THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS

God has a distinct group recognized
not only by their appearance but by their power.

Apostle Gentle Groover

Apostle Groover stressed the connection between personal appearance, spiritual authority, and collective identity to the thousands assembled in St. Louis's America's Center for Friday evening service at the Annual International Convocation. "We're thankful to God," he said, "for having chosen us to represent Him in spite of the proliferation of evil." He warned the followers of "true Apostolicism" that they faced "much pressure . . . living in a time of compromise. . . . It's important for us not to change course even if the winds of change blow." Then, encouraging the rapt gathering, he pronounced, "Thank God we're not playing church, [we're] people who are truly filled and tongue talking! . . . Jesus is real tonight!" Cheers and praise erupted from the sea of enthusiastic attendees, mostly women, dressed in their distinctive style. Saints held Apostle Groover in high regard; in addition to overseeing the Florida diocese, he was one of twelve who sat on the governing Board of Apostles of the Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith, Inc. (COOLJC). Beyond his positions, saints spoke of "his

love for God" and "love for people." On this night, he urged saints to hold on to the status of "distinct" and "chosen" by maintaining the standards set by the church. Moreover, Apostle Groover insinuated that the price followers would pay for compromise was a loss of power.

This chapter examines the ways in which COOLJC women perform *aesthetic labor* in interconnected material and immaterial realms to produce, reproduce, and reconfigure the meanings of the beauty of holiness. Regulations on dress, which the church codifies most rigorously on women's bodies, demonstrate the standard of respectable appearance in COOLJC. Examining the aesthetics of presentation and its history, we gain insight into the particular ways in which the saints understand that a woman, by her appearance, exemplifies not only herself as one of the "ambassadors for Christ" but also the institution (see 2 Cor. 5:20). At the same time as she visually sets a standard, she is also a conduit for access to sacred realms, the "power" cited by Apostle Groover. Women perform aesthetic labor in unrestrained liturgical practices—music making and worship—rendering the invisible (spirit) visible (embodied) to model the beauty and power of holiness. In every service congregants work to "usher in" the Holy Ghost; given that women are in the majority and that Spirit infilling is egalitarian, the religious bodies of COOLJC women most often actualize the "anointing." Musical and liturgical work by COOLJC women produces, reproduces, and reconfigures church theology, doctrine, and aesthetics, creating a passageway that provides access to the past-present-future of the "Kingdom in the midst" and "new heaven and new earth" (see Rev. 21:1). By way of unrestrained and restrained bodily practices, women address ideologies of power and respectability that are foundational to understandings of gender in COOLJC. Women's spiritual and material aesthetic work reinforces communal and self-understandings of women as spiritual gatekeepers while keeping church polity intact.

WITHOUT A SPOT OR WRINKLE

The ongoing attention to the presentation of Black women's bodies within COOLJC comes out of the American religious, cultural, and political landscape of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that gave rise to the wider Holiness-Pentecostal movement. The sociohistorical and religious history render the bodies of Black women "triply damned" through the stigma of enslavement, stereotypes of hypersexuality, and Eve's centrality

to the "fall of man." At the same time, within COOLJC, women's bodies become doubly "revered," showing both power, through Spirit infilling by the unbounded Holy Ghost, and also respectability, through modest dress and comportment. In emergent Pentecostalism, notions of Black holy women's self-presentation were inextricably tied to a political and social history rooted in enslavement, a "sexual economy" in which each Black woman's body became the point of production.[1] The ensuing postemancipation shift from Reconstruction to Jim Crow–era America found the majority of Black people precariously situated between the "politics of respectability" and Black folk cultural ways of knowing.[2]

Holiness-Pentecostals adhered to certain markers of respectability, such as strict codes regarding leisure activity and sexual behavior, whereas music, preaching and teaching styles, and other elements of worship remained firmly rooted in African American–Black Atlantic aesthetics.[3] The Holiness-Pentecostal theology of Spirit baptism embraced ecstatic worship, which flew in the face of Black mainstream politics of representation. At the same time, members demonstrated restraint in dress and comportment, rooted in both a politics of representation and also the Bible.[4] Holy Ghost infilling and the imminent return of Jesus for a church without "spot or wrinkle," "holy and without blemish," required each individual to maintain a pure vessel, signified by their outward appearance (see Eph. 5:27).[5] Pentecostal dress and demeanor also countered hypersexualized stereotypes projected onto Black people—stereotypes that always carried the real threat of violence when acted on by the barbaric.

