition leaves open the possibility. Toward my work in this chapter, if one believes the embodied action of recycling to be prayer, then I will honor that belief and action. Civil rights activists apparently defined prayer quite broadly: a march could be a prayer; a moment of silence could be a prayer; a small bow of the head could be a prayer. I do my best to work with their theory and to explain how this theory operated as a genre of activism supported in the meeting and powerful beyond it.

[29] That's not to say of course that all prayers for civil rights were Christian; they weren't. For instance, Abraham Heschel, a Jewish rabbi, who worked with King on a number of events, employed prayer to describe his participation in protests. For instance, speaking about marching in Selma, he poignantly said, "[M]y feet were praying" (qtd. in FitzGerald). Heschel exemplifies the prayers of the Jewish contingent of civil rights activists. For more on the religious civil rights work of those of other faiths, see Norman Finkelstein and Kenneth Marcus.

American experience. That is to say, the prayers do not reflect a monolithic Christian practice; rather, they depend on somewhat diverse views of God even as that view is, broadly speaking, Christian. While sustained investigation into how different conceptions of God influence activists in philosophy of protest and performance of prayer is certainly an important avenue of research, it is not one I have space for in this chapter. My goal instead is to offer detailed insight into how prayer functions toward civil rights ends within the mass meeting and beyond it. One final note on how I define and treat prayer: even as I focus on the sociopolitical functions of prayer and the ways that the genre is revised toward civil rights exigencies, I seek to respect and attend to the faithful relationship at the heart of most, if not all, of these prayers. Here I mean that I try to keep in play the ways that even when praying is quite actually a silent mode of protest, it is still for the rhetor also a conversation with God. Prayer is animated as much or more by its religious and spiritual import as it is by the possibilities it holds for enacting racial justice; indeed, the former often motivates the latter.

The chapter begins by situating prayer in the African American religious and rhetorical traditions. For centuries African Americans have observed and enacted prayer as response to oppression and means of remaking their lives, and in the context of the civil rights movement, activists extended this work. After making clear that prayer has long been significant spiritually and rhetorically to black people, the chapter moves to the scene of the mass meeting in Americus, Georgia. This meeting, held after a march that was poorly attended, demonstrates how prayer served, both in silent contrition and discursive response, as a way to reflect on how to achieve the goals of the movement. Similar to Freirian praxis as reflection toward action, reflection through prayer provided a

step toward continued protest. Moving to the context of a mass meeting in Selma, Alabama, I show how for these activists prayer enabled a mode of looking forward; through their prayers, they hoped. In this way, prayer provided a means of rhetorical perseverance—of naming oppressive situations, detailing plans to change them, and asking for divine help to carry them out. The final mass meeting scene I examine is Greenwood, Mississippi. At mass meetings held in Greenwood in 1963, prayer provided opportunities for imagining and enacting collective dignity as an important aspect of African American sociopolitical identity. This chapter closes by considering how these important functions of prayer circulated outside of meetings as gestural protest, visual argument, and definition of freedom.

Prayer in the African American Rhetorical Tradition

In 2011, Lewis V. Baldwin published a collection of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s prayers entitled, *"Thou Dear God": Prayers that Open Hearts and Spirits*. In this prayer book, one can find prayers delivered by King on many different occasions, though most often at church services, and for different purposes. The purposes of the prayers provide the structure for the book. The first section, for example, presents King's prayers for "spiritual guidance," and the second section presents prayers for "special occasions." It is impossible to read the sixty-eight prayers collected in this small book and not discern that prayer was important to King and to the philosophies animating the civil rights movement—not just spiritually significant but profoundly *useful.*

For King, prayer is a means of communicating with God that is both otherworldly and practical. In the epigraph to the book, taken from the essay "The Misuse of Prayer," King explains this view of prayer,

> There can be no gainsaying of the fact that prayer is as natural to the human organism as the rising of the sun is to the cosmic order. Prayer is indigenous to the human spirit. It represents a throbbing desire of the human heart. As [Thomas] Carlyle stated in a letter to a friend: "Prayer is and remains the native and deepest impulse of the soul of man." We often try to call prayer "absurd and presumptuous." But a yearning so age-old and deep-rooted cannot be slain by a couple of objectives. Men have often tried to dismiss it by affirming that pressing the rigidity of natural law makes it impossible. But such a declaration is unconvincing; for there is something deep down within us that makes us know that God works in a paradox of unpredictable newness and trustworthy faithfulness. ("*Thou Dear God"*)

In this passage and elsewhere, King emphasizes prayer as a deep, natural desire and impulse of humanity. For him, it is "indigenous to the human spirit" and "natural to the human organism." While King describes these universal aspects of prayer, he is also attuned to the particular functions of prayer for black people. Summarizing King's discussions about prayer, Baldwin writes, "King spoke of prayer as the sacred heart of faith, as the foundation of devotional life, as an essential component of prophetic social witness, and as a vital ingredient in the overall effort to free, humanize, and empower humanity. . . . The point is that prayer must be defined not only in words or concepts but

also by how it bears on practical reality, a matter of primary consideration in the black church tradition" (xii). True to King's rhetorical practice, in his prayers and discussions about their purpose, he rode the line between African American religious tradition and mainline liberal homiletics (Miller, *Voice*). King's view of prayer offers a window into the broader understanding of prayer that black people held in the civil rights movement: it could be both the "sacred heart of faith," while it was at the very same time, an effective mode of responding to white violence and cruelty and remaking social relations among races.

Since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, African Americans have practiced prayer toward both faithful and real-world functions. Enslaved men and women prayed to communicate with a divine God, to find strength to endure, and also at times to resist the institution of slavery. In truth, these functions of prayer were deeply intertwined: for an enslaved person to pray to God after being forbidden to do so by a slaveholder was both a pure act of faith and a mode of resistance. Albert Raboteau describes this aspect of religious life in slave communities. He suggests that the act of prayer was itself an act of power, particularly when an enslaved individual was reprimanded for participation in a hush harbor gathering or prayer meeting. At times slaveholders allowed these types of gatherings, and at others they forbade them. As Raboteau writes,

> Christianity, as slaveholders had all along suspected, was a double-edged sword. . . . Practicing religion could be for slaves an act of resistance—an assertion of independence that sometimes required defiance of the master's commands. When the master's will conflicted with God's, over attending a prayer meeting, for example, slaves faced a choice: obey God

> or obey man. Strengthened by the belief that salvation lay in obeying God rather than man, some slaves chose to disobey their masters. Beatings did not stop slaves from praying, and these prayers were symbols of resistance. (58)

Prayer meetings in slave communities engendered hope for enslaved people, and in so doing, they provided a new orientation toward the bondage of slavery, one that could both provide strength for disobeying in the present and the possibility of a new and different world in the future. In the long history of oppression against African Americans, prayer has long served as an important mode of responding to that oppression by seeking God's help. As such, it has also offered African Americans a means of engendering rhetorical power, resisting injustice, and claiming freedom.

One example of such a prayer is "A Slave Woman's Prayer," written down in 1816 by Stephen Hays, a minister visiting upstate New York. In this prayer, the woman prays for the slaveholder on her plantation and calls on God for joy. She prays:

> O Lord, bless my master. When he calls upon thee to damn his soul, do not hear him, do not hear him, but hear me – save him – make him know he is wicked, and he will pray to thee. (19)

This prayer is one of very few recorded prayers of enslaved people. As it demonstrates, prayer provided spiritual help as it also operated as resistance. For the enslaved woman positions her own voice and perspective as superior to the male slaveholder. She uses her prayer, spoken aloud in a site that denied her humanity, to enact her humanity and wisdom before God, while also asking for her situation to be changed. In so doing, she

begins that process by resisting and refuting the power dynamics at play between her and the slaveholder and by claiming divine power as her authority.

As enslaved people gained freedom and abolition gained traction, African American rhetors turned to prayer to advocate for justice on public platforms and in widely circulated texts. Rhetors such as Frederick Douglass and Maria Stewart capitalized upon the rhetorical powers of prayer to persuade others to help end slavery and to recognize the human dignity of black people in the United States. For Douglass and Stewart, hybrid written and spoken prayers provided an important avenue for appealing to the religious conscience of their audiences while also offering them, as marginalized speakers, a source of religious power from which to craft their ethos. In his *Narrative in the Life of An American Slave, Written by Himself,* Douglass weaves prayer into his story to prompt readers to think about how God feels about slavery and the enslaved individual. In the following passage, Douglass emphasizes that when he was a slave, the only audience to listen to his grievances was God and the ships sailing by. He writes,

> I have often, in the deep stillness of a summer's Sabbath, stood all alone upon the banks of that noble bay, and traced, with saddened heart and tearful eye, the countless number of sails moving off to the mighty ocean. My thoughts would compel utterance, and there, with no audience but the Almighty, I would pour out my soul's complaint in my rude way with an apostrophe to the moving multitude of ships. (37-38)

In this passage, Douglass describes watching ships pass by and feeling compelled to speak with no one to listen but the Almighty or the ships. At this point in his narrative,

Douglass is enslaved; for the slave, he suggests, imaginative speech to objects, the ships, and to God, provides an important mode of frank speech or *parrhesia*. In a hybrid apostrophe-prayer, Douglass next calls out first to the ships and then finally to God:

> You are loosed from your moorings, and free. I am fast in my chains, and am a slave! O, that I were free! O, that I were on one of your gallant decks, and under your protecting wing! Alas! betwixt me and you the turbid waters roll. Go on, go on; O that I could also go! Could I but swim! If I could fly! O, why was I but born a man, of whom to make a brute! The glad ship is gone—she hides in the dim distance. I am left in the hell of unending slavery. *O, God,* save me! God, deliver me! Let me be free! Is there any God! Why am I a slave? I will run away. I will not stand it. Get caught or get clear, I'll try it. . . .I had as well be killed running as die standing. . . .Try it? Yes! God helping me, I will. (38, emphasis mine).

This pivotal moment in Douglass's narrative shifts from apostrophe, shouting to ships in the distance, to prayer, crying out to God. He marks this shift out with the trademark generic feature of prayer, an invocation of address, "O, God" (FitzGerald 53). Through the passages excerpted above, Douglass communicates with God, and in so doing, draws audiences into his brief moment of prayer. The prayer, woven tightly into the narrative, provides a turning point for Douglass's movement toward freedom. After asking God to save and deliver him, Douglass chooses to run away, thus positioning his prayerful plea to divine power as the source of his resistance and act of rebellion against the institution of slavery.

For Douglass, this positioning of himself in prayer before God draws on the rhetorical power of prayer as a source of ethos. As discourse directed at divine audiences, prayer relies on what William FitzGerald calls the "attitude of reverence." Such a posture means illustrating "a discerning and gracious acceptance of one's subordinate, contingent place within an ordered and hierarchical cosmos" (72). For marginalized speakers in particular, this feature of the genre of prayer proves a rhetorically effective way of negotiating audience expectations for ethos and performance. Douglass thus inhabits prayer as a source of spiritual strength, the power that drives his resistance, and a rhetorical posture that helps him to craft his ethos: a prayerful, courageous human with dignity before God and man.

Like Douglass, abolitionist and women's rights advocate Maria Stewart relied on prayer's posture of reverence as rhetorical strategy. Also like Douglass, Stewart employed prayer in her abolitionist writings. Her spiritual narrative, *Meditations*, collects both prayers and speeches together to narrate her spiritual life. Besides these written prayers, Stewart also used prayer to bolster her ethos on the public platform. During her short speaking career in Boston, Stewart wove prayer into her public addresses regarding both slavery and women's rights. One example is her 1854 address. In this speech, Stewart calls women to activism through a speech laced with prayer. Her speech, like Douglass's *Narrative*, shifts into prayer somewhat unexpectedly with the call to the divine, "O, my God." She opens with directives to women before turning to prayer:

> O woman, woman! Your example is powerful, your influence is great; it extends over your husbands and your children, and throughout the circle of your acquaintance. Then let me exhort you to cultivate among

> yourselves a spirit of Christian love and unity, having charity one for another, without which all our goodness is as sounding brass, and as a tinkling cymbal. And *O, my God*, I beseech thee to grant that the nations of the earth may hiss at us no longer! O suffer them not to laugh us to scorn forever! (62-63, emphasis mine)

Prayer emerges in the middle of this passage, shifting from exhortation to women to petition to God. Through the petition, Stewart seeks the help of God for her cause. As prayer emerges here, it bolsters Stewart's ethos by positioning God on her side and by providing her a posture of reverence, a move that would have heightened her credibility before her audiences. This passage offers an example of a much larger pattern in Stewart's addresses. She turned to prayer often at the beginning and end of her speeches. Her *Meditations* include seven prayers in a collection of fourteen meditations (Bassard 62). By weaving lines of prayer into her speeches and texts, Stewart bolstered her own ethos by inhabiting the posture of reverence.

Prayer remained important to many African Americans in the early twentieth century as the black church institutionalized in the United States. Writing in 1927, for instance, James Weldon Johnson writes about the role of prayer in black church services: "One factor in the creation of atmospheres I have included—the preliminary prayer. The prayer leader was sometimes a woman. It was the prayer leader who directly prepared the way for the sermon, set the scene, as it were. . . . These preliminary prayers were hardly less remarkable than the sermon" (Johnson). As Johnson notes, as formal African American church services became a recurring genre, roles such as "prayer leader" developed to describe congregants who would compose and deliver prayers. While

Johnson marks prayer's function as a lead-up to the preacher's performance, he views these moments in church services as equivalent to the sermon and the ways this genre opens up possibilities for other leaders in the church: women.

Like Johnson, religion scholar James Melvin Washington sees black prayers from this period as important texts in their own right. In *Conversations with God*, Washington includes prayers by W. E. B. Du Bois, Ralph Mark Gilbert, Langston Hughes and Arna Bontempt, along with Johnson. The following prayer by Du Bois, written in 1910, operates in the twin functions of spiritual and real-world import outlined by King in the introduction to this section:

> Mighty causes are calling us--the freeing of women, the training of children, the putting down of hate and murder and poverty—all these and more. But they call with voices that mean work and sacrifice and death. Mercifully grant us, O God, the spirit of Esther, that we say: I will go unto the King and if I perish, I perish – Amen. (105)

Summoning the power of the biblical character Queen Esther, Du Bois prays for strength to act in response to the "[m]ighty causes" of the day: women's rights, education, and racism. Like Douglass, Stewart, and King, Du Bois's prayer recognizes that spiritual strength urges actions for justice.

In the mid-twentieth century, as African Americans rallied together to work as collectives in the South resisting segregation and demanding voting rights, better jobs, and racial equality, they too turned to prayer's spiritual import and real-world uses. Prayer was a major part of mass meetings, drawing on its well-established role as a crucial feature of the black church service. Prayer was also a significant part of civil

rights rhetoric more broadly, providing individuals and groups with a mode of dramatizing the moral and ethical issues they sought to change. In public places such as pool entrances or streets, African Americans such as John Lewis responded to white cruelty and violence by kneeling in prayer. This gestural act symbolically spoke to God as it also surprised onlookers and perpetrating whites into recognizing racial injustice at work.

Despite this long tradition of African American prayer as rich rhetorical activity and the ubiquity of civil rights prayers, the rhetorical role of prayer in the civil rights movement has received relatively little examination from scholars. Davis Houck and David Dixon have helped call attention to this issue with their edited collections of religious rhetoric leveraged toward black freedom. As they write, however, many texts—including prayers—remain to be discovered, and I would add, much analytical study remains to be done.

The lack of scholarly scrutiny given to civil rights prayers may stem from a much larger trend in rhetorical studies, to overlook prayer as an important rhetorical genre. Thanks to FitzGerald and a growing number of other scholars, religious genres are now garnering much more attention.[30] Fitzgerald in particular is responsible for drawing attention to prayer, and his book *Spiritual Modalities: Prayer as Rhetoric and Performance* establishes prayer as a deeply rhetorical genre. In *Spiritual Modalities*, Fitzgerald offers a multi-dimensional prism for viewing prayer's rhetoricity. He argues that prayer cannot be fully understood from one theory, and instead is most fruitfully conceptualized flexibly drawing on Burkean and traditional concepts. For my work here,

[30] For work in this vein, see Jeffrey Ringer and Michael DePalma's collection *Mapping Religious Rhetorics*.

FitzGerald's discussion of prayer as a "rehearsal for living" and as a site of memory are crucial insights.

In what follows, I expand FitzGerald's project to examine prayer in mass meetings and beyond, illustrating how activists employ individually and collectively spoken prayers toward a variety of ends. My analysis of civil rights prayers builds on FitzGerald's project by connecting it to issues of race and power. In his conclusion, FitzGerald writes, "By design, I have focused my study on formal operations of prayerful discourse, but implicitly called for extension of these concerns into the realm of the political as a domain where prayer is used to sanctify, shock, legitimate, or elevate" (137). My examination here thus extends FitzGerald's project and answers his call for examining prayerful discourse's role in the political domain. Examinations of African American prayer cannot focus on formal operations alone; as the above overview makes clear, black prayer has always been invariably related to politics because for marginalized people, prayer as an invocation of divine power by its very nature challenges extant power dynamics.

"We really need some *bodies*": Prayer as Praxis in Americus, Georgia in August 1963

On August 17, 1963, black citizens and civil rights workers in Americus, Georgia, staged a march from the church where mass meetings were usually held across the town to the City Hall. Prayer was intended to play a central role in this protest: a meeting leader instructed the folks gathered to the plan: "This is what we're going to do now. We're going out the back door . . . and you're going to City Hall, you're going to kneel

and pray, and you're going to pray until they carry you in. All right, all right, so walk in twos down to City Hall and pray and stay there" ("Americus"). The desired goal was demonstrating to white Americus officials and residents that their civil rights activism had not waned, and prayer was the intended strategy for carrying out this campaign. Despite this clearly laid out plan, this protest did not go well. Very few people attended the protest even after they had been assured leadership they would be there. As a result of few people marching, the campaign that day was executed poorly.

In the mass meeting held directly after this march, the event centered both on reviving prayer as a protest tool and instructing the group in how to employ prayer effectively, enacting both its spiritual and real-world significance. Toward this aim, the meeting is structured around songs, discussions of prayer and its relationship to protest and freedom, and periods for both silent and discursive prayers. The discussions around how to pray emphasize that "prayer changes things;" that as contrition, prayer must be reflection that prompts further action. In this way, prayer is framed as a type of Freireian praxis, or "reflection and action upon the world to transform it" (51). For this leader, prayer as contrition and reflection were modes for moving toward further action. Furthermore, the rhetorical silences surrounding instructions in how to pray suggests that civil rights activists were invested in mining the resources of contemplation as moves toward freedom. While these functions of prayer help move activists further toward their goals, this meeting also illustrates the complexity of leveraging protest and civil rights campaigns through religious genres, as the instructions on how to pray sometimes bleed into moments of rhetorical shaming.

Before analyzing these functions of prayer at the Americus mass meeting, it is necessary to understand the town's role in the broader Southwest Georgia Movement. The county seat of Sumter County, Americus was first targeted by members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in 1962, and later, in 1965, by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. After they decided to leave Albany, Georgia, SNCC activists chose the nearby town, Americus, as their next location for civil rights organizing.[31] As a neighbor town to Sumter, SNCC thought Americus held promise for expanding the voter registration and citizenship education work they had been doing in Southwest Georgia since 1961. Indeed it did: SNCC stayed in Americus through 1965, when the SCLC moved in to help.

According to Jason Sokol, by 1970 the town was considered an anomaly as a rural "backwater" town marked by impressive racial change. For instance, many whites stood against "white flight" from public schools to private academies in response to desegregation. Blacks and whites alike joined the football team at the public high school, and some students even began eating dinner together on the weekends. A sophomore football player claimed, "The kids are really a little surprised at how well things have gone" (qtd. in Sokol 179). He was not alone in noticing progress; many Americus residents expressed similar sentiments (Sokol).

[31] Albany proved difficult for civil rights activists because of the Sherriff Pritchett there who infamously claimed he would "out-nonviolent" the nonviolent protestors. The strategies that worked well elsewhere—filling the jails to overwhelm the cities while protest continued—did not work in Albany because Sherriff Pritchett strategically made arrangements with other local Sherriffs to use their jails as well. In addition, and most importantly, Albany obtained a federal court order against protestors, including King (Hogan 70).

While by the end of the decade Americus had made considerable progress, when SNCC began organizing in early 1963 the signs of change were difficult to see. White supremacy ran deep in this rural town as it did in most areas of the Black Belt of Georgia. One white woman, Frances Pauley, stated that whites in Americus "would rather have their banks and businesses fail than to desegregate their town" (qtd. in Sokol 207). White violence following the 1964 Civil Rights Act proved Pauley's sentiment to be widely held. After eating in newly desegregated restaurants SNCC workers were attacked, and whites mobbed a local movie theater. Local law enforcement was among the worst in the South: when King visited Americus he labeled the County Sherriff Fred Chappell "the meanest man in the world" (qtd. in Robins). In Americus, law enforcement officers weren't simply cruel; they were also antiquated. On August 8, 1963, they arrested four SNCC workers—three white and one black—on charges of breaking Georgia's 1871 Anti-Treason Act (Robins). This group, called "the Americus four," was held in prison for months with the threat of the death penalty, a punishment included in the antiquated law. Historian Glenn M. Robins labels the year the arrest occurred, 1963, the year of "learning to March" for Americus black citizens.

Occurring in the aftermath of the charges against the "Americus Four," the August 17 march and mass meeting described above offer insight into how prayer provided spiritual strength and rhetorical power in the Americus movement. As African Americans and other activists coped with obstacles familiar to civil rights activists across the South—cruel and obtuse law enforcement, white hatred violence, and waning energy to keep the spirit of the movement going—they turned to prayer as a structure for protest and a resource for reflecting on what to do next when a protest failed.

It made sense for the mass meeting following the failed protest to center on prayer given that the Americus activists had planned to carry out the protest through prayer. Those gathered together in the meeting were the very activists who did not show up for the prayerful protest. Thus, in light of the failed prayer protest, the meeting leader (unnamed in archival records) sought to offer instruction in how to pray to help meeting participants see how to connect prayer and protest. Through this instruction, he aimed to persuade participants to enact prayer as activism. Then, through the times of silent prayer he led after his instructions, he sought to provide opportunities for them to begin to practice employing prayer as a mode of activism and connecting their protests with their prayers. In the silent prayers, the collective group reflected on the protest and why it failed. The reflection here, in line with Frierian praxis, was geared toward renewed action. As both a means of fostering deeper awareness of oppression and taking steps toward changing their situation, the moments of silent prayer provided participants with a site for reflection on movement goals and strategies, even as it functioned too as their contrition for failing to act in ways consonant with those ideals. After the songs that opened the meeting, the crowd grew silent for a few moments, waiting for directions on how to proceed. The meeting leader began his instructions by connecting prayer to larger movement goals. He suggests that their march failed because too many of them are still afraid:

> We really need some bodies. We need you. We need some bodies. We *really* need some bodies. Like the people that just left here . . . they proved that they weren't scared of nobody. That they really wanted their freedom.

> Sing louder, "Do we really want our freedom?"
>
> It won't be long brother, before men like you, decide to put your body on the line like those children did. It won't be long.
>
> This is no joke. Everybody in this church really means business. ("Americus")

In the opening of his instructions on prayer, this leader emphasizes that the Americus movement depends upon courageous activists who will enact embodied, prayerful protests. He wanted them to be present with him praying on the steps. As he makes clear that embodied protest is crucial to enacting freedom as their goal, he also gently chastises those who did not choose to participate in the protest held earlier that day. In this opening discussion the group is reminded of their overarching goal—freedom—and the strategies necessary to achieve it—courageous, embodied protest in public. At the same time, they are prompted to begin reflecting on why some of them fell short of their goal and did not attend the protest.

This initial discussion of their goals and strategies paved the way for scaffolded instructions on how to pray as a way to change the direction of the movement and to take steps toward ending racial injustice in their town. The leader moves from reflection on the failed prayerful protest to calling for the crowd to shift into a time of prayer. He suggests that praying now, in the meeting, will change how they act in public. The leader continues:

> You gotta act like you want freedom . . . You know prayer changes things. (Yes it will.) Prayer changes things. Sometimes we can see ourselves when we're praying and after our prayer. We can sometimes see

> ourselves. It's time we look at ourselves now. We point at other people; it's time we look at ourselves now. I think we need prayer in this church bad, and we need it now . . . That's everybody here, kneel down. ("Americus")

The leader defines prayer here as a means of *contrition*. As the "we" pronouns indicate, the leader is calling for collective contrition and reflection. Where traditionally contrition operates as an individual's confession and repentance for sin, in this meeting contrition provides the group with an opportunity to reflect on their collective failure to move toward greater freedom in their town through their marching. Prayer thus creates an opportunity to repent together and to turn away from the day's ineffective protest. It is a chance to "change things" by "seeing themselves" as they really are. In this way, the leader has framed prayer as a type of praxis, reflection that must inspire further action. This praxis-prayer time enables the group to parse out what past actions show their desire for freedom most clearly, and which past actions might have distorted or impeded their quest for that desire.

The leader's directions are important in shaping the prayers of the group toward continued action. Rather than simply move to silent prayer, during this time of meeting prayer, the leader continues speaking and instructing the crowd while they are kneeling down. He walks them through what they should contemplate in their prayers. In this way, the time of prayer works through the silence and contemplation of the group in conjunction with the leader's promptings. For example, after the leader directs the crowd to kneel down, he claims that they must first address God to request forgiveness: "Ask God to forgive you, to help you, to make you stronger . . . ask God to help you make up

your mind that you want to be free, help you to say it like you mean it, you want to be free, help you to fight" ("Americus"). This instruction in how to move from contrition to petition reveals how the leader scaffolds the crowd's prayers. He directs them in how to go to God and find spiritual strength for failure and to find further strength for future embodied actions. This direction importantly prompts the group praying to see contrition as a movement toward renewal and repentance—toward new modes of action.

The prayer time at this meeting fosters silent contemplation as a resource to be leveraged toward movement goals. Scholars such as Cheryl Glenn, Anne Ruggles Gere, and Gesa Kirsch have written about the important rhetorical possibilities silence and contemplation avail. Glenn and Gere, for instance, both argue that silence operates in reciprocal relationship with speech and offer significant rhetorical resources (Glenn 7; Gere 207). Glenn puts it persuasively: "I argue for silence as a rhetorical art, one that can be as powerful as the spoken or written word. . . . [A]s a constellation of symbolic strategies [silence] serves many functions" (18). Kirsch agrees, writing that silent contemplation, coupled with spirituality, enables rhetorical agency. For Kirsch, contemplation and reflection provide important modes of engaging with "complex social, political, and ethical problems" (W11). In the Americus meeting, prayer is the genre that enables rhetorical silence to foster spiritual engagement with the most pressing social, cultural, and political issues facing African Americans in southwest Georgia.

Periods of rhetorical silence punctuate the pauses between the leader's instructions. In these silences, we can surmise that many in the group, kneeling in the church, offer up prayers to God. Drawing on the work of Richard L. Johannesen, Glenn names twenty functions of silence, and number eleven, "The person is in awe, or raptly

attentive, or emotionally overcome," best describes the meaning of the group's silences during this prayer time (16-17). Breaking their silent prayers, the leader interjects more instruction, this time recalling what happened earlier that day. He proclaims,

> Just think, all those kids went down on the mall. And yesterday, Thursday night, you knew, I told you. . . . I asked how many people want their freedom? Who is willing to go out [on the] town now? Everybody jumped up. Everybody was willing to fight then, everybody was willing to go downtown. ("Americus")

Creating moments for silent contemplation on what happened that day, the leader reminds the group that they had promised to march and pray with him. This reminder subtly calls to mind the fact that they broke their promise. In the silent moments, the group contemplates before God why they were not willing to participate and ask for help to overcome the challenges they prevented them from participating.

In addition to these subtle reminders about the failures of the group, the leader also employs a strategy we might think of as rhetorical shaming. In providing direction for the group's silent prayers, the leader at times punctuates the silences with layered questions and statements that prompt meeting participants to develop an affective understanding of what had happened. The dominant emotion prompted by this question-and-answer time of prayer seems to be shame. Shifting from questions the group should direct at God, he directs questions at them:

> We're supposed to be freedom fighters, I mean freedom fighters! Ask yourself, Are you a freedom fighter?

I don't know, Do you feel guilty? Do you feel bad seeing those people walk down there and you not being with them? Do you feel bad? (Yes)

You should feel bad. (Yes sir.) You should feel bad. ("Americus")

In this discussion of prayer's import for the group, the leader's directions bleed into rhetorical shaming. By "rhetorical shaming," I mean repeated and strategic claims that the group is guilty and should carry an affective burden from this guilt and then not fail to participate in a protest again. As the group silently kneels before this leader, he layers rhetorical questions to reinforce his disappointment in their actions and the guilt they should carry for what they did. Their rhetorical silence in this moment is not a resource for spiritual power; it is an imposed silence. As Glenn writes, "The question is not whether speech or silence is better, more effective, more appropriate. Instead, the question is whether our use of silence is our choice (whether conscious or unconscious) or that of someone else" (13). Throughout the meeting, the silent prayers of the group are to a certain extent imposed upon them: silent prayer is enforced by the leader. While the leader largely urges meeting participants to access the spiritual power afforded by silent, contemplative prayers, this moment when his instructions veer into shaming shifts the silence from empowering them to an imposition, a silence enforced by authority. It is a brief moment in this meeting and should not be viewed as the dominant tone of the group's prayers. However, while brief, it does serve as a reminder of how silent prayer can shift from source of spiritual power to imposition.

After creating moments for silent prayer considering the day's events, the leader exhorts the group to turn from contemplating the past to silent prayers about how they

might begin to act in new ways. Interjecting another exhortation, the leader shifts the group's thinking to how they might move from reflection on their fear and failure to how shared suffering and equality provide strength for their actions:

> Never turn back. Actions speak louder than words. Those kids were willing to go to jail. If others can go, I can go. One person suffers, I can suffer. How many people think they're better than those kids? None of us. We're equal. It was God who created all of us to be equal. We gotta realize it. All these boys over here. All the girls over here. Right there, right there. ("Americus")

In the silences, the crowd considers how collectivity—shared action and suffering—provide spiritual strength. Moving away from ideals of divine protection, the leader instead urges everyone to consider how equality offers them a resource for action even while protection from harm cannot be guaranteed. The knowledge that before God all people are equal should encourage their willingness to suffer together if necessary. At this point in the Americus movement, the leader realizes that contemplating protest may call to mind the Americus Four being held in jail under threat of the death penalty. Instead of asking to be spared suffering, the leader suggests that the group must expand their spiritual understanding to embrace it as part of their activist philosophy.

Once the leader finishes exhorting the group in how to pray and think about prayer as inspiring their action, the remainder of the meeting moves through more silent and also sporadic or extemporaneous prayer. The leader structures this portion of the meeting by instructing everyone to kneel and encouraging all types of prayer: silent and

spoken. If an individual wants to speak (or sing) prayers, then she should. The others should just be praying along silently:

> Everybody kneel and pray. Whoever want a lead a prayer, lead. Somebody's going to lead a prayer, lead. Just really pray. Now you can really pray. Prayer changes things. Let us kneel. On our knees. ("Americus")

As we will see in the following sections, in many meetings an individual, usually a minister, leads a prayer while everyone listens and silently prays along. This Americus meeting, however, functions differently. The leader never moves from instruction in prayer to actually praying; instead, he offers everyone an opportunity to pray, whether silently or aloud. While he does provide significant direction for their prayers, the leader does not after all speak the prayers himself and urges the meeting participants to voice the prayers of the group. A woman responds and sings a prayer to God, and then the group sings a hymn-prayer together. These musical genres close the meeting.

"When we are done shedding brighter tears": Rhetorical Perseverance in Selma, Alabama in October 1963

While the meeting in Americus relies on prayer to look backward in reflective contrition, spiritual contemplation, and momentarily, in shame, prayer is a genre that also looks forward. It is this future-oriented function that we see operating in mass meetings in Selma, Alabama, in October of 1963. At these meetings, prayer provides the moment for the group to articulate their decision to keep going, even as they faced increasing difficulties in reaching their goals. I name this function of prayer *rhetorical perseverance*.

For as discursive articulation of plans to endure, rhetorical perseverance in prayer helps prepare and steel civil rights activists for what is to come.

The backdrop for this Selma meeting is important for exploring these functions of prayer in the meetings. James Baldwin called Selma, Alabama, "one of the worst places I ever saw" (qtd. in Branch 152). Historians are careful to note that the Selma civil rights campaign began long before the direct-action protests of the 1950s; indeed, in the 1930s, Amelia Boynton, and her husband Samuel, created the Dallas County Voters League (DCVL). The DCVL worked toward increasing voting rights and economic equality for blacks, providing a strong base for partnerships with civil rights organizations beginning in the early 1960s. Despite the long years of work by the DCVL, in 1961 a mere 130 of 15,115 eligible blacks had secured their right to vote (Crosby).

While Selma was the site for standard obstacles to voting such as difficult literacy tests and questionnaires, historian J. Mills Thorton suggests that tests and questions were not the main reason blacks had not registered. Thornton writes, "But perhaps the principle obstacle to registration was not the formal requirements, not official misconduct, not black apathy, but pervasive black fear" (436). As the home base for the Citizens Council of Alabama, Selma was a stronghold of enduring white supremacy. To register to vote was to put one's name on public record, thus risking the wrath of the Council members (Thornton 436). Such wrath often meant the loss of jobs, the loss of security, and even the loss of life.

The recent film *Selma* paints a picture of civil rights this city as though the most important year in the campaign was 1965, the year that King and the SCLC moved into Dallas County. To be sure, 1965 was a crucial victory for Selma and the civil rights

movement, as the national attention to the violence of whites on Bloody Sunday helped secure the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. However, the longer campaign, beginning with the Boytons in the 1930s and gaining momentum in January 1963 when SNCC arrived in Selma, laid a foundation for the 1965 events. In activist Prathia Hall's words, "The 1965 Selma Movement could never have happened if SNCC hadn't been there opening up Selma in 1962 and 1963. The later nationally known movement was the product of more than two years of *very* careful, *very* slow work" (Hall). As Hall makes clear, the day-in, day-out work of organizing over a number of years played an integral role in making the later campaign in Selma possible.

Perhaps the most significant element of this very slow and careful work, or at least the most effective, was the mass meetings. If fear was the largest obstacles blacks faced, then the meetings were the greatest space of engendering its antidote, courage. Patterns of voter registration among Selma blacks make this point well. Thornton notes that in the year before mass meetings began in Dallas County, black applications averaged about 3 per month (450). Some months no blacks applied at all. When mass meetings began in May of 1963, application numbers rose to 31; by October, it reached 215. Over the course of the year while Selma residents met for weekly mass meetings—May 1963 to July 1964—the average number of applications per month was 47 (Thornton 450). Selma blacks were speaking back in word and action to the fear mongering of the White Citizens Council, and the mass meeting was the center of that rhetorical power.

Within these meetings, prayer functioned as a genre to enact the power to speak back to fear, to rhetorically persevere. I define rhetorical perseverance as a rhetor's

discursive discussion about a failure, challenge, or barrier to a goal and her subsequent discussion of her will or plans to overcome it. Prayer is an important space to develop such rhetorics, as it provides a moment of transcendance and otherworldliness. In speaking to God, an individual or group enters a unique rhetorical situation where the context shifts to engage a divine, unseen audience. This otherworldly aspect of the genre enables those inhabiting prayer to enter a new *kairos*, one where the speaker operates in divine time and space (FitzGerald). These aspects of prayer create an ideal situation to name challenges and detail plans to overcome them—or more simply find spiritual strength to face them and decide to continue acting, and speaking for justice in spite of them.

October 1963 was an exciting time in Selma. As the numbers above suggest, it was the month of the largest number of voter registration applications to be submitted in one month during civil rights campaigns, and perhaps in Selma history. One particular day during October, October 7, was dedicated as "Freedom Day." SNCC along with the Boyntons teamed up to encourage Selma folks to go in large numbers to register on this Monday. The idea was that the large numbers of registering blacks would provide Selma activists with a victory they could stand on.

Thus, the mass meetings held in October offer a window into how activists generated courage and enthusiasm through rhetorical perseverance. All of the meeting genres work toward this goal, but it is through prayer that activists name the relationships between the group and their enemies and obstacles, call on divine power, and state a will to endure. The prayers of these October meetings offer an inside look at how Selma civil rights activists understood the challenges before them,

and just as importantly, the resources they called upon to keep them going in spite of these challenges.

October 2, less than a week before Freedom Day, Selma locals and SNCC leaders gathered together for a short meeting with a program including some freedom songs, a Scripture reading, and a prayer. The songs for the evening blend African American religious traditions with civil rights goals, as the meeting begins with "This Little Light of Mine," and concludes with "Kumbaya." To shift from song to prayer, master of ceremony Mr. Henry Aaron Ramsey calls upon Reverend Coulter to read a scripture lesson.