This history and its legacy helped shape COOLJC doctrine, as wider sociopolitical concerns and Christian values internal to the church converged in formulating gendered aesthetics of holiness.[6] The dress code for COOLJC women prohibits sleeveless tops, pants, hemlines at or above the knee, slit skirts that expose the knees, open-toed shoes, bare legs (without stockings or tights), makeup, earrings, and uncovered heads. These regulations apply strictly within the sanctuary, and most COOLJC women carry them into daily life to varying degrees.

Exploring the production of COOLJC women's attire broadens the work sites open to examination of on-the-job aesthetic labor by scholars who consider the "embodied capacities and attributes" that employees bring to a potential job and that employers further exploit for organizational gain.[7] (For example, a boutique owner may look for prospective employees to have a particular cosmopolitan demeanor—in clothing style, speech, and

carriage—which the employer will further tailor to appeal to his or her specific product-clientele.) Like workers in public-contact service work, who are "constantly on display," churchwomen by their outer appearance and demeanor reflect the institution—as Apostle Groover made clear.[8] Yet there is a key distinction between COOLJC women and service-sector workers who bring embodied qualities and styles to the job (and further develop these qualities), in that, for a saint, the bulk of the aesthetic labor of presentation begins after she commits to a Jesus-led life. In fact, the community values a radical transformation in dress and comportment from before salvation to after salvation, as a marker of the new self.

Recent analyses of aesthetics in religious communities that engage with the mass media can be applied to the material and spiritual aesthetic labor of presentation as well. Birgit Meyer's work on Ghanaian Pentecostal filmmaking and images in the public sphere makes an important intervention in that she moves away from thinking about representation as an imaginary field. Instead of dividing the material and immaterial, Meyer argues that "the relevance of aesthetics, and the concomitant importance of style," is key in "grasp[ing] the material dimensions of religious modes of forming subjects and communities."[9] The work of presentation done by COOLJC women shows the ways in which dress, as a religious aesthetic, is seen as an embodiment of holiness. Dress presents one of many ways that members live the theology of being "all on one accord," like the disciples on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 1:14 and 2:1). On that day, being "on one accord" facilitated baptism by the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the Christian church. In addition to regulations on dress generally, the women's auxiliaries each have designated colors for their attire. At auxiliary-sponsored services, the Women's Council dons white and purple, the missionaries black and white, and ministers and deacons' wives dark blue and white. Oftentimes, women overseeing services will select a color for clothing. During one Sunday's announcements, Sister Wanda Madison informed congregants, "This Friday's young people service is sponsored by Sister [Georgia] Rogers, and she's asking everyone to wear orange. The color for Friday is orange, so we want to all be together. Amen? Show we're all on one accord. Amen?"

THE LABOR OF STYLE

Physical, spiritual, and psychic exertion that materializes theology in the sanctuary is preceded by the everyday labor required for self-presentation. Keeping up with the dress code can be laborious. Newly converted women

may find they need to give up their old clothes and acquire new ones.[10] Women with children take on the added task of keeping church clothes organized for the whole family. I was running Saturday errands with a sister; one stop was the cleaners. She did a monthly drop-off of church clothes for her family of five. I was stunned by the size of the pickup. "You know how we worship," she said, laughing. "We wear something once, and it's soaked [with perspiration]." We made a few trips to get everything to the car. This sister's good nature represents how many women matter-of-factly fold the extra work and expense of keeping clothes prepared for church into the rest of their daily religious labor.

Women, too, carry the burden of conforming to same-color attire for special services and wearing the appropriate "uniform" colors for women's auxiliary services. Some men participate by adding color-coordinated ties or handkerchiefs, but as one church mother said in an exasperated tone, "Oh, they leave the men alone" about uniforms. "I hate uniforms," declared Mother Lucille Grayson, a COOLJC member for over sixty years. "It's so much trouble," she explained, "to have to keep your clothes organized that way. I almost didn't come to that service last week 'cause I wasn't sure if my whites were clean. It's such a hassle! But, thank God, I did have another suit in the closet 'cause I really did want to come." And she would not have attended out of uniform.