The Scripture reading sets the stage for Reverend Coulter's prayer. He directs the crowd to the sixth chapter in the book of John:

> And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" ("Selma")

Like the church services many in attendance would be so familiar with, this meeting turns to a Scripture reading before the turns to the genre of prayer. Reverend Coulter describes his interest in discussing this text: "I love to read that scripture. If you would go home and study that 12th verse, you will get something out of it. Then you will think about what Jesus said about the fight. It make me get to thinking sometimes, when I start reading that scripture. . . that we are living off the leftovers. That is why I love to read

that scripture" ("Selma"). While the directive that there will be a scripture lesson connects people to church services, Coulter's application of the text draws them back to the fight for freedom happening all around them. This type of weaving, from familiar church service to freedom fight, permeates October mass meetings.

The Scripture reading and discussion that comes after it serve as a frame for Coulter's prayer. Reverend Coulter moves into prayer by taking a posture of reverence and directing those praying with him, presumably everyone else gathered, to adopt this posture as well. After the song, Coulter begins:

> We bow our head in prayer. Father in Heaven, we come this evening with bowed heads in your house, and we come this evening Father, only as we know how, we come this evening for thee, as a good child would come before good parents, we come thanking thee for the blessing that thy has come upon us. ("Selma")

In this first portion of the prayer, Coulter positions himself and those praying along with him as the children of God. This moment calls on the Christian scriptures read earlier that portray Christ as the Son of God. In line with the text, Coulter testifies to the familial bonds the group believes they share with God. At the same time, his opening also instructs his audience in the postures of prayer—in the embodied and attitudinal senses. They must bow their heads together, reminding themselves of what prayer feels like and what it looks like.

Through this opening posturing, Coulter and the group enact what FitzGerald terms "an attitude of reverence" (72). For FitzGerald, reverence best describes the attitude most commonly manifested through prayer (73). Like Douglass, Stewart, and

others in the African American tradition, Coulter adopts "a discerning and gracious acceptance of one's subordinate, contingent, place within an ordered and hierarchical cosmos" (FitzGerald72). Assuming the familiar role of children before parents, Coulter and the meeting participants adopt a position of subordination to God in their words and gestures. Through discourse Coulter demonstrates reverence in his claims that they are "good children" before "good parents." In gesture, they all embody reverence through their bowed heads. This type of posturing—adopting a position of subordination to God in word, attitude, and gesture—should be seen as a source of spiritual strength and power. For many in the group, these are the familiar moves that make conversation with God possible. In this way, these postures help foster spirituality in the way Kirsch writes about, as "[a] sense of magic, inspiration, and wonder one can experience at different moments in life" (1). As she argues, spirituality in this sense can catalyze rhetorical agency, attuning rhetors to the issues they most wish to change and inspiring them to believe their actions matter. Thus, while it may be tempting to read bowed heads and a position of subordination before God as "weak" (and indeed some activists did see it this way), it also could powerfully serve as a source of spiritual power, even and especially through these postures of reverence. For many in the group, reverent words, attitudes, and gestures engage them with supernatural, transcendent power, more accessible and present to them through this posturing.

From this opening posturing, the rest of the prayer focuses on establishing Selma activists as those who rhetorically persevere with God on their side. Coulter does this explicitly by describing God's strength and power and then alluding to their obstacles:

> Father in Heaven, as we bow this evening, that we beg indeed to have mercy upon us, as we bow Father in that, we realize that we are weak, and thou are mighty strong, we realized you made man and you know all about him . . . realize Father in heaven, that all power is in thy hands, we pray this evening, that you hold our hands, guide our feets as we walk up the King's highway, knowing that stumbling blocks are in our way, knowing sometime our valley is very low . . . knowing that you said you would be a bridge when the water gets [too high](“Selma”)

Coulter creates a scene where activists hold hands with a strong, powerful God while they walk up the highway. They are not fixed on the obstacles—loss of jobs, violence, economic disadvantages—but they are also not unaware of them; they go “knowing that stumbling blocks are in our way” (Selma). These images serve as rhetorics of perseverance. Coulter describes them as people who keep going no matter that “our valley is very low” (“Selma). Echoing the Exodus narrative as well as songs from earlier in the evening, Coulter charts their path forward in his prayer. In the spirit of King, Ralph Abernathy, and other African American leaders, this minister appeals to the Exodus narrative to establish Selma African Americans as those who keep going to the promised land of freedom in spite of obstacles.

In a meeting held that same week, a different minister, Reverend Anniston, led the time of prayer. Anniston similarly employs his prayers toward enacting rhetorical perseverance, helping activists to steel and prepare themselves for what is ahead. He opens, “Our dear heavenly Father, we beseech thee at this hour, come in the most honest manner that we know how, thanking thee for the manifold blessings that thou has

bestowed upon us" ("Selma"). Like Reverend Coulter, the opening portion of Anniston's prayer focuses on the relationship between his audience and their God. Emphasizing their "honest manner," he enacts reverence by defining and enacting their posture before God. They are honest, thankful and blessed, beseeching their "heavenly Father" once again in this prayer as children. Again, this posturing sets the stage for explicit discussion of the power and strength they ascribe to God and access through their prayers.

Anniston moves from posturing to a series of "realization" statements, through which he names the difficulties facing Selma African Americans. He prays, "We realize that thou has been good to us, thou has brought us a mighty long ways, through many dangers seen and unseen. Our Father, we realize that thou are on our side. We realize that we cannot do anything without thee. We realize, our Father, that we are struggling for freedom and equality" ("Selma"). Anniston "realizes" with those listening in that they have had struggles before even as they have them now. Again employing the image of a long, hard journey toward a promised land of freedom and equality, Anniston's prayer describes Selma African Americans as astute travelers on a divine-mandated quest toward justice. This rhetoric of perseverance works much like Coulter's, imagining that African Americans have come close to claiming what is at the end of the road: the promised land of freedom and equality. In naming these struggles and "realizing" God's power is present to them, Anniston and those praying with him claim strength to endure and press on.

From these Old Testament references, Anniston shifts to describing the strength that comes from the New Testament Gospel of Jesus Christ. Again using the language of realization, Anniston continues, "We realize that thou died that all men may be free.

Thou hung on the old rugged cross, shedded thy blood, signed the bond of freedom for all men with thy blood. Said whosoever will, let him come" ("Selma"). This quick summary of the Christian gospel provides the linchpin for the rest of the prayer. For Selma blacks that identify with Christianity, the reference reminds them that their quest for freedom has divine authority, as it is the central story of their faith. "The bond of freedom" has been signed because of the life of Jesus, and it is the work of Selma civil rights activists to complete this work. This discussion of the Gospel and its connection to social activism anticipates black liberation theology that emerges later in the 1960s.

Anniston goes on to draw out the significance of the God-ordained quest for freedom. He charges, "That means black man, that means white man, red men, yellow men, and all men, all over the land and country come unto thee" (Selma). In the God-orchestrated journey toward freedom depicted by Anniston, people of all races are bound together in their need for God, thus all people are by extension involved in Selma's struggle. Such a definitional point provides the context for Anniston's description of how Selma blacks will engender the courage to go to the Courthouse or turn in their questionnaires. He says,

> We are coming tonight, our Father, in thy name. We pray that thou wouldst be with us. Take our hands and lead us. And give us the courage that it takes for us to go through. Our Father we pray thee that thou wouldst forgive us for all our many sins. Create in us a clean heart and renew the right sprit within us. Please do not leave us alone. For that if I said leave us, we realize there is nowhere we can go but to thee. And as we come in thy name, our Father, please do not deny us. Bless this

> speaking, our Father, to thy will. Keep us safe from all hurt, harm, and danger. . . . Help us to see the light as we march to freedom, Our Father. ("Selma")

In this petitionary portion of the prayer, Anniston asks God for his presence, for courage, and for a "right spirit." He also asks for safety, for protection from "hurt, harm, and danger." All of these requests precede the final supplication, "to see the light" as they march to freedom. These petitions reveal how Anniston and others understood what resources would help them to endure as they continued campaigning for voter registration, and more broadly working for racial equality in Selma. For many, these goals were possible because of God's help accessed in prayer and seen in ways both spiritual and tangible – as much through their affective understanding that they had the right spirit and God was with them as by their plans to march forward.

Through the genre of prayer, Coulter and Anniston both develop rhetorics of perseverance. As a rhetorical situation that fosters an otherworldly sense of time and space, through their prayers activists steeled themselves and prepared for what is ahead. They did this by enacting reverent attitudes and gestures, positioning themselves as known and loved by God, and observing challenges while charting paths forward. Moreover, these prayers illuminate how Selma activists sought out spiritual power to keep them going as they risked their jobs, families, and lives for freedom: they discursively develop their collective sense that God is with them, and because of this presence, they can and should persevere. They invoke divine authority to call themselves blessed and to empower the work they take up in registering to vote.

"This thing is too big for Kennedy": Collective Dignity in Greenwood, Mississippi in Winter 1963

The mass meeting scene in Selma, Alabama, illustrates how prayer served as a space removed, a situation where activists steeled themselves for the challenges ahead by communicating with God. Through prayer, they prepared to face oppression as they went to the Courthouse to register to vote, reminding themselves of stories in the Christian Scriptures that urged them to act with God for justice and racial equality. They remembered the many times that God had helped them before. In Greenwood, Mississippi, mass meetings, prayer similarly serves as a space to steel oneself and to prepare for what is to come. Yet it also illuminates another important function of prayer for civil rights activists. It demonstrates how through collective prayers, meeting participants developed rhetorical ways of being: they refined their collective identity as characterized by dignity, honesty, and Christian nonviolence. Yet, these postures of prayer were also eventually contested. For some activists, prayer would ultimately come to be viewed as an outdated mode of response. The scene of Greenwood, Mississippi, brings this tension into focus.

If Alabama was *one* of the worst places in America in the early 1960s, Mississippi was surely *the* worst. Historians differ on what caused racism to be so intractable in the state of Mississippi, but they agree that the state ranks first in white violence, terror, and stubbornness to change in the middle decades of the twentieth century (Dittmer; Hogan; Sokol; Payne). SNCC moved into Mississippi in 1960 with considerable enthusiasm and hope for change. Just three years later, some fieldworkers, quite understandably, had

worn down. For instance, early in 1963 SNCC organizer Bob Moses wrote to the SNCC Executive Committee:

> The Mississippi monolith has successfully survived the Freedom Rides, James Meredith at Ole Miss, and the assassination of Medgar Evers. The full resources of the state will continue to be at the disposal of local authorities to fight civil rights gains. The entire white population will continue to be the Klan. (qtd. in Hogan 144)

Moses expresses his deep dissatisfaction with the local government in Mississippi and his feelings that white supremacy ran deep and wide, affecting every white person in the state. This waning enthusiasm was not limited to SNCC leaders. Local activists too were discouraged. After three years of hard work, white violence against civil rights activists was worse than ever and national attention to the Mississippi problem was zero.

At this crucial moment, in the fall of 1963 Moses and Allard Lowenstein devised the "Freedom Vote." The Freedom Vote was a mock election "designed to dramatize, especially to the federal government, that disenfranchised black Mississippians would cast a ballot if given the opportunity" (Houck and Brooks 3). This strategy also importantly gave blacks and other activists a much-needed victory, as the campaign offered black Mississippians something they could *do* even as federal help was limited to nonexistent. Such a strategy proved extraordinarily effects: the campaign was an outright success and gained traction across the state. To keep momentum high, mass meetings focused on rallying folks to go out and vote.

Speaking about Greenwood, Mississippi, Maegan Parker Brooks claims that one such meeting provided the context for Fannie Lou Hamer's first important address. While

such addresses offer much insight into the rhetorical work motivating the Freedom Vote, the prayers in these meetings also illustrate how black Mississippians continually developed their collective self-respect, rejecting ideas that they were unworthy of full-class citizenship and replacing them with embodied discussion of their value and dignity before God. We see such prayers delivered by individuals, and we also see such prayers collectively spoken. At the same time, however, some activists began to question prayer as an appropriate mode of resistance. Reverence and resistance could not be fully merged for some.

As an example of how prayer could serve as a space to enact collective dignity, Reverend Redd's prayer at a fall 1963 meeting provides important insight. This meeting is comprised almost entirely of freedom singing but for a few minutes in the very middle. During this middle portion of the meeting, a moderator calls upon Reverend Redd to come and "open up like we always we do with a prayer" ("Greenwood"). Before Redd prays, the moderator reads Galatians 6:7, "No man wants to reap what he sows" ("Greenwood"). This verse, he claims, offers the crowd a way to respond to their white opposition. He says:

> See our white brother have sowed so many bad seeds. And he don't want to hear it. That's why he's worried, trying to lock up a few people, but you tell him that I said to stop this movement he got to lock up God, and he can't do it. (Laughter.) . . . You know Negroes started this stuff two thousand years ago. . . . Don't worry yourself. This thing is too big for Kennedy. This is God's movement." ("Greenwood")

Through this short Scripture lesson, the moderator establishes the purpose of Redd's prayer and sets the tone for it. With humor and references to the Kennedy administration, the moderator suggests that what is happening in Greenwood is "too big for Kennedy," and too powerful for white men to stop.

Reverend Redd picks up the themes established by the moderator. Through his prayer, he emphasizes the strength and will to freedom he has observed among Greenwood African Americans. He begins, "Let us bow our heads. Our Father in Heaven as we come humbly again before thy holy throne. We come with thanksgiving; we come thanking thee, Heavenly father, for the many blessings that thou have granted unto us from our early existence in life up until this present moment" ("Greenwood"). Continuing with the thread, "this thing is too big for Kennedy," Redd describes how God has been present to the Greenwood African American community since the beginning. His prayer reinforces the view of the movement as belonging to God. These first words also orient the group toward God by assuming a position of reverence. Through this opening, Redd defines the group's upstanding character: they are humble, thankful, and blessed. By naming these qualities of the group before God, Redd establishes the collective character of the group as dignified Christian people seeking God's help. As meeting participants listen in and pray with Redd, they remember who they are *together* before God. In so doing, they agree with his assessment of who they are and reaffirm their commitment to the principle strategies of the movement: Christian nonviolence blended with democratic ideals.

Redd extends this opening image of the Greenwood group's character as he petitions God for help. Through his discussion of Greenwood blacks' efforts and

enduring service to civil rights causes, Redd speaks to God about their collective dignity. Redd prays,

> Father in Heaven, bless these who are here tonight who came for freedom who are putting in every effort, trying in every way to achieve what is rightfully theirs. Have mercy on us tonight. Do not leave us, Heavenly Father, I don't care how the struggle gets or how hard the fight be may be, stand on our side. We attempt to serve you in all ways. Help us to fight this battle. Give us the courage to continue. Don't let us stop until the victory have been won. In Jesus' name we ask these blessings and for his sake. ("Greenwood")

Redd continues emphasizing the collective dignity of those gathered together. Through plural pronouns "us" and "we," Redd imagines how the group appears before God. He highlights how they are "putting in every effort," and they "attempt to serve" with all they have. In this way, Redd demonstrates how they are indomitable fighters for justice and freedom. They love mercy and freedom, and they believe that their struggle is one that requires their constant work, even as they believe it is God's struggle. Redd's prayer reveals how speaking to God serves to define the character of the group, shaping their ethos and fostering their political agency. In comparison to the Americus meeting leader's strategy discussed before, Reverend Redd's emphasis on the dignity and efforts of this group contrasts with the shaming approach taken up by the Americus meeting leader.

FitzGerald describes this as prayer's function as a "space of rehearsal." He writes, "One can regard prayer as having this precise purpose: to shape character by orienting

performers to present and future action by manifesting a communicative self" (23). In this way, we see "prayer function as a space of retreat and recalibration in which aspects of communication and performance (such as *ethos* and agency) are 'worked out' through *practice*. Prayer is a space in which rhetoric is tested and true" (23). Through the retreat and recalibration that prayer avails, the group in Greenwood inhabits prayer to practice how to speak, act, and be. In enacting their collective identity as blending qualities of reverence and resistance, Redd and meeting participants practice these rhetorical ways of being and test them out. Through discussions of their humility and subordinate position before God, they practice reverent ways of being. Then, through petitions for God's help as they look forward, they testify to the worthiness of their struggle and their own strength and will to continue working for changes through the voter registration drive.

As the last chapter discussed, when activists turned to black power as modus operandi in the late 1960s, hymns and protest songs were cast aside. As a faithful genre, the same is true for prayer. While Redd's prayer at this 1963 Greenwood meeting occurs several years before black power was embraced, the meeting does show hints of the fractures to come. After Redd's prayer, the moderator of the meeting speaks at length, telling jokes and Bible stories to get audiences ready to sing. Toward the end of his remarks, he closes this speech by recounting a conversation he had with someone in the community: "And another one you said I tell you, you ought to tell those young folks to pray. And I say no let us old folks pray. Let those young folks fight" ("Greenwood"). This remark is brief, and he offers no context, but still, it is telling. Even in 1963, prayer's function as resistance was being called into question. As a genre associated with "old folks" on the sidelines, some activists were beginning to see the possibilities for prayer as

protest as severely limited. The moderator's words suggest that prayer as a mode of resistance may not have ever received unilateral acceptance among civil rights activists in Greenwood.

Prayer in Circulation: Street Prayers, Prayer Books, and Posters

While prayer would eventually be abandoned as a direct-action strategy in the mid to late 1960s, from the mid 1950s to the early 1960s, activists turned to prayer for public protests both strategically and spontaneously. During these years, prayer was circulated beyond the meeting through public protests or "street prayers," and in remediated texts like prayer books, posters, and news stories.[32] The circulations of prayer extended the work of mass meeting prayers, relying on prayer as an embodied posture of reverence, for instance, and enacting collective dignity both in word and gesture. In this section, I demonstrate how many of the functions important in meetings remain significant in broader more diffuse contexts, but the interactions with new audiences amp up activists' attention to how prayers can visually startle or shock tertiary audiences. In streets and other public places, civil rights prayers derived significant affective power from their overt connections to spirituality and nonviolence.

One little discussed direct-action protest centering on prayer is the 1963 Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom. This large-scale protest was very similar in design and execution to 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Like the March on Washington, the Prayer Pilgrimage was a campaign that sought to bring national attention

[32] Significantly, civil rights prayers *continue* to be remediated as the discussion of King's recently published prayers in section II of this chapter reminds us. As archival research on the civil rights movement continues, remediations of prayers will likely continue to circulate.

to civil rights issues. The Prayer Pilgrimage differed in its emphasis on prayer as the theme for protestors' march on the mall in Washington, D.C. Protestors sought to encourage the Eisenhower administration to bring federal help to desegregation efforts in the South and to bring national attention to the oppression African Americans were enduring by illustrating collectively their commitment to acting for racial justice.

Four ministers of the SCLC including Dr. King delivered a telegram to President Dwight D. Eisenhower in February 14, 1957 notifying him they were devising plans for the prayerful demonstration. They write:

> In the absence of some early and effective remedial action, we shall have no moral choice, but to lead a Pilgrimage of Prayer to Washington. If you, our President cannot come South to relieve our harassed people, we shall have to lead our people to you in the Capitol in order to call the nations' attention to the violence and organized terror directed toward man women and children who merely seek freedom . . . first class citizenship of goodwill from across the nation will undoubtedly join in such a pilgrimage for freedom and human dignity. (King et al)

In the remainder of the letter, the ministers ask the President to give a speech opposing segregation and to call a White House conference on law and order to promote "an orderly growth toward civil rights" (King et al). Earlier that year, they had asked the President to address the South, standing with them in desegregationist efforts. Since the President had not yet complied, they again requested his support, but this time, the ministers maintain that if he refuses to grant their requests, they will respond by leading a "Pilgrimage of Prayer to Washington" (King et al).

President Eisenhower did not satisfactorily answer their requests. In May of 1957, the ministers made good on their promise. In response to the Eisenhower administration's lack of cooperation, the SCLC with the NAACP held their first major demonstration on the national mall in DC, the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom. According to an article that ran in *The St. Petersburg Times*, the demonstration intended "to commemorate the third anniversary of the Supreme Court's antisegregation ruling in the school segregation cases, call for enactment of pending civil rights legislation, protest recent anti-Negro violence and terror in the South, and pay tribute to the memory of Abraham Lincoln" ("Prayer Pilgrimage"). As much a protest for the President as for the American public, this highly publicized event brought together between twenty and thirty thousand people to march together that May. Interestingly, the protest was not entirely devoted to prayer: it was a march that ended in hymns, prayers, Scripture reading, performances by gospel singer Mahalia Jackson and entertainer Harry Belafonte, and several speeches, including Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Give Us the Ballot." Through the Prayer Pilgrimage civil rights leaders attracted the attention of the press, and in so doing, they called the nations' attention to the terror and violence in the South in the aftermath of *Brown*.

By framing this public protest as a "Prayer Pilgrimage," organizers sought to cement Christian nonviolence enacted through prayer as the activist identity associated with the civil rights movement. In a memo composed by Ella Baker, Bayard Rustin, and Stanley D. Levison, they spell this idea out in the first section, "Aims and Purposes." Included under the heading "Moral and Spiritual," they write: "i) To demonstrate in action the *spiritual quality* and basis of the Negro's struggle for freedom and equality; ii.) to emphasize that the Negro's struggle for democracy is a boon to the nation, its moral

growth, and the purity of its social and political institutions; iii.) to call upon Negroes to adhere to *nonviolence* in their struggle" (188, emphases mine). As these stated purposes make clear the organizers saw prayer as a genre uniquely suited to illustrate that civil rights goals were spiritual and their strategies were nonviolent. Through the act of naming this protest The Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, SCLC and NAACP leaders made clear that the civil rights movement was a spiritual battle. In executing this protest, the title subtly reminded audiences of these points, as the image of protestors marching on the Mall and gathering to sing and listen to performances did not overtly appear like the prayers we saw in the mass meetings. National audiences then were invited by the title to question their understanding of what prayer meant and what it accomplished. Could a march be a prayer? Could a "prayer pilgrimage" create political and social change?

After the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom in 1957, activists turned to prayer again to organize large-scale direct-action protests in the early 1960s. "Pray-ins,[33]" as these protests were called, relied most overtly on prayer in their title, like the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom. The goal of these protests was to call Southern white churches' attention to the injustice of segregated worship. In strategy, these protests were carried out by groups of African American and white activists arriving at a white church on a Sunday morning and attempting to enter and worship together. Sometimes, when turned away they would respond by kneeling on the church steps; at others, they would simply leave. While other things were happening, they still called it a pray-in. In the following excerpt of a letter, King frames the strategy for the white churches they sought to integrate:

[33] Stephen Haynes notes that these protests were also sometimes called "kneel-ins" (11).

> [I]f we can't worship the same God together inside the same church buildings, then we will still knock on your door and so irritate you that you cannot worship your white God in peace, that you cannot escape thinking about the problems of segregation even on Sunday morning, that we are just letting you know that every single aspect of your Southern Way of Life is under attack. (qtd. in Haynes 16)

For King and many others, the pray-ins were thought to be one of the most important phases of the civil rights movement. By naming the protests "pray-ins," activists sought to shape how audiences understood their actions. Calling on the spiritual and nonviolent associations with prayer that the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom asserted, these protests sought to demonstrate that interracial worship was a spiritual ideal worth protesting for and called into question white Christianity if these pray-in participants were turned away (Haynes 11-13). Through protest oriented around prayer, even in name only, civil rights activists unsettled some audiences into questioning why white churches turned African Americans and their white friends away from worship services. Prayer, as a universal response to God, was the suitable means of drawing attention to the injustice of segregated worship.

The pray-ins were designed to move civil rights protests into white churches and the areas of town where they were located. In the early 1960s in particular many leaders such as King thought it important to move civil rights campaigns into *sacred spaces*. Where most previous demonstrations had taken place in civic spaces—streets, courthouses, and other public edifices—the sacred spaces of churches represented an important, and potentially persuasive, location of discrimination and oppression. As a

means of dramatizing the contradictions of segregation, the pray-in called attention to the reality that the sacred space of Christian church should be open to everyone and shared by blacks and whites, but the Southern Way of Life dictated yet another incongruity (Haynes 16).

While the Prayer Pilgrimage and the pray-ins serve as examples of how prayer was used as a theme or a spirit for protests, some campaigns centered much overtly on prayer in speech and gesture. As activists sought to demonstrate about voter registration and to call for desegregation of other civic but not sacred public spaces, such as restaurants, libraries, and swimming pools, they sometimes bowed or knelt in prayer in worship and protest (Shearer 493). These campaigns were powerful as embodied arguments that surprised and unsettled onlookers.

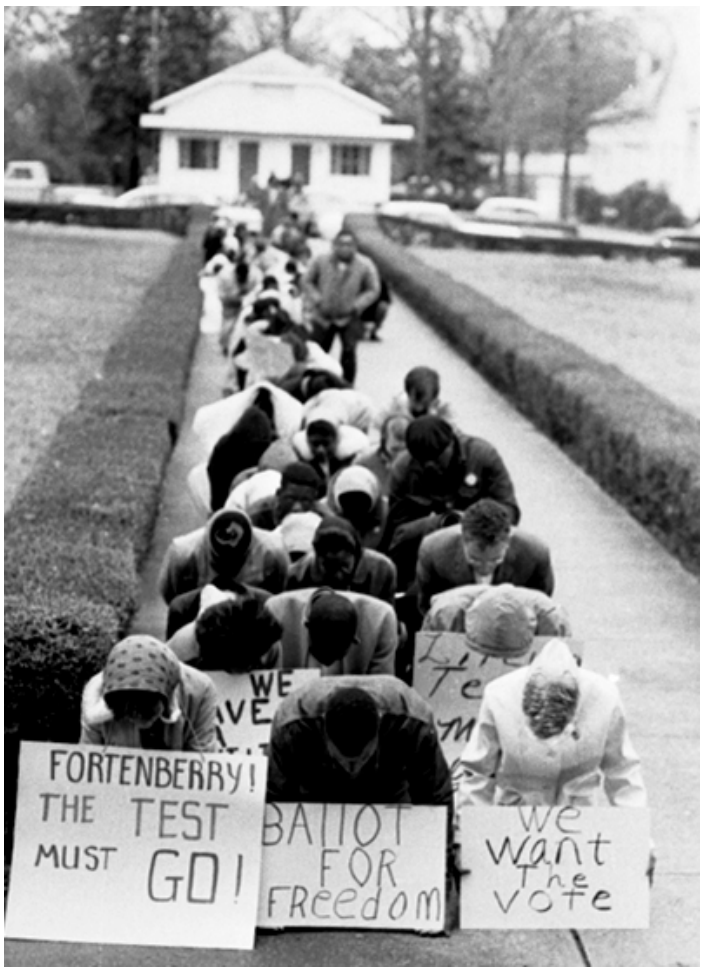

Image Credit: crmvet.org

For example, the above image depicts an embodied voting rights protest that relied on the gestural act of prayer. This one occurred in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and this time the prayerful protestors sought to communicate their desire and will for voting rights. Scholars such as Cara Finnegan, Lester Olson, Diane Hope, and others have argued that visual means of persuasion are extremely important for marginalized groups. These scholars write, "For groups with limited access to media and power, visual rhetoric has been a traditional and indispensable means of establishing agency and taking civic actions" (4), and they further note that embodiment serves as a powerful visual means of persuasion (3). Thus, in turning to prayer as an embodied means of direct-action protest,

civil rights activists capitalized on an available gestural means of communicating their desire for racial equality. As an embodied and thus visual argument for their freedom, the Hattiesburg protest shown above relied on antithesis: coupling reverence and resistance, the group employed posters with slogans demanding their right to vote against the stark contrast of their kneeling bodies and bowed heads. In so doing, they created a powerful, unsettling argument for tertiary audiences. The reverence of their bodies juxtaposed with the fervor of their demands invited onlookers to recognize African Americans' collective dignity while also viewing its connection to their will to change their city.

More broadly, street prayers such as the one carried out in Hattiesburg operate as what Sally Gearhart calls rhetorical re-sourcement. These street prayers were employed in large numbers throughout the 1960s. Historian Tobin Shearer suggests that 170 protests centering on prayer occurred between 1960 and 1970. Shearer only includes gestural or discursive prayers in this number (Shearer 493). If we include pray-ins that employed prayer in name only, then that number would be much higher. These protests served as a powerful means of rerouting oppressive, stilted rhetorical situations that silenced or stifled African American voices. In this way, these protests functioned through what Sally Gearhart calls "re-sourcement." According to Gearhart, re-sourcement entails "going to a new place" for energy and rhetorical power (95). Sonja K. Foss and Karen A. Foss explain Gearhart's theory as a two-step process for responding in an oppressive rhetorical situation (50). The first step is disengaging from an oppressive frame and the second is generating a creative response from a different frame. They write that this creative response "is designed to foster understanding, communicate that the speaker and audience are equal, and signal an interest in continuing to interact without

denigrating the other's perspective. Often, this second step involves engaging in communication that does not directly argue against or even address the message being offered. It presents a response addressed to a different exigence, need, or problem" (51). As a creative means of responding to oppression, street pray-ers sought to disengage from the public conversation that sought to deny them voting rights and their other legally sanctioned privileges and to transcend the current frame by creating a new dialogue — about how God responded to the injustices they endured. Through their gestures and silence, activists who participated in civil rights street prayers created powerful visual arguments for their freedom.

Creating another type of visual rhetoric, activists sought to make these street prayers, pray-ins, and prayer marches significant beyond their immediate context by remediating events into texts like posters and prayer books. These texts employ prayer to define freedom and to demonstrate the Christian character of the movement for black freedom. For example, capitalizing on genres such as the poster, activists circulated the powerful imagery of street prayers. Writing about the rhetorical uses of the poster Bruce Gronbeck claims that in the twentieth century posters became a powerful means of political communication (xxiii). One powerful poster was created by SNCC in 1963:

Photo by Johnny Lyons.

This poster features a photograph taken of a street prayer in Cairo, Illinois, earlier in 1963. In the photo, John Lewis and two local African Americans kneel and bow their heads. Their eyes are closed, and they rest one arm on their knee and one by their side. The caption at the bottom of the poster, "come let us build a new world together," both describes their gestures and actions and invites audience to join them. Lewis and the young man and girl took up this posture of prayer when denied entrance to the public pool. Upon their attempt to attend the public pool, white men stood in front of them, displaying a sign that read "Members Only." Leveraging the power of re-sourcement and seeking to shift the rhetorical situation toward a new exigence, Lewis along with the local

young people, turned to God in prayer. But their resistance did not just stop there. SNCC photographer Johnny Lyons captured the protest on film, and his photo became a poster that framed the protest as transcendent, reverent gestures enacted toward a "new world."

The poster argues for the dignity of SNCC activists and their goals and invites viewers to join in this work. The image emphasizes the reverent, Christian character of civil rights activists and portrays reverent bodies in extreme vulnerability: three well-dressed African Americans kneeling in a public place that sought to deny their presence. The youth of all three activists, and particularly the young girl in the center, amplifies the vulnerability portrayed through this image. Through portrayals of reverent and vulnerable black bodies, this poster invites tertiary audiences to come alongside civil rights activists and offer help to a group marginalized and oppressed by whites throughout the nation. The caption at the bottom directs viewers to associate the image with SNCC's broad goal of remaking race relationships. Through posters and other publicity texts, activists sought to circulate the visual arguments created through prayerful protests.

Besides posters, prayerful protests also circulated in memorial texts like the prayer books. For example, the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom was remediated into a prayer book titled, *The Prayer for Freedom: A Memorial of the Prayer Pilgrimage, May 17, 1957*. Published in June 1957 by Reverend Raphael Powell, the text includes a preface by Powell and a forty-five stanza prayer that recounts the story of the Pilgrimage in prayer form. In the preface, Powell describes the importance of prayer and the need for the protest. He suggests that while marching in the Prayer Pilgrimage, he observed that there was no designated prayer for the day. His text is intended to fill that gap and offer everyone who would remember the Pilgrimage an opportunity to pray, once again, for

black freedom. Powell writes, "Although this worthy occasion was described as a 'Prayer Pilgrimage,' there was no special prayer. The question, 'What prayer is to be offered for the freedom of African Americans?' rested persistently in the mind of the writer, and the answer which came by revelation was, 'THE PRAYER FOR FREEDOM!' The words of the prayer then flowed freely from inspiration" (ii). Powell then saw an opportunity for himself to employ a prayer book to an important end. His text memorialized a significant public protest, suggesting that prayer is the most appropriate way to remember the march. At the same time the memorialization builds on what Powell saw as an important omission from the protest: a prayer everyone can pray together for freedom. Thus working in this absence, Powell circulates his own prayer asking God for freedom and defining it as a Christian ideal.

This sampling of prayer protest texts, while by no means exhaustive, illuminates how prayer moved: it was enacted in streets, church steps, and public pools, and it was then remediated through image and print and reframed for new purposes and audiences. In this way, prayer circulated widely. The important functions of prayer in meetings—communion with God, reverence in attitude and gesture, and Christian nonviolence as strategy of resistance—reached new audiences for diverse purposes through marches, direct-action protests, pray-ins, posters, photographs, and prayerbooks.

Conclusion: Remembering Prayers for Black Freedom

Remediated texts like the prayer book and the photograph make clear that as far as many activists were concerned, civil rights prayers—as discourse and as image—were important means of defining and enacting freedom and the many goals that activists

associated with that term. In this way, the prayers of ministers and activists in meetings and beyond invite us to reconsider how we understand the goals of the civil rights movement. While we can easily name the legislative and sociopolitical agendas that motivated protestors—voting rights, desegregation, and economic equality—it is a much more difficult task to explain how these goals were spiritually motivated, and how this agenda, broadly understood as freedom, was religiously and spiritually understood and leveraged. Yet, as this chapter makes clear, many activists defined freedom in religious and spiritual terms, and these conceptions were not at odds with sociopolitical goals. The prayers included in this chapter prompt more investigation into this seeming incongruity.

This chapter aimed to overview the rhetorical work that happened through prayer in meetings, and then to trace this work outside the meeting and into streets and public memory. In so doing, it demonstrates how within the meeting prayer functioned as contrition to look backward in reflection, as rhetorical perseverance to look forward, and as a means of naming and defining dignity and reverence as markers of African American collective identity. Tracing prayer's rhetorical significant outside the meeting makes clear that these functions had even greater import. Particularly as a depiction of dignity and reverence, prayer visually argued for the collective character of African Americans even as they enacted resistance in public places such as streets and pool entrances. Moreover, these visual arguments circulated widely in remediated texts that emphasized the reverence and Christian character of activists and served as modes of defining and remembered freedom as an African American cause in the mid twentieth century.

Chapter 4:

Testimony: On and Off the Record

> But in the mass meetings is the place where we can stand up and say what we feel. And this is the time to do it. Can't wait until tomorrow. That's too late tomorrow. We got to do it tonight. Tonight your soul will be required in paradise.
>
> –Charles Sherrod
> Mass Meeting, January 22, 1964
> Hattiesburg, Mississippi

According to Davis Houck and Maegan Parker Brooks, Fannie Lou Hamer's earliest speech on record was delivered in the fall of 1963 at a mass meeting in Greenwood, Mississippi. In this speech, Hamer urges her audience to participate in the Mississippi Freedom Vote that I described in the last chapter. Toward this aim, Hamer leverages several strategies Houck and Brooks mark as her signature moves and themes. One of these moves is the story of a brutal beating Hamer endured on June 9, 1963, in a Mississippi jail. In the middle of her 1963 speech, Hamer turns to recalling this memory for her audience:

> [O]n the ninth of June, this year, I was beat in a jailhouse until I was hard as metal. And I told the policeman, I said, "It's going to be miserable when you have to face God." I said, "Because one day you going to pay up for the things you have done." I said, because, as the Scripture says, "Has made of one blood all nations." He said, "It's a damn lie," said, "Abraham Lincoln said that." So that's pitiful—I'm telling you the truth, but it's pitiful, you see—that people can have so much hate that will make them beat a person and don't know they doing wrong. (5)

Here, Hamer recounts the story to illuminate police brutality. She interprets her experience to explain how policemen can be so callous that they "don't know they doing wrong." For Hamer, this story, of how she endured unfathomable violence, would in many ways serve as the bedrock of her rhetorical career. Hamer builds her 1964 mass meeting speech, and indeed, what Brooks calls her vernacular rhetorical persona, on her testimony: recounting for others the brutality of whites in Mississippi and her own will to overcome it by remaking the story and circulating it widely.