POLICING

The parameters of the dress regulations come from the male leadership, and they, along with the senior missionaries, make sure members adhere to the rules. In addition to altar work (as detailed in the last chapter), the spiritual responsibilities of missionaries include overseeing the conduct, duties, and church attire of women and children. The International Missionary Department motto, "'Lifting Up a Standard for the People' (Isaiah 62:10) in Action, Attitude and Appearance," informs a missionary's approach to her labor.[11] Missionaries must embody "the beauty of holiness," thereby "lifting up a standard," to which they hold others. In her study of teaching and learning between Black mothers and daughters, Suzanne Carothers calls attention to the importance of acquiring household work skills within the context of a sense of aesthetics. For example, a task such as baking could be *done*, but only when the daughter had learned "to get [her] biscuits to look pretty" did she consider the task *done well*.[12] In much the same way, the

self-presentation of a COOLJC woman is integral to church work itself, and missionaries see to it that church work is done well.

Even as Mother Grayson made clear that missionary women have different attitudes about the "hassle," many women still take the charge of overseeing appearance quite seriously. Mother Esther Pea, the president of the Missionary Department at True Deliverance Church (TDC), was one such woman. She would admonish one-on-one or in front of the congregation if a sleeve or hemline was too short, a garment too tight, or a skirt split too high. She reprimanded according to COOLJC doctrine; however, she also carried a standard of "proper dress" instilled by her Methodist mother.[13] She recalled, "My mother told me if ladies don't wear gloves and put their hat on their head, she ain't dressed. That just stuck with me." Born in 1913, Mother Pea had meticulously maintained her stylish wardrobe for decades—two- and three-piece long skirt suits from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, complete with matching hats and gloves, of course. Her mother made all her clothes when she was coming up, "the ruffles, the lace, the ribbons. . . . I loved what she made for me. That's why you see me with all this lace now because I come up with it."

As Methodists, her parents were fully immersed in the early twentieth-century "politics of respectability." They, too, became caught up in the waves of the Great Migration, moving with their five children from farm life in Anderson, South Carolina, to the promises of industrialized Asheville, North Carolina. Her father secured one of the two "top-leading jobs [for Black men] down there, . . . cleaning engines for the railroad." The other "top-leading job" was at the post office. Both parents stressed education, and her mother insisted that the girls "be ladies." As Mother Pea hit her preteen years and her hips "started to spread," her mother's instructions to dress "nice and neat" expanded, too. "She told me, 'You gotta put on that corset, otherwise you're gonna be out of shape,'" Mother Pea recalled. "Well, I didn't want to be out of shape! And I grew up to be a big girl. You're talking about a sixteen proper shape? I had it! [She howled with laughter.] Ooooh!" Her happy childhood recollections were rife with racialized "gender-laden and class-laden meanings" that permeated the rhetoric of respectability—an ideology that fought against "every black woman regardless of her income, occupation, or education [being perceived as] the embodiment of deviance."[14]

Mother Pea epitomized the convergence of a politics of respectability with the standard of sanctified attire, in which dressing "as becometh

holiness" both harks back to early twentieth-century race, gender, and class politics and also signals the indwelling Holy Ghost. The missionaries of COOLJC, like those of the Women's Department in Anthea D. Butler's study of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), "wish to be pleasing to God," viewing "the body . . . [as] a marker of the self" and their devotion to Christ.[15] Mother Pea, however, came into COOLJC in 1973, at sixty years of age. She had been in New York since 1934, when, with her parents' permission and forewarnings, she journeyed to the city with a girlfriend, found employment, got into nursing school, and "brought myself honor." She remembered a different attire among Holiness women from her youth in the South. "[They] didn't wear clothes like I wear," she explained. "The women in Holiness back in my day wore these long black skirts, white blouses, and an apron. And they wore that bonnet hat on their head. Holiness was different than it is now." Mother Pea found the changes in style between her own and preceding generations acceptable. Notably, she attributed changes in style to "Holiness [being] different than it is now." At the same time, she balked at changing styles in "this modern holiness." Her comments, too, highlight the ways in which women's self-presentation remains the primary marker, as she charged that "young *people* [are] dressing too slack. . . . They should wear their *dresses* a little bit longer" (emphasis added).

Mother Pea joined COOLJC decades after a major postwar shift in holy women's style of dress. She therefore missed the earlier transition that other senior members had experienced, in which older missionaries criticized "these young people [and] their dress." Mother Pearl Norris, a second-generation member of COOLJC for over seventy-five years, explained that the pre–World War II style of plain dress was a combination of a "holdover of the Victorian type of dress" and low income levels. "Back then [in the 1930s and early 1940s] in Harlem most people didn't have a lot," she said, "so they dressed more modestly." She remembered the change as coinciding with her entrance into college. "Around the mid-1940s and 1950s we started to dress more modern," she said. "People had more [money]. It was after the war. . . . We moved to the new temple [in 1945]. We thought we were something! And we *dressed*. Hats [and outfits of] all different colors. We were hot stuff!"[16] Yet dressing "more modern" did not occur without conflict. Other saints who came of age in the same period talked about the displeasure of the older missionaries and the evolution of their own biblical perspectives. Stringent dress conventions "didn't hurt us [when we were young]," one senior missionary recalled, "but a lot of stuff wasn't necessary. When I think

about it now and match it up with the Word, [the Bible] really don't have nothin' to do with all that stuff [about dressing] they were telling me."

"YOU DON'T REPRESENT HOLINESS . . ."

Even with a mature understanding of a gap between scripture and doctrine, women rarely contest the "hassle" of dress regulations or openly clash with church leadership. However, one such incident occurred on a sweltering Friday night in August, when a dispute about obedience to the dress code boiled over at the Queens church. Tensions around dress can run high among saints because policing can take place in the public domain, making a saint's relationship to political and spiritual authority visible to the entire church. For some, policing ensures the moral standard will be maintained. For others, policing carries a host of assumptions about one's personal relationship with God.

On this particular night, Sister Patricia Roland had sponsored a service themed "United for Christ: Back to Basics," in which she used a makeup kit to talk about the benefits of "being in Christ," the premise being that unsaved women use makeup to brighten their appearance and uplift their spirits, while COOLJC women use Christ and the Word. As is customary, the end of the service was turned over to Bishop Crosley J. Cook. He opened with, "Sister Roland talked about the woman's face. I thought she was going to go into the women's clothing." He went on, "We have to dress to a standard of holiness. . . . You have to dress for the Lord. . . . The Praise Team sets a tone. You usher in the Spirit. If you don't represent holiness you can hinder the Spirit. . . . You're not dressed representing holiness if your legs are bare and your feet are out." On this ninety-degree Friday night, none of the four singers on the Praise and Worship Team had on stockings; one wore open-toed shoes, and two wore sandals.

Bishop Cook continued his reprimand, asking rhetorically, "How can you help usher in the Spirit if you're a distraction?" Moving forward, he would be dispatching the ministers to meet with all the auxiliaries "to make clear the standards." Emphasizing his role as spiritual father, he explained, "I am trying to get you in readiness. I say this not to chastise you, but because I love you." Finally, to reinforce the connection between "dressing to a standard" and holiness, he summoned the memory and authority of the beloved departed first lady of the church. "Mother [Reva] Cook never let any of her children enter the house of God dressed inappropriately," he reminded them. "Not one ever entered with her legs not covered or her feet out."

Mother Geneva Reeves raised her hand to be recognized and stood. "I'm really glad you brought this out, Bishop. The mothers have a hard time when we uphold the standard. Someone wants to know where it is in the scripture that women must wear stockings." She then answered the anonymous query with a response frequently offered when a direct connection between scripture and doctrine was tenuous. "Well," she said, "when you truly have the Holy Ghost, He deals with you, and . . . you want to dress to a standard. And I'm going to search out the scripture to find it." Bishop Cook encouraged her quest, "Yes, Mother, you search it out and bring it to us."