Across the nation and in a range of venues, Hamer adapts this account of the violence she endured for a number of audiences and occasions. Brooks writes:

> Hamer testified about her Winona beating at mass meetings held in southern black churches across the region of the country, and she also verbally witnessed to her experiences of torture in venues as diverse as the Democratic National Convention, the halls of the US Congress, a rally in Harlem with Malcolm X, and at college campuses across the United States. Hamer offered an official testimony, moreover, to the FBI and to

> the all-white jury at the trial the Justice Department brought against her assailants (62).

Through these testimonies, Hamer participates in an African American tradition of speaking back to the state against white violence while also testifying to her human dignity through the lens of her religious faith. By telling the story, Hamer documents the violence that the state had not yet legally protected her or other African Americans against; at the same time, she participates in a longstanding religious tradition. In the religious tradition, speakers tell of their personal experiences before one another and before God—to give these experiences purpose and meaning. In this tradition, testimony enables individuals to speak out against brutality violence, as Hamer did, as well as to speak about other ordinary, everyday experiences. Rosetta Ross calls this aspect of testimony "ritualizing the mundane," a process that involves telling stories to make the everyday sacred, and therefore meaningful, in spite of, or indeed transcendent beyond, white oppression. These wide-ranging functions of testimony are important for civil rights activists because they enable individuals to speak through the genre about a wide range of experiences—from the horrific violence of white supremacists to the daily, sometimes very mundane work of organizing and working for racial justice in their towns and cities.

This chapter explores how testimony shaped and was shaped by the work of the mass meeting. Hamer was one of many civil rights activists who used the meeting as a space to testify against white violence, oppression, poverty, lack of jobs, and segregated spaces. As Bob Moses explains, "People learned to stand up and speak. . . . The meeting itself, or the meetings, became the tools. . . . People were feeling themselves out, learning

how to use words to articulate what they wanted and needed. In these meetings, they were taking the first step toward gaining control over their lives by making demands on themselves" (qtd. in 69-70). By examining the role of testimony in meetings in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and Danville, Virginia, the chapter demonstrates how the mass meeting was a crucial space where activists such as Hamer learned to speak out against white violence, and also "ritualize the mundane," create meaning and story in the midst of the ordinary, daily work of organizing. Additionally, testimony offered many people inroads to more public forms of activism. While prayer and song were powerful as collectively spoken and enacted genres, testimony shaped collective action because it fostered the speech of everyone in the group: any individual was qualified to stand up and testify in the meeting. In addition, through the audience-speaker relationship, it fostered a collective understanding of the diverse experiences of those participating in the movement. By listening in on the testimonies of others, audience members bore witness to their experience.

Following testimony outside of the meeting opens up even more lines of inquiry to explore the relationships between meeting genres and civil rights activism in the public sphere. While I contend that the mass meeting was not private, the circulation of testimony beyond the meeting offers insight how the genre was revised and remediated for new audiences. As Hamer's rhetorical career indicates, the meeting often provided the testing ground to hone and refine testimony before delivering it in other contexts, including legal ones such as the FBI and at trial. Moreover, as this chapter will show, the mass meeting provided participants with a multi-audience stage to offer them a sense of the real stakes for their protest. By considering the movement of testimony outside of the

meeting, this chapter demonstrates how other men and women like Hamer inhabited testimony to rhetorical ends. Moreover, testimony, like prayer and song, was strategically recorded for wider circulation in large-scale oral history projects and movement memoirs.

The chapter opens by defining testimony in the African American tradition. Next, it analyzes testimony's role in a mass meeting in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, where twenty activists of all ages inhabit testimony while members of the Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizens Council listen in the back of the meeting. The chapter then moves to consider mass meeting testimonies in Danville, Virginia, as a site where testimony is a heuristic for understanding movement problems. This meeting prompts questions about the role recording played in shaping the rhetorical work of participants and leaders. Like the others, this chapter closes by examining how testimony circulates beyond the mass meeting in print and aural genres.

Testimony as Faithful Genre in the African American Tradition

Scholars of rhetoric have explored the rich history of testifying and testimony in the African American rhetorical tradition, and their work provides the groundwork for the investigation I take up in this chapter. Since Geneva Smitherman's groundbreaking work in the 1970s, scholars such as Jacqueline Jones Royster, Shirley Wilson Logan, and Rhea Estelle Lathan have defined and analyzed how testimony operates as a genre of activism. Smitherman theorized testimony as an important mode of black communication. She provides important insight for defining the genre and considering the actions it enables. For Smitherman, testifying can be defined as follows:

> Testifyin, concepts referring to a ritualized form of black communication in which the speaker gives verbal witness to the efficacy, truth and power of some experience in which all blacks have shared. In the church, testifyin is engaged in on numerous symbolic occasions; newly converted ex-'sinners' testify to the church congregation the experience of being saved, for instance, or on Watch Meeting Night, New Year's Eve, when church folk gather to 'watch' the old year go out and the new one come in—they testify to the goodness of the Lord during the past year. A spontaneous expression to the church community, testifyin can be done whenever anybody feels the spirit—it don't have to be no special occasion. Like Rev. C. L. Franklin, father of Aretha Franklin, might just get up in the pulpit any Sunday morning and testify to the goodness of God. Aretha talks about the greatness for her man and how he makes feel in her well-known blues recording, Dr. Feelgood, and that's testifyin too. (58)

As Smitherman points out, testimony begins in the church: "a spontaneous expression to the church community." The church supports and enables much testimony because of its long history as a space where congregants are encouraged to tell stories. As she also observes, such testimony, while historically encouraged by the church, also takes place in broader contexts. These two key insights are important for my work here: first, the mass meeting affords activists a church-like space to speak up about their experiences—ordinary and extraordinary—in the movement for black freedom. Walking down the aisle of the church to speak up at the meeting was not so different from walking down the aisle

to confess one's sins, or to testify to "having the Spirit." In this way, the mass meeting space works as an important catalyst for the testimony of local individuals not accustomed or experienced in speaking up about racial injustice in front of audiences. Second, as Smitherman argues, testimony is not always overtly religious even as it is supported and rooted in the context of the church. Thus, while the church-like space and meeting pattern helps foster testimony as a faithful genre, the mass meeting also provides the context for individuals to deliver testimonies not closely or apparently about faith or issues of religion.

Smitherman's definition serves as the foundation from which much other work follows. In a 2015 essay, "Testimony as a Sponsor of Literacy: Bernice Robinson and the South Carolina Sea Island Citizenship Program's Literacy Activism," Rhea Estelle Lathan builds on Smitherman's work. She writes that

> a conventional understanding of testimony is to give an account of something: reporting on or explaining a situation or event that the speaker has personal knowledge of. In African American sacred or religious contexts, testimony is the retelling of an occurrence that includes visual accounts, prophetic experiences, and narratives. The storyline is usually delivered in dramatic fashion, re-creating a spiritual reality for the listener, who at the moment shared, vicariously, the experience that the person has gone through. Above all, the *purpose* of testimony is to empower by communicating valuable, life-giving, life-changing solutions. (34)

Lathan here argues for understanding testimony through both a conventional and a religious understanding, emphasizing the central purpose as describing solutions to

problems. Shifting toward a genre view, however, we might think about testimony's purposes somewhat more broadly by examining the actions of the genre. Indeed, part of the goal is to envision new possibilities for one's self; but sometimes the point is not to communicate a solution, per say, but to stand up and say, I am still alive in the face of this terror, as Hamer did over and over again. Taken together the definitions of Smitherman and Lathan show that testimony operates broadly as a mode of making meaning from black experience, rooted in the church tradition. Historians and religious scholars emphasize how what Lathan describes as the purpose of testimony, to create a life-giving solution, resists white supremacy in two significant ways: 1) it "cast(s) everyday life as sacred by asserting divine intervention in ordinary circumstances"; and 2) it attempts to make this understanding shared by creating witnesses to the traumatic or transcendent experiences (Ross; Williams). To describe the way that testimony asserts divine intervention in ordinary life, Ross employs the term "ritualize the mundane." She draws this term from womanist religious scholars. Ritualizing the mundane helps people suffering oppression to remake trying experiences into narratives that are shared, meaningful, and powerful. Put differently, testifying provides a mode for reseeing one's experience as a resource for rhetorical action as it also makes this experience shared, and thereby validated. Kidada Williams' insights underscore how for individuals who endure violence and trauma testimony provides a crucial mode of resistance. She writes:

> Testifying about racial violence was a crucial factor in African Americans' individual recovery and their collective resistance to white supremacy because whenever victims related their experiences of this violence, they

> created witnesses to their trauma. Family members, friends, and neighbors were the first people that victims made bear witness to suffering they endured or witnessed. A select few made bear witness to advantage of forums sponsored by federal officials, journalists, and civil rights organizations to report violence. (5-6)

Williams importantly notes that testimony has played a crucial role on the individual and collective level for African Americans resisting white supremacy. As she notes, people generally first turned to family members, friends, and neighbors to deliver testimonies, but others sometimes turned to other forums. In the civil rights movement, the mass meeting was one such forum. Importantly, as chapter one illustrated, it provided the combination of family members, friends, and neighbors with journalists, civil rights leaders, and sometimes less supportive people such as white police or Ku Klux Klansmen. As a context similar to the church service, the mass meeting provided the forum for individuals to inhabit testimony and testify to God and everyone present about their experiences in the movement.

From the beginning of the African American rhetorical tradition, black rhetors have inhabited testimony to the powerful, memorable, and efficacious ends described by Lathan, Smitherman, Ross, and Williams. For enslaved African Americans in eighteenth and nineteenth century, testimony forcefully spoke back to the state's legal subjection of them and denial of their humanity. The narratives of Olaudah Equiano, Mary Prince, Harriet Jacobs, and Frederick Douglass, among others, created an important counterargument through their testimony: by circulating the testimony of the violence and inhuman treatment they received as enslaved African Americans, they participated in

abolishing slavery by drawing attention to their experiences with the cruelty and injustice that permeated the institution. For instance, Logan recounts how William Lloyd Garrison often whispered, "Tell your story, Fred," as Douglass walked to the podium (qtd. in Logan 73). Logan writes that the effect of these testimonies was "in creating a *presence* of slavery" (Logan 73, emphasis in original). She argues that for Douglass as well as Sojourner Truth personal testimony coupled with enactment "becomes a major source of appeal" (73).

Besides these rhetors' testimonies against slavery, other African Americans leveraged testimonies toward resisting forms of white oppression that emerged in the aftermath of the civil war, as well arguing for women's rights and education. Many of these rhetors took to the platform to deliver their testimony. Exemplary here are Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, and Nannie Helen Burroughs. Still others wrote essays in which they drew on the significant power of testimony to create a sense of self and truth. Royster writes that

> [T]hese writers have a particular regard for testimony and bearing witness, acts that blur in provocative ways the lines between logical arguments and pathetic and ethical ones. Testimony, for example, as it credits proximate experience, sets in motion the opportunity and obligation to actually give the testimony, or as is typically phrased, to bear witness. In African American women's texts, bearing witness functions vibrantly in the creation of 'true' and honorable self. A valuing of truth, authenticity, and the genuine creates a pathway that is knowable, and it makes transformative power available for the writer and for her audiences. (67)

Royster is concerned with how testimony helps writers fashion themselves for audiences in authentic ways; such self-fashioning, she writes, provides epistemological resources for these writers as well. By focusing on testifying to an experience, African American women create an avenue for powerful truth-telling as a mode of activism.

As this overview illustrates, the African American tradition is rich and replete with examples of how testimony serves as a genre well suited for rhetorical action. This overview also points to one of the unique functions of testimony as a faithful genre—unlike freedom songs and prayers, its religious dimensions can sometimes be muted. It is a flexible genre that is rooted in and shaped by the African American religious tradition. Yet, it is not always overtly or explicitly religious. Extending and adapting this tradition, civil rights activists leveraged testimony widely, speaking back to audiences from the 1950s to today. What my work here adds to this conversation is a sense of how testimony was adapted to be deployed as *collective* rhetorical action by ordinary activists. In the mass meeting, leaders helped participants to shift from audience members in seats to activists willing to stand up and speak. This shift further affected change in the listeners: as they saw ordinary men and women, boys and girls stand up and testify, the rest of the group became more aware of the ubiquity of white oppression and the collective will to resist it through agreed upon campaigns.

Hattiesburg, Mississippi, 1964: Testifying Across Race, Age, Geography, and Gender Before the Ku Klux Klan

Mass meetings in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, demonstrate the crucial power of testimony to bring activists together, while also illuminating how the mass meeting space

raised the stakes for narrating African Americans' experiences with white oppression. To see these functions, some background on this segment of the Mississippi movement is necessary. Hattiesburg was an important site for the Council of Federated Organization (COFO)'s work in Mississippi in the early 1960s. SNCC workers viewed Hattiesburg as a key to creating change in race relations in the southern area of the state, a region where many rural counties went unaffected by civil rights gains made elsewhere. Located in the southeastern area of the state, Hattiesburg differed from Mississippi's Delta towns of Greenwood and Greenville. Where Greenwood and Greenville were marked by stark economic disparity between impoverished blacks and white plantation owners and intransigent racism, Hattiesburg blacks were far less poor, and whites' resistance much less strident. Perhaps the presence of universities such as the University of Southern Mississippi and William Carey helped combat the vitriolic racism that characterized so many other areas of the state (Dittmer).

These qualities not withstanding, Hattiesburg was far from a beacon of racial equality. In John Dittmer's words, "Still, Hattiesburg was a segregated city, and blacks suffered from lack of economic opportunity, poor schools, and inadequate city services. Above all, in denying blacks the right to vote, Forrest County circuit clerk Theron Lynd put his Delta counterparts to shame" (Dittmer 179). An investigation by the Justice Department found Lynd had allowed 0 blacks to register in his first two years as circuit clerk. Lynd was subsequently the target of several federal suits, including *United States v. Lynd* in 1962. This suit required federal courts to protect black voters from Lynd's efforts to keep them from registering (Dittmer 179-180). Such federal attention further drew SNCC organizer's attention to Mississippi's southeastern city.

In Hattiesburg, like Albany and other cities in the Southwest, organizers made major gains after securing the support of a local church. Here, it was St. John's Methodist Church. As one activist puts it, "That's really where the Hattiesburg movement started. It started for all practical purposes in St. John's Church in Palmer's Crossing" (qtd. in Dittmer 181). St. John's Church provided the institutional base as the site for mass meetings and a signal of support from local African Americans.

In January of 1964, a new wave of COFO activity took this organizing to the next level. Inspired by new federal injunctions against Lynd as well as the success of the Freedom Vote in other parts of the state, Bob Moses and Lawrence Guyot planned for a Freedom Day demonstration to call national attention to Lynd's refusal to comply with court orders. The Freedom Day was planned for January 22. This demonstration was designed to extend the voter registration efforts already taking place. The idea was that on this Freedom Day, rather than having one or two African Americans go to the courthouse to attempt to register to vote, large numbers of local blacks would march to the courthouse together and try to register. At the same time, other supporters would set up a picket line outside the courthouse to protest the unjust practices of the circuit clerk (Dittmer 219). This strategy confronted Hattiesburg whites as it also would serve as a symbol to other local blacks: "[s]uch a show of strength would 'give heart to other blacks' who were afraid to make the registration attempt alone" (220).

The Hattiesburg mass meeting that night demonstrates the significance of the mass meeting as a site for testimony to be delivered. That evening, some 250 people gathered for a rollicking evening of songs, prayers, and most notably, a lengthy period of testimony. This group included some 50 white ministers from states outside Mississippi.

COFO had invited outsiders to Hattiesburg to garner attention from the national media. At this invitation, the National Council of Churches recruited a delegation of white clergy to join the protestors. Other important civil rights leaders also joined the group from other parts of the movement. Hamer, Charles Sherrod, John Lewis, and Ella Baker all came in for Freedom Day, and thus were present and helped lead the mass meeting. During the period of testimony, 20 different people, black and white, male and female, ages 12 to elderly, stood up and delivered testimonies. Some of these rhetors took the opportunity to speak at length; others spoke for only a few minutes. They described their feelings, their hopes, their ideas, their fears; they testified to the significance of what they saw happening in their city. In so doing, they created a diverse, vibrant collective story of progress in Hattiesburg shared among many—white outsiders included.

This collective story relied on the leadership of SNCC field secretary Charles Sherrod as well as Guyot. These two provided instruction, models, and scaffolding to assign the various groups represented—African American student activists, older Hattiesburg residents, and white ministers—the moment to deliver their testimony. This instruction is key, for through it the leaders draw the diverse group together around the shared goal—continuing demonstrations in Hattiesburg—and they help them to create meaningful personal narratives that contribute to working toward that goal. In this way, Hattiesburg participants learn to see themselves as an individual participating in a large, diverse group protest. The stories develop shared affect among the entire group, as the audience witnesses to the experiences of the testifier. This affective experience is both fortifying and provocative for the testifier. In standing up and telling their experiences, they learn what it feels like to testify as direct action. For the younger crowd, their

testimony in the mass meeting is no doubt the first time they stand in front of multiple audiences and craft a narrative that effectively challenges white supremacy.

The leadership of Sherrod and Guyot defines these purposes of testimony for the crowd. Sherrod leads the group first. His instruction states that they will testify because they must "start talking together":

> Let's talk together. The only way we can be successful in this movement is to be together. And they are saying now, what we are gonna do, is let 'em demonstrate a couple of days. Let 'em get it out their system. They don't know how long we've had it in our system. It's gone take a *long* time to get it out of our system. One thing we've got to do. That is, to start talking together. How many of us live in Hattiesburg? Raise your hands. All right. Now I'm going to ask you to do something easy. Raise your hand one more time to one other question.
>
> How many of us were downtown today? Beautiful. Now take about 3 people over here, 3 people here in the back. And I guess about 2 people here. Come up, those who feel strong enough, to stand up and come up here and tell what you saw downtown today. Just tell what you saw downtown. And if you want to say anything else. Say it. If you want to say what you think we ought to do, you say it. Say what you feel. Now what we got to do, listen. I don't want no talking you know. Everybody got to listen to what *this* person gonna to say. Now can we get a volunteer from

> the first three. Who over here want to stand up and tell what you saw. Just tell what you saw.
>
> Speak up loud and clear like you ain't scared of nobody cause you want your freedom. ("Hattiesburg")

Sherrod's instructions then make testimony's purpose plain and clear: he asks for young people who witnessed the demonstration to stand up and tell what they saw. Talking together, he explains, is key for sustaining their protest over the long period of time that will be necessary to create the changes they seek. Throughout the remainder of the evening, Sherrod will help the entire crowd learn what it looks and feels like to talk together. He begins with the younger group, offering students the opportunity to stand up and speak first. This move generates energy for the rest of the evening as many student activists are eager to stand up and share.