After the benediction, a member of the Praise and Worship Team, who was sitting next to me, turned and said indignantly, "Well, I guess I'm going to hell." As folks filed out of the sanctuary and into the thick, hot August air, clusters of women formed on the sidewalk to talk about the issue. Some had on the proper attire. Others wore sandals with no stockings under their nearly floor-length skirts. Mother Reeves was in the middle of an excited discussion with some saints. One in particular, Sister Diane Comstock, a contemporary of Mother Reeves, challenged the scriptural basis for requiring stockings and prohibiting open-toed shoes. Mother Reeves was "surprised" that Sister Comstock would question doctrine because she was a lifelong member. "That's my point," Sister Comstock stated emphatically. "I've been in the church since I'm ten years old." Mother Reeves shot back, "Then you should know better!" Not backing down, Sister Comstock said, "I've been dressing like this my whole life. I have on stockings, but I've been wearing sandals every summer my entire life. There's nothing wrong with it." Then, leveling an "out-of-order" accusation at Mother Reeves, she exclaimed, "And you have on diamond earrings!" Acknowledging that her large diamond studs were not "according to the standard," Mother Reeves responded, "I know. I said it was wrong [when I spoke up in the sanctuary]."

Sister Ruth Holmes (open-toed shoes and no stockings) and Mother Jessie England (proper attire) walked out of church together and approached the group. Talking to Mother England but speaking loud enough to be heard by everyone assembled, Sister Holmes held up her large cluster of keys and jangled them. "I'm g-r-o-w-n. Grown! And I'm going to *my* car," she said. About a block down, she joined another group of women already in discussion. One of them, Mother Regina Highland, who was in her sixties and highly respected by young and old alike, noted that she was not wearing stockings. One would have had to look closely to tell because underneath her floor-length dress, her slip-on shoes exposed only small portions

of the top of her feet. Laughing, she said, "Well, I guess I'm not going to make it [to heaven]."

"Well, I want to go where you go!" Sister Holmes responded.

Mother Highland continued, "I believe He looks at your heart. There are times where, if you have to go home and change, you might not come to church. It's better to come."

Sister Holmes then shifted to confront the notion of women's "improper" dress "distract[ing]" worshippers. She charged, "If my ashy feet get you excited, you have a *big* problem! It's not *my* problem."

Sister Eileen Hansen, a youthful middle-age grandmother who always dressed according to the standard, picked up from Sister Holmes. "The women are always responsible for how men act," she noted. "Why do we have to be responsible or more responsible?"

Sister Holmes retorted, "Well, we know that men wrote the rules. It's all about control." Control indeed. Notably, no men were present as the women grappled with the pastor's public reprimand. Although "men wrote the rules," heated, open debate about implementation fell to women. Inside the church, only saints who agreed with Bishop Cook spoke up; those who disagreed sat in silence. Although the actions that constituted not adhering to the dress code were open disagreement, verbally disagreeing with the pastor in front of the church would have been highly irregular. All concerned adhered to protocol, keeping church polity intact. Dress standards have become codified, too, because "church mothers emulated, articulated, and embraced sanctification ideas and images in [and on] their person."[17]

Yet not all agree about the level of importance. Mother Grayson, who hated the "hassle" but complied, asserted that too much focus on women's garb caused the church to "major in the minors." She agreed with Mother Highland that "[God] looks at your heart."

On that August night, there was a fundamental disagreement about representation and *the thing* being represented. Bishop Cook and his supporters contended that the Spirit responded to the outer embodiment of holiness, while the others maintained that the Spirit responded to a person's internal being—the cultivated relationship with God. They were indignant about the ways in which women's dress can overshadow the full extent of the aesthetic labor devoted to servicing the family of faith.

The women on the Praise and Worship Team who sparked the pastor's reprimand were second- and third-generation saints between the ages of twenty-five and forty-five—committed members who had accepted the job of preparing the sanctuary for worship by bringing the congregation into communion with the Spirit through song. For every service, Praise and Worship Team members come in time to be "on their post" at the front of the sanctuary as congregants arrive.[18] On one Monday evening, as folks assembled, Sister Rogers and the team moved to the front of the sanctuary. She removed the microphone from its stand, placed the stand behind her, and, in her robust alto, launched into the buoyant "This Is the Day the Lord Has Made": "This is the day / This is the day / That the Lord has made / That the Lord has made. I will rejoice / I will rejoice / And be glad in it / And be glad in it . . ."[19] Like most songs presented during this portion of service, "This Is the Day" is lyrically sparse and repetitive to encourage participation.[20] The rest of the Praise Team and some congregants joined in, singing and clapping. Near the end of the song, a woman stood and was recognized by Sister Rogers, the Praise Team leader. The woman began with a standard opening, "Praise the Lord, saints. Giving honor to the spirit of Christ, the head of my life, to my pastor, to the ministers, mothers, deacons, and all to whom honor is due." She was "glad on today" because her son had received good news about his civil service exam.

In response, Mother Eula Fulton rose from her pew, singing, "It's another day's journey, and I'm so glad . . ." An octogenarian whose stature and appearance belied her years, her singing was thin, yet spirited. Responding to intent more than quality, Sister Rogers and the team pushed the song with powerful gospel harmonies. Energized by the thrust, other saints jumped into the up-tempo song. The organist and drummer had not yet arrived, so infectious call-and-response layers of tambourines, hand clapping, and foot stomping accompanied Mother Fulton's sung praise. As the song ended, she began her spoken testimony: "I thank God for my family . . ." As she continued, "*Halleluuujah!*" was sprinkled throughout her declarations; she raised her hands; moved by the Spirit, her body bent quickly to the right at the waist; she straightened up and thanked God for her health. The saints recognized Mother Fulton's anointing. Proclaiming, "Thank you, Jesus!" and "Glory to God!" they impelled her, each other, and the Holy Ghost into deeper spiritual union. Ending, Mother Fulton asserted, "It's a privilege to get up everyday and come to the house of prayer. Pray for me in Jesus's

name." Right away, Mother Bettina Evans sprang up from her pew and in her rich, raspy, booming voice sang the up-tempo spiritual "I Got Joy, Joy."

A beat after the ending of "I Got Joy, Joy," a sister stood, proclaiming, "I thank God for being saved, sanctified, and filled with the Holy Ghost. Speaking in tongues as the Spirit of God gave utterance. . . . I thank God for waking me up this morning!" Sister Rogers and the Praise and Worship Team exuberantly intoned the song "Lord, I Just Want to Thank You." Leading praise and worship requires the team leader to have songs ready to impel the church "higher," whether moving from song to song, or from personal testimony to song. At all services, the team works to "usher in the Spirit," while the team leader carries responsibility for the overall arc, transitioning the congregation from praise to worship. Effective Praise and Worship Team leaders need to have "a true anointing" and an encyclopedic knowledge of the church's musical literature, which includes Psalms, scriptures, traditional praise songs, gospel songs, and folk spirituals. After the extended and rousing version of "Lord, I Just Want to Thank You," Sister Roland stood, declaring, "I thank God for the women of God and the love of God that sustains me as a single mother raising my daughters." The Praise and Worship Team leader launched into "The Jesus in Me Loves the Jesus in You." Everyone joyously joined in, and Sister Rogers and the Praise and Worship Team, seguing from tune to tune, led folks through another fifteen minutes of impassioned singing.

FILL "ALL THE HOUSE" WITH SOUND

Music dominates COOLJC worship services from beginning to end—devotional (praise and worship), the processional of the choir, the prayer hymn, the Lord's Prayer, the morning hymn, selections by the children's and young adult choirs, a solo meditation, a standing congregational song, the message song bearing up the sermon, and altar call invitational hymns.[21] Saints transmit and reinforce the theological underpinnings of faith through song. Music's predominance in worship as an aesthetic sensibility connects to the biblical foundation of COOLJC doctrine, Acts 2:2–4, which states, "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." The first indication of divine activity on the day of Pentecost was sound completely filling the space, so the musical

soundscape of service (re-)produces Bible time at each gathering. Services can move in dynamic sonic waves, from quietly meditative to extremely loud, pushing the sound system to distortion. In these moments, singing, preaching, praying, hand clapping, foot stomping, and instrument playing are deliberate and forceful.