Eight young people, including a sixth grader, stand up and explain how it felt to march downtown. They talk about being afraid at first, or even being afraid still, but seeing the protest as worth it, and exciting. Here, for instance is the sixth grader who leads off the evening, and whom the audience cheers for as "Big Boy,":

> I was in the bed this morning. Some fellows came by house. They said are you going downtown today. I said, "I don't know man. I been planning on it, but I'm scared. And, really, I was scared.

I went by the office and saw everybody getting picket signs. I said, "Where you going?" [They said] "I'm going downtown." I said, "Well, I will wait and see how many more go."

[Someone said], "Come on let' register." [I said,] "You know, I mean, sign my name and tell where I'm located before I have to go to jail or anything." He said, "Naw man, I'm fixing to go, come on let's go. So I went and registered and got my sign."

I started downtown, and I got halfway. I turn around. I came back when I got to the Dollar Box. I saw another group of people coming uptown. So I went uptown. I got uptown and I saw the cops. Cops said, "Where you going?" and I said, "To the courthouse." They said, "You can't go this way. You gotta turn around and go back." So I turned around and went back. I came up that way. The cops said "Where you going?" and I said, "To the courthouse," and They said, "You can't come this way. You gotta turn around and go back." Bob [Moses] said, "Come on, and I'll take you to the courthouse." I got to the courthouse and I saw cops standing on every corner, a lot of people marching and singing.

I joined in and I marched and sang too. I think everybody feels the same way. ("Hattiesburg")

Big Boy's testimony, full of humor and excitement, sets the tone for the testimonies of the students. The crowds offers hearty laughs as students like Big Boy recount the police's attempts to thwart their marching. The first few testimonies, like Big Boy's, tell in basic terms what their day was like. By narrating encounters with policeman, feelings of fear, and other struggles, these stories make those experiences become shared among the large group gathered together. Students like Big Boy learn that their story is meaningful and important to their friends, family members, and neighbors, as well as even ministers and leaders beyond their city.

Big Boy's testimony reveals how the "ritualizing the mundane" function of testimony, or making the daily work of demonstrating meaningful, operates in the meeting. Other students' testimonies reveal other functions as they recount other difficult experiences that encourage them to *want* to demonstrate, and they articulate the purposes they see undergirding the difficult, daily work of marching and picketing. One young woman, for example, delivers an eloquent testimony describing her view of the demonstration and her feelings about why it is important:

> Today after school I went downtown. The main reason was I wanted to see what a real demonstration was. When I got there, what I saw made me almost cry. I had been reading a book on Frederick Douglass, the father of the protest movement. I remember how he had been beat by these people. For nothing. Only because his skin was dark. This made me feel very bad. And so I said, if my friends can do it, so can I. These people are here to help me, so why don't I join in too. I wasn't permitted to go until after

> school. Even after school, I went. And to me, I saw William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, and John Brown all marching.
>
> The things that have been said to my people, my mother, she works in a white man's kitchen. This woman talked to my mother like she's just anybody. I dislike this. I work myself after school. I am trying to get an education because I really want one. . . . I want people to talk to me like I talk to them. And the only way that I think that I can ever achieve this is by joining in and trying to help my people instead of laughing and saying, "I'm kinda scared." I will be down tomorrow. I can't go down until after school, but after school, I'll be there. ("Hattiesburg")

Like Big Boy, this young woman describes her marching downtown. She extends this experience to describe why it is important to her. For this young woman, her desire for racial equality drives her will to protest. She explains to the audience what she dislikes about how whites treat and speak to her mother, and she narrates her feelings, bad and good, about the protest. In so doing, she draws the other students and even other local blacks into her experience of feeling at first curious and even a little afraid of protest, but then seeing how over time it will be key to creating the changes important to her. She astutely draws connections for the audience too with references to her reading, further dignifying the work of the marchers and picketers by comparing them to William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, and John Brown.

It is important to see the ways in which the stories of these students and the other groups of testifiers function both as collective empowerment and as direct action, for the

latter purpose is not always recognized. As Williams argues, "[B]lack people's proclaiming their traumatic experiences to family members, friends, neighbors, civil authorities, civil rights organizations, and state and federal officials represents an unappreciated form of their direct-action protests against racial violence" (6). I would add that black people's proclaiming their dissatisfaction with race relations and the status quo to these audiences and others also represents an under appreciated form of direct action. For example, the testimonies of the students Big Boy, the young lady, and a number of the students create shared protest experiences among the African Americans and other activists gathered together. At the same time, they also speak directly back to the perceptions of white supremacists listening in on the meeting, for the audience was not just composed of African Americans and other activists and supporters. In the back of the audience of this mass meeting, members of the Ku Klux Klan and White Citizen's Council sat and listened in on these testimonies.

At the beginning of the meeting, the local minister moderating the meeting refers to the presence of these groups. He briefly speaks directly to the both the members of the Klan and the Citizen's Council:

> Even the White Citizen's Council representatives that are here, YOU NEED IT. (Amen) God wants your hearts to be changed. God wants you to be converted. I have to be many of these meetings for the past few years, and I know some of you, but God knows you best. (That's right) Amen. (AMEN.)

> And to the Ku Klux Klan representatives, we are all brothers, whether you want to accept it or not. And until you realize MY BROTHER, that I am your brother, and that God is the Father of us all, you are living a false life. It's time for all of us to repent. Somewhere in this blessed book, God spoke to some of His children, "Be not as your folly." Let's paraphrase those words: Stop being slaveholders. Stop hating Negroes and Jews. Stop all of your abominable, hateful ways. And come on the Lord's side. Don't rend your clothes, but rend your hearts. Give them to God. Let God use you. ("Hattiesburg")

This minister's words represent the only moment in the meeting when the white supremacist audience is addressed directly. Here, he frames the purpose of the meeting for them, and he describes how Scripture speaks to them. In so doing, he draws this audience into the meeting and models how to speak and respond to them to his insider audience. The presence of these groups is a pointed reminder why the testimonies, as well as the songs and prayers that preceded them, constitute a significant moment of direct action. As the students, and later the older Hattiesburg residents and white ministers, stand up and "tell what they saw", they speak back directly to the forces of white oppression sitting in the room.

As direct action, these stories testify to the belief in the importance of demonstrating, and more broadly of the *need* to demonstrate. The student activists collectively asserted their support for the picketing and marching for voting rights and for changed race relations. After they leveraged this support through their testimonies, Sherrod turned to the older group of Hattiesburg residents, urging them to add their

voices to the collective story begun by the students. In this way, Sherrod orients the insider audiences toward seeing the individual stories woven together into a larger narrative that includes the experiences of everyone, from the 12-year-old to the white minister from Nebraska to the teenage girl to the elderly lady. Toward this goal, Sherrod offers another short moment of instruction and exhortation:

> Now what has been said. . . what the young people been saying is that they are ready to move. But they need the help of everybody. We all got to get into this. You see how the young people stepped up here. I didn't pull them up here, I said anybody who want to come, come on. Ain't nobody pull them up here. Plenty more people out there wanted to talk too. Plenty of them would talk. Now, what the young people, and what the old people need, now the old people are getting what the need, they need the young people to stand up and say they're ready. And you know the young people need some of us older persons live in Hattiesburg to come up and do the same thing that they been doing. To come up and say that we ready. Now we can't let our young people down. Now can we?
>
> Now I know some of you people, I heard someone over there say, that's right. Gave it a Amen. I heard a whole lot of more Amens all over. So I know you're getting ready. But get outta that seat. It's like a *conversion*. You know when the preacher stands up here and says, Whoever will let him come. And take over. Take up his burden and follow the way of the cross. This is the way of cross. (That's right) This is the way of the cross.

> And nobody can come over there and pull you out of your seat and make you walk this long mile. It's a long mile from there to here and many of you have never stood up here and talked. You think these children have ever stood up here and talked before? They could hardly stand over there in that school, in that thing they call school over there and say what they feel. Can't even stand up in Sunday school and say what they feel.
>
> But in the mass meetings is the place where we can stand up and say what we feel. And this is the time to do it. Can't wait until tomorrow. That's too late tomorrow. We got to do it tonight. Tonight your soul will be required in paradise. Tonight, you know the story, I don't have to tell you the story, you been here longer than I have. Taught me the story. The only difference is some others of us are trying to believe those stories that you taught us. ("Hattiesburg")

The impassioned Sherrod movingly compares standing up and speaking in the meeting to a conversion experience. Standing up and walking up to the podium to testify against white oppression and in support of demonstrating is like standing up and walking the aisle to become a Christian for the first time. While this comparison may seem striking, it is in fact commonplace for the time. Indeed, the language Sherrod uses here is more typical than atypical in describing movement participation; conversion logic is prevalent in discussions of race relations in the 1950s and 1960s (Hobson).

After Sherrod's instructions, 4 adult Hattiesburg residents stand up and offer testimony. One woman, for example, stands up and explains how difficult she has found

it to demonstrate because she has small children and no childcare. She closes, however, by stating that she has realized she must join the fight and not just let the young folks fight. An older man stands up and testifies to the importance of the local minister. Apparently, the minister who presides over the church attended by most of the insider audience was absent from this mass meeting and the recent demonstration. The resident laments this fact and calls for bold ministers to participate in the movement.

The longest testimony from this portion of the evening, and indeed from the entire night, is delivered by an elderly lady. She begins like everyone else by describing her experiences with demonstrating, focusing on her own attempt to register to vote. Then, she shifts into narrating her philosophy of the movement, and how she understands change to happen:

> Most of all I prayed to God last night and this morning asking him to open our hearts and help us to see ourselves and see God's word that God died for all men to be free and the only way that we will be able to see God's face, that we must fellowship here one with another. It's no divided place. It's no two heavens, and two hells. . . ("Hattiesburg")

This portion of her testimony reveals that she sees the demonstrations through the lens of her Christian perspective. By narrating her belief in a transcendent God, this woman "ritualizes the mundane" as Big Boy did. Except here, she does so through her discussion of her faith. Importantly, she also uses this discussion to provoke her audience to think about the universal aspects of the Christian faith presumably shared among many in the crowd. By explaining that heaven and hell will not be segregated, this speaker creates a powerful exhortation for her audience. If heaven and hell are not divided, it follows that

divine authority and scripture authorize the freedom they are demonstrating for; they are working to make the changes they believe are mandated by the faith they hold to. She continues to develop this line of thinking in her close, as she moves from testimony to exhortation:

> The Scripture says we must love those that despises and misuse us, no matter how hard and how tough it is, we must still love and treat them right. But what we are trying to get is rightfully ours. We are not trying to take anything that doesn't belong to us. Because God died so that we might all have freedom. ("Hattiesburg")

The shift this speaker makes at the end of her testimony, from telling her story to exhorting her audience, is important. In the nineteenth century, some abolitionist leaders such as Garrison encouraged African Americans to stick to their story—to avoid shifting from testimony to argument. As Logan notes, Garrison and Douglass eventually split over this issue; by limiting Douglass to testimony in a strict sense, Douglass felt Garrison limited his ability to deliver more effective and persuasive performances. As the passages of Sherrod's instruction as well as the above testimony indicate, SNCC leaders structured the testimony portions of the meeting loosely, offering audience members the opportunity to say anything they wanted to. The leaders made clear that the starting point was to share an experience, in this case with demonstrating, but they also left open and indeed encouraged the possibility that an audience member might stand up and shift from testimony into exhortation, as the above woman does.

After the testimonies of the local adults, Guyot returns to the podium to move the audience to a final group of testimonies, the local ministers. In his instruction, he picks up

on a thread introduced by one of the teenagers. In this young woman's testimony, she referenced that she saw many priests marching but not as many African Americans. Guyot clarifies her point, noting that by priests, she likely meant white men and was referring to the large group of white ministers visiting from out of state:

> I think everybody should talk. I would like to say I heard the remark of one of the young ladies that she was very hurt when she saw the priests, or I think what she wanted to say but didn't know quite how to handle it, was the white man fighting for the freedom of the Negro. And I'd just like to say that people fight in this human struggle for human rights. I think what we should do is listen to some of these people. I'd like for any of the ministers to at this time have anything that you would like to say. Perhaps you can select three from your group to do so. ("Hattiesburg")

Thus, like a good teacher, Guyot uses a comment of one of the student activists to highlight the importance of the white ministers' presence. This presence, he argues, shows them something important about the movement, that it is a "human struggle." Behind Guyot's remarks lies a huge controversy in SNCC. The question of how much white outsiders should participate in the Hattiesburg movement was a much-debated question, and one that would eventually lead to splintering within the organization. But for the moment, Guyot threads the young lady's comment with his own argument that it is important for have support from white ministers, and that this group should be the next and final group to testify.

Five white ministers come to the front and offer moving anecdotes of traveling very far to participate in the demonstrations. They all tell the story of how they came to

be involved with the movement, and most of them describe what a privilege it is to work with Hattiesburg African Americans, calling it an experience they will always remember. Many of them too testify about their fears in coming down to Mississippi. For instance, one white minister uses fear as a mode of structuring his testimony, building on the accounts of African Americans:

> One thing that really struck me in the remarks that were already said were when the people were telling how afraid they were to go down there. Well I want to tell you how I afraid I was. I was coming in to Hattiesburg in a car. There were four of us in the car. The closer we got to Hattiesburg, the more excuses we found to stop for a little while. In fact we decided that they were going to be waiting for us. We knew that for sure. To outsmart them we would go on the highway past Hattiesburg and come in from the South. Well we got clear of the SNCC office before we saw anyone. I think they were so busy with that inauguration that they didn't know that time that we were coming or how many of us were coming.
>
> But we weren't the only ones who were afraid, the four of us in the car and me. But all of the others of us who are here, coming in from other states were also afraid. Even though a lot of us have been picketing and demonstrating where we are. We had heard just how bad it was here. In terms of never any demonstration lasting longer than 15 minutes, usually about 3 minutes. And we came with the same feeling that we were going to have our heads used for targets for clubs. We were trying to figure out

> what is the nonviolent position you assume when a dog is coming. So we were afraid. Back in the states where we came and the churches from which we came, there were people there who were afraid there too. There are some men who were not here who wanted to come. Some men who wanted to get the backing of their church to come, and there church was afraid not only of what might happen to them, but what would it look like if they went down there and their minister wound up in jail. And so there is fear of what happens in Hattiesburg on the part of those of us who have come on the part of churches in the North.
>
> But then I heard people say, that they're not afraid now. They've been there today, and for the first time, ever in Mississippi a demonstration has gone on and has continued throughout the whole day. And it was at least that much was completed. And, therefore, I heard people say they are not afraid: there is a new person who is afraid, and it is the white citizen of Hattiesburg. ("Hattiesburg")

This minister thus uses his emotional response to demonstrating, fear, as a means of drawing together the stories of African Americans, other white ministers, and lay Christian people in the North. In an enthymematic finish, he shifts the emotional response they all share—being afraid—to the white citizen of Hattiesburg. Like the elderly lady, this minister leverages his testimony to inspire his listeners. He does not exhort as she did; rather, he uses his experience as a mode of drawing together the testimonies of the evening, and then juxtaposing them with the imagined response of those listening in the

back of the meeting and outside the church walls, the white citizen. In this way, his testimony explicitly does the work that Sherrod and Guyot have been calling for through their instructions and leadership in this time of testimony by demonstrating a collective understanding of the movement, a collectively shared experience that is powerful to create change in Hattiesburg.

Danville, Virginia, December 1963: Testimonies Off the Record

As the Hattiesburg meeting demonstrates, delivering testimony at the mass meetings was an important means of direct action. Participants spoke back to multiple audiences, sympathetic ones and hostile, narrating their experiences and emotions, and at times, using them as resources to create exhortations for their listeners. In this way, the genre afforded activists a mode of strength and of resistance at once. The Hattiesburg meeting provides a view of diverse groups of activists testifying together, and importantly, they did so in the presence of activists recording the meeting. Unafraid of who might hear, participants stood up and told their stories. This fearlessness was not always the case at mass meetings, however. In Danville, Virginia, a mass meeting in December1963 illustrates that at times, testimonies were delivered off the record. From the audio recording of the meeting, we learn the usual facts about the evening, except that when the meeting shifts to the time of testimony, activists request that the recorder be turned off. The short debate as well as the rest of the meeting illuminate two important functions of testimony at the mass meetings: 1) it took tremendous courage for activists to deliver testimonies on the record, as they did in the Hattiesburg meeting and so many other locations; 2) at times, the mass meeting had to shift toward enclosure and secrecy to

provide the security necessary for activists to offer testimonies as heuristics rather than solutions.

Before elucidating these functions at the Danville meeting, some discussion of the movement scene in Danville is necessary. It may seem unusual to think about a city in Virginia as an important civil rights scene. However, among some activists, Danville was viewed as on the equivalent of a Jackson or Selma in terms of racism and police corruption. As the SCLC's Wyatt T. Walker put it, it was "one of the worst cities I've ever visited across the South. The police brutality here is worse than Mississippi or Alabama" (qtd. in Hall). Danville was one of many small towns across the South where African Americans responded to national attention on civil rights campaigns. In historian Simon Hall's view, much of this response was generated by media portrayals of Birmingham: "In the spring of 1963, as a shocked nation watched Bull Connor unleash police dogs and high pressure hoses on Black school children in Birmingham, African Americans took to the streets across the South. The year 1963 saw more than 20,000 people arrested in more than 900 demonstrations: At least 115 cities were affected, including Danville, a tobacco and textile city situated in southern Pittsylvania County (Hall 253). While Danville had been a site for civil rights organizing before the spring of 1963, the events in Birmingham heightened Danville African Americans' perceptions of the need for direct action campaigns (Hall 253).