The next signal of the Holy Ghost's presence in sacred history and the present is the tongue being split into new language. Here, internal biblical logic joins a culturally specific approach to song making in Black gospel music, as saints fill "all the house" with sound, in terms of both quantity and quality. Horace Boyer, a gospel music scholar, explains, "Perhaps the most unusual characteristic of gospel singing is its text interpolation, the adding of extra words to the original text."[22] Sister Celeste Brooks was a powerhouse vocalist in COOLJC, and one of her renditions of "The Lord Strong and Mighty" epitomized this aesthetic approach.[23] With organ and drums in accompaniment, she set up the high-energy offering in a fairly straightforward fashion for the choir entrance. "The Lord our God is strong and mighty / The Lord our God is mighty in battle / Sound the alarm on the holy mountain / He's wonderful and powerful and mighty in His power." The choir repeated the full chorus, as Sister Brooks had set out, and she began to weave in and out, rhythmically splitting and adding text: "The Lord our God, *oh yes He is*, strong and mighty, *he's mighty* / The Lord our God, *our God, mighty, mighty* in battle . . ." Skilled gospel singers "create emotional climaxes by bombarding listeners with perpetual sound" by overlapping phrases, employing internal call-and-response patterns, and elongating notes to "bridge almost all rests and phrases."[24]

When scripture is fulfilled in song, the entire body is filled with divine power that overflows into divine utterances, which can be realized in sound quality. After a few times around, when Sister Brooks hit "*sound* the alarm," she shifted her rich-textured voice into a full-throated raspy tone and used a similar, but slightly intensified, grain on "wonderful and *powerful*." Like other accomplished COOLJC singers, she knew how to "flip a switch"—that is, generate tones that pierce the air and set the church alight. Singers may do this to bring the Spirit down; as well, shifts in tone can indicate she is under the anointing. Those familiar with the singer and the aesthetic practices will understand the meaning of "innumerable variations of vocal color . . . and nuances in vocal contour."[25] Folks at the service—standing, shouting, and praising God—felt Sister Brooks's "variations of vocal color" and intensity.

These "aesthetics of self-presentation" in music demonstrate a communal "sense of value and appropriateness" as well as a "politics of personal value."[26] It's important to note that within COOLJC men and boys are gifted singers, too. So, for our purposes, the democratized realm of singing needs to be understood within the overall context of women's aesthetic church work. Whether with the Praise and Worship Team or a choir, or as a soloist, the work that women do to usher in the Spirit through song (re-)produces agreed-on aesthetic values for the church, as well as reinforcing their value to the community of faith, and the work is always situated within COOLJC's gendered ideologies of power and respectability. Still, as histories of COOLJC women's dress and the August night conflict over proper attire show, aesthetic values are not fixed. The aesthetic labor of COOLJC women becomes a site where values of holiness can be reinforced, disputed, or altered, all the while reinforcing the importance of women as spiritual gatekeepers.[27]

SPIRITUAL GATEKEEPERS

At the same gathering that witnessed Sister Brooks's commanding rendition of "Strong and Mighty," Mother Viola Gilbert, the speaker for the evening, issued a clarion call: "Women were last at the cross and first at the tomb and will remain! Stand and be counted!" She encouraged those gathered to "develop [the] spiritual sensitivity and spiritual power absolutely necessary" to withstand "warfare," thus reiterating the topic of her fiery "lesson" (not sermon), "Women's Spiritual Warfare."[28] The spiritual fortitude of Mary Magdalene and Mother Mary during the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus epitomized having "the power to go through and give your testimony for that other sister." Placing the church-family relationship of "sister" onto the women at the cross, Mother Gilbert brought all of them together into shared spaces of faith, endurance, and possibility, as "faith must ever claim its promised rights." Centering the lives of Jesus and the faithful women around him bolsters churchwomen as they press through the challenges of contemporary life.

The women of COOLJC, like many Pentecostal women, look to the lives of specific biblical women to model their walk with God. Yet oneness and the founding theology of Bishop Robert C. Lawson, which placed the blood of "colored women" in Christ, sets these women apart from the mainstream of Pentecostalism.[29] Numerous weekly services, too, afford women ample opportunity to develop their own biblical understandings and to bring

those interpretations into conversation within the wider church community. Members gather for Bible study and worship services on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday, as well as for daily prayer services at six o'clock in the morning and at noon. Women usually program the weeknight services, integrating religious instruction and group discussions under the rubric of worship. Special regional and national assemblies, such as the Annual Women's Day, the International Women's Convention, and women's auxiliary gatherings, offer additional spaces for sharing biblical interpretations.[30] On the night Mother Gilbert spoke they had gathered for a quarterly Tri-district missionary service, which brought representatives from a few local churches into fellowship.[31]