May 1963 marked the moment when Danville civil rights organizers moved forward with direct action protests. These protests centered on marches arguing for an end to segregation and better jobs for African Americans. Leaders of the marches included two ministers, Reverend Lawrence Campbell and A. I. Dunlap, members of the

newly formed Danville Christian Progressive Association (DCPA). An affiliate of the SCLC, the DCPA launched the campaign in late May, and by June 10 it came to end with "Bloody Monday." On what came to be known as "Bloody Monday," policeman employed fire hoses against marchers, and made 37 arrests. The day received its name from the events that followed that evening. A group of 66 activists decided to go to the jail and protest these arrests. Once the group arrived at the jail, they sang hymns as they marched outside. The Police Chief E. G. McCain came out and commanded them to stop singing. Protestors resisted his orders and continued singing. The description of what followed is best captured by the author of a SNCC pamphlet:

> Chief McCain bellowed, "Let 'em have it" and firemen turned hoses on the people, many of them women and teen-agers. Nightstick wielding police and deputized garbage collectors smashed into the group, clubbing Negroes who were bunched for safety against parked cars. Some were washed under the cars; others were clubbed after the water knocked them down. Bodies lay on the street, drenched and bloody. (Forman 328-329)

Between June and December of 1963, African Americans support for the movement in Danville waned. While there was a successful voter registration drive in the summer months, by the end of the year, support from student activists had died down considerably. The reasons are unclear, even today. It is true that Martin Luther King, Jr., offered little support for the Danville movement, and organizational tensions in the town ran high that year (Hall). However, these two factors did not always result in decreased activism in other areas.

In any case, the December mass meeting was intended to explore and overcome this decreased activist participation. Toward this goal, the meeting program included the standard features, singing and a pep talk, with a time of dedicated testimony at the end. The pep talk by the local minister, Reverend Campbell, made clear that the purpose of the meeting was to generate more support for the movement. For instance, he closed by saying, "We are first class citizens of the United States. We are still children of God. For that reason, we will not rest, nowhere in America, until black boys and girls will be able to walk with dignity through every street in every city" (Danville). These few sentences adequately capture the tone of the meeting, emphasizing the importance of continued direct action for first class citizenship.

To lead the time of testimony, Campbell turned the meeting over to Bruce Baines. Baines offers an important model of testimony for his audience. He shows them how important it is to one) testify to one's troubles as a mode of resistance; and two) narrate them toward a purpose, thus ritualizing the mundane. Baines begins with some facts about himself: while he has been absent from Danville for some time, it is his home. More importantly, his absence has been due to his activism in another Southern city, Shreveport. He describes these events in his opening:

> Freedom Fighters, core members of Danville, I am glad to be back in the city of Danville. I have called Danville my home now since the time I had left. My grandmother had broke up housekeeping Durham, so I call Danville home. I am glad to be here after being down in Shreveport, Louisiana, where I have been shot at about 4 times. I have been beaten

> down there by the policeman, and I felt very sad when Larry called me and said nothing was going on in Danville. ("Danville")

Baines opens with these facts to show his audience how testimony works: he explains his experiences with their city and with civil rights organizing. Moreover, he leverages his testimony toward testifying to the violence he experienced as a civil rights protestor working in another area. He goes on to elaborate on this point, comparing his experiences to the ones he has had working for change in Danville:

> Now we are having a hard time down in Shreveport, but the Negroes there are together and they are trying to move. Now down there you can't picket, they have all types of laws, but here we have a chance to carry on things. Now we have jobs, about 36 Negroes working down in the downtown area of Danville. Look like now the young people want to give up. And we cannot give up now. We have to keep moving. Now I am looking forward to seeing everybody tomorrow night at the mass meeting. Why? Larry is going to speak. Larry Wilson will be speaking tomorrow night. I hope you will come out and hear the young man speak. I feel bad. I feel just like crying. No more people at the church this afternoon. I feel hurt. Of all the time that we have, the friends that I have been to jail with this summer. The time that we have pulled, the days we stayed in the jail down in the Danville. The trouble we have gave Chief McCain and Mayor Stinson and other white people here in Danville. ("Danville")

Baines uses his comparisons between Danville and Shreveport as a means of motivating his listeners toward continued activist participation. He endured police brutality in

Shreveport much worse than what they have experienced in Danville, he says, but the important thing is that the people are together and attempting to create change. There is no reason, it follows, that African Americans in Danville should not also be together and working toward more changes. He also recalls the difficult circumstances he endured while he was working in Danville, illustrating that he as well as many others have provided solid ground for continued work.

After modeling how to testify to activist experiences, Baines shifts toward explaining the time of testimony. Like Sherrod and Guyot, he prompts his audience to come up and speak about their experiences with demonstrations in Danville. His instructions, however, are more pointed:

> And yet you have stopped. I want to know? I just want to know. What's wrong? I want to ask the question, what's wrong? Are we afraid? Are we turned chicken? I want to know. That's what I want to know now. ("Danville")

Baines frames the purpose of activists' speech differently from Guyot and Sherod; he employs testimony here as a heuristic for understanding movement problems. Thus, he poses questions to prompt a specific mode of activist testifying, accounts that will help to explain the lack of support. Baines' prior speech illuminates a model of testimony that narrates struggles and describes will and purpose toward overcoming them; he then prompts activists toward narrating struggles so that together, as a collective, they might discern how to overcome them. In this way, testimony functions as a heuristic for discerning issues and inventing solutions.

While we can learn about these functions of testimony through Baines' work prompting and scaffolding testimony, it is not possible to know how activists responded to him or if they learned from his model. The recorder is turned off so that audience members might come forward and speak. However, the conversation that precedes this moment is in itself illuminating, for it shows the affective burdens associated with speaking at mass meetings while they are being recorded, as well as provides insight into how recording was understood by movement activists. Here is the dialogue between Baines, an unidentified speaker, and Alan Ribback, the recorder:

> *Unidentified speaker*: I'd like to say Reverend, since our friend is recording, I think maybe our complaints should be when he's not recording.
>
> *Baines*: No I think they should be. See a lot of this stuff is going to be used for a book.
>
> *Unidentified speaker*: I think before we can put Danville in the spot like this we should get permission from the executive board of the community.
>
> *Baines*: See it's going to be about 5 to 10 years before it comes out.
>
> *Unidentified Speaker*: I still think we are really probing deep into the community here. I don't think we are in the position to speak for this entire community.

Alan Ribback (Moses Moon): I'll cut it off. ("Danville")

This conversation illustrates that activists saw the recorder as a hindrance to testimony as heuristic, the type of testifying that might viewed as complaining. For the local Danville activists, many of them students, the affective burden of providing testimony that might circulate was too great; they felt it would inhibit their ability to speak freely and productively, especially as their accounts would presumably *not* testify toward solutions they could recognize or movement progress. In this way, in order to fashion true, authentic selves before the mass meeting group, they felt that the safety and seclusion of a more "hushed" harbor would be productive. As a heuristic, then, we might say that testimonies are more productively induced off the record, out of view from the public, who so depended on hearing testimonies more in line with those delivered by Hattiesburg resident. Stories of progress, of movement victories, of overcoming—these are the testimonies that activists delivered out in the open and for wide circulation for they are the ones that generated greater movement support.

The Danville meeting then illustrates another important function of testimony at the mass meeting, as a heuristic for exploring movement problems. At the same time, it complicates our view of the activist space of the meeting, reminding us that at times the meeting did go off the record and out of view. These moments, as this meeting illuminates, are purposeful and strategic, as in this case, Ribback intervenes in the debate about the purpose of recording and who can speak for the community to simply say: "I'll turn it off" ("Hattiesburg").

On the Record: Testimony in Circulation through Memoirs and Oral Histories

The Danville meeting illustrates the affective burden associated with delivering testimony during the movement for black freedom. It serves as a reminder of how difficult it could be to stand up and speak, as so many did in mass meetings held across the South. Recorded or not, the testimonies of the activists at mass meetings provided a significant mode of resistance and strength through collectively told stories.

As established in the introduction to this chapter, testimony was not only leveraged within the mass meeting; indeed it was important in other contexts in the civil rights movement. While Hamer delivered her testimony orally in a range of contexts and for a range of audiences, still other activists sought to creatively record and at times remediate their testimonies for wider circulation. Some of these testimonies may have been delivered in mass meetings first; others perhaps not. Whatever the connection between individuals' performance in meetings and the testimonies they delivered elsewhere, many activists learned about the genre of testimony from their participation in mass meetings, and testimonies delivered in other contexts continue to illuminate the rhetorical work of the genre. These activist testimonies pick up on the threads seen in the Hattiesburg and Danville meetings: they continue to narrate movement victories; they continue to leverage a collective story of changed race relations; they at times use the language of conversion to describe entrance into movement participation; indeed, they "make" history, to use David Holmes phrase. Two types of texts do this work: civil rights memoirs and oral history projects. What these texts reveal is that testimony was remediated to function as a mode for arguing the movement was made up of scores of ordinary, diverse individuals.

Civil Rights Memoirs

Scholars such as Keith Miller and bell hooks have called attention to the lack of scholarly treatment of civil rights memoirs. As Miller points out, the lack of attention given to memoirs of the period, broadly conceived, is puzzling given the scholarly commitment to autobiographical writing in other eras. He writes:

> [L]iterary critics and rhetorical scholars should address the extremely valuable autobiographies and memoirs of those involved in civil rights and Black Power protests of the 1950s and 1960s. By my count, activists and others have produced at least 70 first-hand accounts. Many literary critics have wisely researched and taught American slave narratives. But apart from attending to works by Maya Angelou and a few others, they have generally and foolishly ignored subsequent African American political autobiographies and memoirs, especially those written during the past 40 years. This bias against recent literature is illogical and unjustified, because many of these works deserve careful critical scrutiny and deserve to be taught. (179)

As Miller rightly notes, the memoirs composed by activists are important texts in their own right. The task he calls for to be sure is an important one, yet it is also a daunting one given the sheer number of activist texts, a number that continues to grow even now as activists continue to public accounts. Historians suggest the number is closer to 200 (Hall; Nasstrom).

In order to even begin to think about how to analyze these memoirs, it is useful to categorize them and to try to see them in the groups that activists themselves devised as a

means of coordinating action. Here, for instance, we might think about the groups of testimonies that Sherrod and Guyot called for in the mass meeting: student activists, local activists, and Northern white supporters. For example, student activists such as Endesha Ida Mae Holland, John Lewis, and Diane Nash have composed and published memoirs. Local activists refers to men and women such as Peter Honigsberg and Douglas L. Connor. Northern supporters too write memoirs. Examples here include Tom Hayden and Mary King. To these groups we can add the group to which Sherrod and Guyot belong, movement leadership. Numerous leaders have written memoirs; for instance, James Meredith and Ralph Abernathy. Two other groups wrote memoirs as well: whites who "convert" to the movement such as Sarah Patton Boyle and Wendell Berry, and journalists who watched from the insider perspective such as Pat Watters and David Halberstam.

Taken together, these texts provide a rich portrayal of movement activism. Individually, they provide representations of the various groups and perspectives that came together to work for racial change. At the same time, collectively these texts participate in the project of creating public memories of the movement as a nonviolent, diverse collective national campaign for justice. Historian Kathryn Nasstrom writes about civil rights memoirs and public memory, arguing that these texts seek to revise and recapitulate grand narratives of the movement. She writes,

> Civil rights autobiography, with all its particularity and partiality, will always tell us more about individual experiences, but it also opens a window on collective experience and meaning through its dialogue with history. Civil rights history expands with each new autobiography, as each

> memoirist puts forward new memories and interpretations, but it also contracts with the weight of history, as each writer acknowledges the ways autobiography is implicated in, even limited by, other histories of the movement. The weight of the existing narratives acts as a stay on what might be recovered from memory, but it also establishes a common ground for discussion. As each autobiography circles back over that ground, what results is both recapitulation and revision, a telling of new stories and in them a revised telling of familiar stories. When civil rights autobiographers acknowledge their indebtedness to existing narratives, they remain anchored in a dialogue about what the civil rights movement was then and what it means now. (362)

Nasstrom's project is to define the relationship between civil rights history, her field, and the autobiographies of civil rights activists, many of whom reject scholarly histories of the movement even as they depend upon them to compose their texts. For Nasstrom, this paradox leads her to the conclusion excerpted above, that civil rights activists and historians operate dialogically, working together toward a revision of the grand civil rights narrative that stalls continued change and ignores the hundreds of activists who worked together to make the gains they did.

As this overview should indicate, civil rights memoirs as testimony are rhetorically savvy in ways that *continue* to be important. Building on the work of Nasstrom, rhetorical scholars should examine the strategies that activists leverage toward revising public memory and resisting the grand narrative established by conservatives in

the 1980s. Such analysis is important, for as it illuminates how these narratives are arguing it might also attend to the erasures that make them necessary in the first place.

Oral History Projects

While some activists composed (and are still composing) memoirs, others still created (and are creating) oral history projects. Here I am thinking of oral history broadly, as "a systematic attempt to enlist people with first-hand knowledge of special historical developments and experiences into recording their memories. Oral history is spoken history, subject to all the biases and vagaries inherent in human recall; yet it is not substantially different from other historical sources (diaries, correspondence, official documents, newspapers, photographs, etc.)" (Reti).

The oral history projects of civil rights activists and supporters illuminate an activist role similar to the one explored in the music chapter, that of music recorder. Here, though, the texts activists created center on testimonies, individual accounts as told by activists. By taking up the role of testimony recorder, many whites from outside the South found an inroads to civil rights activism as they also opened up new pathways for African Americans' testimonies to circulate.

So who produced oral history projects centering on testimony? Significantly, these projects were taken up by a wide range of white activists—including students at Stanford, a musician named Alan Ribback (later Moses Moon), and the writer Robert Penn Warren. The Stanford students, a group of eight undergraduates worked collaboratively in the summer of 1965. In collaboration with KZSU radio and the Institute of History, these students traveled to the South to produce an oral history ostensibly for broadcast purposes. This group was ambitious and thorough: the students

traveled to six southern states and collected 330 hours or material—nearly 200 hours are personal interviews. Through their interviews, the students provided activists like Guyot, Victoria Gray, Johnnie Mae Walker, and many others with a means of delivering testimony for broader circulation.

Ribback, now Moon, also sought to capture and record the testimonies of activists as well as mass meetings; he is the recorder featured in the Danville meeting. After a stint owning The Gate of Horn, a music and comedy club, in Chicago. He joined the civil rights movement in 1963, and his recording project spanned two years, 1963 and 1964. During these years, he created one hundred and forty-four audiotapes of movement recordings; much of this material includes activists' testimonies. By joining the movement in this sustained way, Moon created one of the largest collections of civil rights material available today, as he also generated material used to circulate activist testimonies in sustained ways. During the movement, some of his recordings circulated in movement albums.

Writer Robert Penn Warren too took up a reel-to-reel recorder and moved around the South in the sixties. His recordings are from early 1964, when he traveled recording interviews with a wide range of activists. He sought to record testimonies of widely recognized figures as well as other "ordinary activists," whose names might otherwise be forgotten. From his recordings, he composed a book, *Who Speaks for the Negro* circulating these activists' accounts. He describe the book as a "transcript of conversation":

> I have written this book because I wanted to find out something, first hand, about the people, some of them anyway, who are making the Negro

> Revolution what it is—one of the dramatic events of the American Story. This book is not a history, a sociological analysis, an anthropological study, or a Who's Who of the Negro Revolution. It is a record of my attempt to find out what I could find out. It is primarily a transcript of conversation, with settings and commentaries" (Warren).

As this passage illustrates, Warren sought to preserve the accounts of activists making the civil rights movement. It is a "record" for the public to see.

Like the memoirs, these oral history projects are still being leveraged toward creating public memories of the movement. Scholars at Vanderbilt University recently generated a digital archive from Warren's oral history work, leveraging it to contemporary audiences. Moreover, scholars such as Jacquelyn Dowd Hall at UNC Chapel Hill continue to create oral histories, and as they do, make them available online in digital archives. Two examples here are the Civil Rights Documentation Project at the University of Southern Mississippi and the Civil Rights Movement as Theological Drama at the University of Virginia.

While these texts—the memoirs and the oral history projects—function in unique ways as individual texts, taken together they illustrate how testimony continues to circulate as a genre that emphasizes the many different individuals who comprised the activists' base and the significance of this diverse collective for carrying out movement work. One particularly interesting argument that these texts make collectively is that the movement was really carried out over the entire United States: people from California to Illinois to Mississippi worked together as activists, even as one of activist roles

individuals from outside the South took up was recording and preserving the testimonies of local Southerners.

Conclusion: Testimony as Faithful Genre

Testimony, like prayer and song, was adapted in mass meetings to function as resistance to white supremacists' hold on the status quo. By standing up and speaking before large audiences, men and women, girls and boys, delivered testimony as direct action and spoke about their experiences. At times, these testimonies spoke more softly and to smaller audiences, as meeting organizers revised the mass meeting's purpose to enable a safer, more exclusive space for testimonies that could serve as heuristics. Testimony enabled wide, collective participation, and it functioned to foster activists' telling of many different types of experiences—from difficult experiences of abuse to more light-hearted stories of their movement participation.

As a faithful genre, testimony is quite unique. Unlike song and prayer, it can be decoupled from its religious dimensions. It persists through the contextual shifts that occur during the Black Power phase of civil rights efforts. As far as I have been able to tell, testimony does not receive the same type of criticism and interrogation from activists that prayer and song do. While song and prayer come to be questioned by many activists, testimony remains consistently useful for movement participants. Perhaps this quality of the genre emerges in part from its backward-looking function: where song and prayer *become* sites of memory more and more after they are delegitimized as modes of action, testimony is always and already a site of memory. Where song and prayer shift toward this type of use, testimony functions in this way during the movement as a mode for

remembering what activists have experienced. In any case, testimony is unique in its fluid movements from the church to new contexts and its capacity to be severed from its religious dimensions.

Conclusion:

Tracing the Genres of the Civil Rights Mass Meeting

> . . . I had to leave the [mass] meeting and rush to the other side of town to speak at a YMCA banquet. As I drove away my heart was full. I had never seen such enthusiasm for freedom. And yet this enthusiasm was tempered by amazing self-discipline. The unity of purpose and *esprit de corps* of these people had been indescribably moving. No historian would ever be able fully to describe this meeting and no sociologist would ever be able to interpret it adequately. –Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom*

Broadly speaking, "Faithful Genres" has worked to illuminate the rhetorical significance of the civil rights mass meeting. Taken together, the chapters on song, prayer, and testimony demonstrate that these meetings functioned not only through the individual performances of well-known leaders but also through the collective enactment of these other religious genres. Through the interwoven genres, meetings depended upon the participation of everyone who attended: to attend the meeting was to enact its genres.

By requiring this participation, the meeting invited the audience to become activists—to sing, to pray, and to testify. These meeting genres thus invited meeting participants to become a certain *kind* of activist, a Christian, nonviolent activist who sang, prayed, and testified toward desegregation, voting rights, and racial justice.

As I have argued throughout, enacting song, prayer, and testimony provided those gathered with a rhetorical mode for constituting their activism within the meetings. Through songs such as "Onward, Christian Soldiers," "Michael Row the Boat Ashore," and "Ballad of Medgar Evers," people engendered their collective identities as activists and created the exigency for their work in boycotts, sit-ins, and voter registration campaigns. Prayers provided a transcendent constitutive moment for activists in Americus, Georgia; Selma, Alabama; and Greenwood, Mississippi. By speaking with God, these collectives engendered divine authority for the work they were taking up and further created their identity as a Christian activist movement. Testimony, somewhat differently, created individual rhetorical identities within collectives in Hattiesburg, Mississippi and Danville, Virginia, and it further provided these individual speakers with opportunities to engender new exigencies for the movement.

Besides these constitutive functions, song, prayer, and testimony operated persuasively as well. The freedom songs helped activists in Montgomery secure a nonviolent ethos for the nascent movement, and the continued expansion of the freedom song genre helped depict the movement as a diverse nonviolent collective. Prayer was instrumental as a deliberative genre: it enabled activists in Greenwood a mode to look forward together to the impending protest and to plan to walk with courage, dignity, and purpose. Testimony too served persuasive ends, as individuals in Hattiesburg sought to

convince one another of the significance of the experiences they shared marching to the courthouse, and to exhort one another toward further activism.

In taking up these faithful genres toward civil rights purposes, individuals and groups *transformed* the genres for their work. These changes, as we have seen, were both subtle and strategic. Hymns, gospel songs, and spirituals were recontextualized and revised to function as freedom songs. Song leaders and song writers such as Guy Carawan and Matthew Jones further expanded the freedom song genre to include unfamiliar, sometimes secular songs and songs written especially for the movement while keeping the religious experience of congregational singing at the heart of the genre. Prayer became a site within mass meetings in Americus to reflect on why the protest failed and spur further action. Testimony, too, was revised through the mass meeting's engagement with varied audiences: in meetings that included white segregationists and recorders of movement activists, it functioned in double and triple-voiced tones, and in meetings that denied the presence of these other audiences, it served as a heuristic for moving forward when activists struggled with feelings of shame or fear, or became fatigued.

In detailing the rhetorical functions of meeting genres and the ways they were revised, "Faithful Genres" suggests that this significant and recurring rhetorical event, the mass meeting, provides clues to thinking about civil rhetorics more broadly. The circulation of song, prayer, and testimony, beyond the civil rights mass meeting indicates meeting participants took the religious genres from the meeting outside into new contexts, and in so doing, they revised them further. The mass meeting was a performative space and a practice space. It *did* things for the people at the moment of the

meetings, but it was also a practice space that prepared people for the activist work they would take up after meetings were over. The expectation was that these genres would travel outside the walls of the meeting's churches and be leveraged by activists in other contexts. In this way it prepared individuals to take up the actions they enacted within it elsewhere. Each genre, in different ways, functioned as a frame for collective participation in direct action protest outside the mass meeting space: freedom songs were sung at marches, on buses, in jail cells, at sit-ins, and elsewhere; silent gestural prayers were leveraged as embodied campaigns against desegregation; and testimonies enabled individuals to speak briefly about their experiences at televised events like the March on Washington. These circulations of the genres as direct-action protest provide a broad view of how the mass meeting, in some ways, serves as a synecdoche for civil rights rhetoric.

Thus, as a project that shifts the view within the mass meeting from individual speakers to the rhetorical work of collectives of everyday activists, "Faithful Genres" also points to the ways the collectively enacted genres of prayer, song, and testimony functioned in civil rights rhetoric more broadly. This diffuse enactment of these religious genres in new contexts and for other audiences deserves much more attention that I have been able to give it here. Future studies should investigate the ways that these genres were revised further as activists leveraged them for audiences beyond the meeting.

The mass meeting is not the only movement tool that might provide clues to thinking more broadly about how movement rhetoric worked and "moved." Indeed, many other events remain to be studied along these lines. For instance, the rhetorics of sit-ins, or marches might be examined across locales as a way to consider how various protest

tools function recursively and develop over time. The Nashville sit-ins, for example, might be examined alongside the sit-in campaign taken up in Greensboro, North Carolina. Civil rights marches were carried out repeatedly in different locales, and these campaigns too might be studied to see how the rhetorical strategies for carrying them out shifted and changed in different locales. While some work has been done thinking about movement ecologies (Rivers and Weber), the approach taken up in this project points to the usefulness of examining movement tools and events in this way.[34]

Life Cycles of Faithful Genres

At the close of the chapters on song, prayer, and testimony, as I take up questions of how the genres circulate beyond the mass meeting, I consider how the contextual shifts that occurred in the Black Power movement disturb the efficacy of these faithful genres. I contend that as black nationalism, separatism, and power came to be embraced by many who formerly operated under interracial love and unity, two of the faithful genres studied here, song and prayer, were largely abandoned as sites for collective action. As we have seen, freedom songs and prayers diminished in their protest use as leaders such as Stokely Carmichael and Julius Lester argued that these modes connoted love and Christianity, terms that no longer resonated with activists working in the Black Power moment. These genres became closely associated with ideologies of the "Beloved Community," so much so that when the goals of activists shifted, song and prayer could not be revised further for campaigns.

[34] This scholarship might build on feminist studies of marches in the context of the early twentieth century (Borda).

Testimony persisted and continued to circulate throughout the shifts of the mid and late 1960s. It was not interrogated in the same ways that song and prayer are. It remained useful to civil rights activists even as the context shifted and new ideologies became influential. In the 1970s, for example, activists performed their testimonies for interviewers, such as Jack Bass. In the 1980s and 1990s, they continued delivering oral testimonies about their experiences and many such as John Lewis and Ralph Abernathy turned to composing memoirs. As I mention in the conclusion to chapter 4, the persistence of testimony suggests that, unlike song and prayer, users were able to sever it from its connections to the church and ideas of Christian nonviolence. Indeed, some oral testimonies and civil rights memoirs are not overtly religious or spiritual but turn instead to emphasize the violence of white aggressors.

Future studies focusing on religious rhetorics might further investigate the questions raised by the persistence of testimony as a site of activism on the one hand and the dissipation of song and prayer as modes of protest on the other. What was the rhetorical process for delegitimizing a genre as a site of protest? What part did secularization play in moves away from these genres? What do these debates about the purposes of song, prayer, and testimony tell us about the relationship between religious rhetorics and activism in the context of the mid twentieth century? Such studies might offer more insight into the boundaries of religious genres. They might explore too how secularization narratives are troubled through historical analysis of religious genres.

Another site for future analysis is the relationship between gender, genre, and civil rights participation. In turning toward ideas of Black Power and away from religious genres, activists like Julius Lester and Stokely Carmichael opened up new types of

participation and they closed off others. Singing and praying in the Christian nonviolent phase of the movement, as I have illustrated, offered women inroads for participation; they could act as song leaders or prayer leaders, and they were expected to sing and pray along with these genres. The turn to Black Power and away from these religious genres, it would seem, may have served to create barriers to women's participation, and the rhetorical strategies women developed to negotiate these boundaries and support their activism should be recovered and studied.

Civil Right Mass Meetings, From the Ground Up

In her introduction to *A Voice That Could Stir an Army*, Maegan Parker Brooks describes the "bottom-up approach" to civil rights history that informs her investigation of the rhetorical life and legacy of Fannie Lou Hamer. This approach emerged from historians' critique of the master-narrative of "The Civil Rights Movement" that followed a series of triumphs and losses in the life of one leader, Martin Luther King, Jr. (Crosby, Hogan). It works to take a long view temporally, in both directions, as well as focus on local movements and ordinary people. As Brooks writes:

> The bottom-up orientation . . . decenters the emphasis on pulpit-driven mass mobilizations, marked by grand orations, legislative victories, and Supreme Court decisions, considering, instead, the widespread organizing tradition in places like the American South. Community studies that investigate the organizing tradition, furthermore, feature local leaders—ordinary people, oftentimes women, empowered to discover and articulate

> solutions to their problems by radically democratic organizations like SNCC. (6)

Recent studies in civil rights rhetorics have moved along these lines, including the work of Brooks, Davis Houck and David Dixon, Nathaniel Rivers and Ryan Weber, and Stephen Schneider. Another tenant of the "bottom up" approach to civil rights history is emphasis on local conflicts. My project has extended this conversation by considering how a bottom-up orientation shapes what *genres* we study. In looking "beyond the pulpit," to call on Lisa Shaver's insightful phrase, I have turned toward the genres most useful to the ordinary people working in various local movements. This approach has provided a nuanced, localized view of the frames for participation activists found most useful for their work.

Throughout this project, I have described how song, prayer, and testimony served as modes of Christian nonviolent action and protest. The project helps show how even though the movement never entirely cohered around nonviolence as an ideology and way of life, large groups of activists still enacted Christian nonviolence, and religious genres were rhetorical modes for doing so. By singing "Onward Christian Soldiers," for example, African Americans in Montgomery enacted a spiritual protest strategy in a spiritual battle. While I do show how the genres of song, prayer, and testimony were widely and repeatedly enacted, and how these repeated actions served to help the civil rights movement be viewed as a nonviolent movement, we can also see how local conflicts trouble a wholly nonviolent conception of civil rights activity. Historians such as Wesley Hogan and Emily Crosby emphasize that the civil rights movement was never entirely nonviolent. As the debate about who should be doing the praying in Greenwood,

Mississippi illustrated, song, prayer, and testimony were not leveraged unilaterally or without question. While I have noted debates and moments such as this one in Greenwood, future studies might further pursue investigations into the rhetorical debates that occurred over nonviolence as a movement philosophy and the strategies activists developed for supporting and upholding Christian nonviolence within the 1950s and 1960s phase of movement activity.

The Activist 1960s: Comparative Analyses

The phase of African American civil rights activity that I study in this project, taking shape in the 1950s and ending in the mid to late 1960s, emerged alongside other protests against racial injustice and spurred on civil rights activity for other groups. The Chicano movement, for example, was a nationwide campaign for the rights of Mexican Americans in the 1960s that developed alongside the latter phase of civil rights campaigns. And toward the end of the 1960s, many activists shifted from working toward African American civil rights to anti-war efforts, feminism, LGBTQ issues, or disability rights. The interanimation between the rhetorical strategies and genres of these diverse movements deserves attention and careful study. As Randy Ontiveros writes, "Traditional historical narratives draw neat boundaries around the diverse social movements of the postwar era, treating their origins, participants, and goals as distinct from each other" (16). Comparative rhetorical analyses might consider how protest tools—mass meetings or marches—are wielded differently or how particular goals and strategies are shared among varied groups.

An additional fruitful comparative study Ontiveros points toward is one centered on the music of social movements. As he puts it, "Listening carefully to the music of the

Chicano movement can help broaden public understanding of the links between various social movements of the 1960s at a time when this broadening is badly needed" (16). While my work in this project was to trace song's protest work in the African American rhetorical tradition into civil rights activity in the 1950s and 1960s, a comparative approach would enable scholars to investigate the genre's work among movements happening concurrently and in different regions of the United States. This type of tracing might follow the circulation of other genres shared between movements to consider why particular genres are well-suited to activism even across at times wide variation of purpose and geographic context.

Beyond thinking about genres and protest tools, comparative analyses might explore how individual rhetors worked together across movements and to what ends. This type of study might explore how the leadership of multiple leaders working at the same time in different movements or consider the rhetorical exchanges between and among individuals working toward different activist goals. Another productive direction of investigation would be to follow activists from one movement to another: for example, to examine how a civil rights activist such as Bernice Reagon shifts her activism from African American freedom to feminist work or how an activist like Charles Sherrod continues to pursue community organizing work in the South even amidst the changes and fractures that occur with SNCC.

Faithful Genres in the Twenty-First Century

To close, I turn briefly to the question of faithful genres circulation in the twenty-first century context. In June of 2015, while I was writing the chapter on prayer in mass

meetings, Charleston, South Carolina, became a topic of national conversation. On June 17, 2015, a white gunman entered a prayer service at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in downtown Charleston. The gunman, Dylann Roof, shot and killed nine African American people, including the pastor of the church, Clementa C. Pinckney. According to the words of the shooter, he was motivated by racial hate and his intent was to start a "race war." Along with a 1991 shooting at a temple in Arizona, this tragedy is now remembered as the largest mass shooting carried out in a place of worship in United States history (Bailey).

Numerous commentators on the incident remarked upon the significance of the location: as a white supremacist intent on destroying the African American community, Roof targeted one of their churches (Appelbaum, Green). Indeed, his target has been a fixture for Charleston African Americans for centuries. Emanuel AME is one of the oldest African American churches in the Southern United States. Founded in the early nineteenth century, it has played a key role in supporting black political activism throughout its history. Douglas Egerton writes about how a free black man and founding member of the church, Denmark Vesey, planned a slave revolt in 1822. The church was closed three times around this time, 1818, 1819, and 1820, and then after Vesey and others were caught and tried for their plans for the revolt, the church was burned down (Egerton). In 1865, it was rebuilt, and Vesey's son, Robert Vesey, Sr., created the design for it. Throughout Reconstruction, Emanuel AME remained important for Charleston, as so many African American churches were for black people in the United States and especially the South. It later served as the site for civil rights organizing: a march

emerged from the church in 1969 (Applebaum). There is reason to think it may have been a locale for civil rights mass meetings in the 1950s and 1960s.

The 2015 response to the violence against members of "Mother Emanuel," as congregants call the church, reveals a telling moment when faithful genres circulated as a mode for addressing racial injustice. In his eulogy of Pinckney, President Barack Obama turned to the genre of hymn. To close, he sang, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now I'm found; was blind but now I see" (Obama). He then went on to use the hymn as the linchpin of his conclusion:

> Clementa Pinckney found that grace.
>
> Cynthia Hurd found that grace.
>
> Susie Jackson found that grace.
>
> Ethel Lance found that grace.
>
> DePayne Middleton-Doctor found that grace.
>
> Tywanza Sanders found that grace.
>
> Daniel L. Simmons, Sr. found that grace.
>
> Sharonda Coleman-Singleton found that grace.
>
> Myra Thompson found that grace.
>
> Through the example of their lives, they've now passed it on to us. May we find ourselves worthy of that precious and extraordinary gift, as long as our lives endure. May grace now lead them home. May God continue to shed His grace on the United States of America. (Obama)

President Obama turned to a faithful genre to support the work of his eulogy, the hymn. His hybrid speech responded to the heinous crime of Roof and the racial injustice carried out against Pinckey, Hurd, Jackson, Lance, Middleton-Doctor, Sanders, Simmons, Coleman-Singleton, and Thompson. This 2015 moment in Charleston points to the

enduring rhetorical power of the genre of hymn as a mode for addressing white supremacists' violence. Fittingly, President Obama turned to the language and resources of the church to respond to a tragedy carried out inside it. Like Matthew Jones in Jackson, Mississippi, President Obama thinks of song as a mode for grieving murders at the hands of racial hate. This example is not the only one: throughout Charleston and in other locales, individuals met in prayer meetings and church services to show support for the Mother Emanuel congregation.

President Obama's response to the racial injustice carried out in Charleston occurred in a moment when a larger, collective campaign, Black Lives Matter, was also responding to racial injustice and aggression. To my knowledge, Black Lives Matter is the largest activist collective campaign that has been employed toward justice for African Americans in the early decades of the twenty-first century. This campaign relies most visibly on digital technologies, visual rhetorics, and embodiment. The movement represented by Black Lives Matter extends earlier black freedom movements; yet its strategies and goals are also unique to this twenty-first century strand of activism. The Black Lives Matter website reveals this continuity as well as the shifts that make it unique. Centered on the "About" page are the words of Diane Nash: "Freedom, by definition, is people realizing that they are their own leaders" ("About"). Black Lives Matter, thus, seeks to extend earlier the movement through its emphasis on freedom as a key term, its reliance on collectivity, and its circulation of important leaders from the earlier moment.

The differences, however, are more apparent than the similarities. Three differences stand out: First, this movement began online as the hashtag

#BlackLivesMatter, and the online platform of Twitter was key to bringing collectives together around this affordance. Rather than gathering to sing in a church at a mass meeting, activists tweeted from computers, tablets, and phones across the country ("Herstory"). Second, as the "Herstory" page illustrates, the most visible leaders are three women: Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors. These women created Black Lives Matter in response to police brutality against Trayvon Martin and the failure of the jury to find the policeman who shot and killed Martin guilty ("Herstory"). Third, as the "Guiding Principles" page makes clear, the movement seeks to be queer and transgender affirming; on this point, Black Lives Matter brings together earlier strands of activist work toward African American freedom ("Guiding").

While on the surface Black Lives Matter might seem to suggest that the resurgence of faithful genres seen in Charleston is an anomaly, in fact Black Lives Matter also spurs on the circulation of religious genres. Individuals within the movement turn to song, prayer, and testimony to participate in this activist moment as well. For example, in the memory of Mike Brown, a rabbi in California, Rabbi Menacham, composed a prayer that repeats the phrase, Black Lives Matter. It begins:

> Dearest God,
>
> We stand before you because we must.
>
> We stand before You because
>
> truths that should be self-evident
>
> are not so evident in our country. . . .
>
> We call to you in defiance of
>
> of a national system that betrays our noble ideals,

where tanks and blood fill our streets,

where every Black man, woman, and child is

twenty times likelier to be killed by police.

We shout to the Heavens with one, unified voice:

Black. Lives. Matter. ("Black Lives")

Rabbi Menachem's prayer is one of many composed to respond with Black Lives Matter protestors. Menachem delivered it at a Pilgrimage of Lament in Berkeley, California in December 2014, an event that calls to mind the 1957 Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom. In Minneapolis, Minnesota, in November of 2015, Black Lives Matter activists gathered at a prayer service. A participant in this group, Matt Kramer, tweeted: "At #BlackLivesMatter prayer service. @nlevy: We have enough people here to change the world" ("At"). Calling on digital affordances, Kramer participates in a prayerful protest, and he also preserves it and circulates it. His tweet includes an image of the collective gathered together at the protest.

In the twenty-first century, black freedom—and indeed black lives—continue to be violently attacked by white supremacists and racial hatred. While we might expect that a campaign that began with a hashtag would move away from older protest genres, it seems that Black Lives Matter has in fact rejuvenated the activist potential of faithful genres. Taken together, the response to Charleston and the Black Lives Matter campaign make clear that faithful genres remain a viable mode for addressing racial injustice. In addition to websites and Tweets and Youtube videos, activists today turn to religious genres and compose prayers and songs and testimonies. Individuals and collectives in the twenty-first century are taking advantage of all available rhetorical resources to protest

the injustice leveraged against African Americans and to work toward racial justice—faithful genres among them.

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