Pulling women, who were "last at the cross and first at the tomb," into the current moment, Mother Gilbert evoked holy women as spiritual gatekeepers over time, who "will remain!" Connecting the past actions of holy women to current and future strategies and successes in "women's spiritual warfare," she also tapped into the "already and not yet" theological foundation of the church. Generally understood in Christianity as the present and forthcoming Kingdom, within COOLJC theology and practice "already and not yet" sheds light on the particular paradoxes and ambiguities that women navigate as they move between the material and spiritual realms.[32] In what follows, we will see women as spiritual gatekeepers performing aesthetic labor to keep the present Kingdom (the church) aligned with the directives of God, so that the future Kingdom will be realized in "the end times." They do this by materializing a whole, coherent "already and not yet" in the present.

RUNNING FOR JESUS

One February evening, guest singers came from a sister church in Brooklyn to fellowship with the Queens TDC congregation. Oftentimes, when a soloist, choir, or minister visits a sister church, members of their congregation come along. Too, when guest singers or speakers are known to be adept at setting the church alight, members will invite friends and family, saved and unsaved, to come and have "a good time in the Lord." So the transition from corporate prayer into worship service on this evening saw folks moving, not only throughout the church, but also coming from outside. During the buzz of folks hanging up coats and greeting each other in the anteroom, the Praise and Worship Team worked in the sanctuary to "usher in the Spirit" through song.

While the congregation was settling, two visiting musicians positioned themselves at the organ and drums, which were tucked in the front right corner of the sanctuary below the elevated choir pews. They were both "highly anointed" and excellent musicians, and their interplay with the skilled women of the Praise and Worship Team quickly raised the sonic and spiritual temperature to "higher heights."[33] It was a Sunday evening service, so saints were offering testimonials—a word or song about "God's wonder-working power." It wasn't until the young drummer came out from behind the drum kit and hobbled to the front of the sanctuary to testify that it became clear that he did not have the use of his left side. "I wasn't going to testify tonight," he said, "but I have to talk about the goodness of Jesus." A serious car accident had left him in critical condition and in need of major surgery. He survived the surgery only to suffer a paralyzing stroke during recovery. A husband and the father of a toddler, he described the anxiety of coping with the impact on his young family and the emotional devastation of ending his musical career. Once out of the hospital, he threw himself back into the church and "playing to the glory of God." Throughout his testimony, saints praised God: "Hallelujah!" "Thank you, Jesus!"

"God gave me back my drumming," the young man declared. "God has been faithful. The only thing I can't do is run. I still can't run. I need three people to run around this church for me!" Immediately one woman jumped up and began to run counterclockwise around the sanctuary. Before she had gotten halfway up the outer aisle, a second woman, then a third, and then a young boy, about ten years old, joined them. As they whipped around the sanctuary, two of the women were crying, and all were calling out to God. The congregants began to stand, shout, clap, praise God, and speak in tongues as the anointing fell on many. The organist joined in, underscoring the sound of bodies with percussive chord hits. The physical acts of running, crying, and shouting praises brought the Spirit down instantly. Merging the material, spatial, and temporal realms, women's religious bodies materialized "already and not yet."[34] The runners physically incorporated themselves into the testimony of the young drummer, making God's promise of a future healing a present reality. Harnessing spiritual power and (en-)circling the congregation, the proxy runners carried the entire church into the restorative present-future while actualizing the drummer as one member of a whole, healthy body in Christ.

Here, Catherine Bell's work on ritualization is useful. Ritualization occurs when practical activities are carried out in strategic ways in particular

social circumstances.[35] First, these types of practices are context specific. A practical activity, like running, became distinct in the sanctuary and held new meaning. Second, running was "strategic and economic," that is, effective and basic.[36] The runners carried out a deliberate activity that got right to the heart of the matter. Third, the action was particularly effective because of "a fundamental 'misrecognition' of what it [was] doing, . . . of its limits and constraints."[37] In running to realize healing for the drummer, women performed aesthetic labor that recovered and reinforced an understanding of the "end of times." Fourth, the action raises the question, why did they run? In what ways did they produce, reproduce, and reconfigure relations of power? Bell identifies this as "its vision of redemptive hegemony."[38] The women runners demonstrated a "vision of empowerment rooted in [their] perceptions and experiences of the organization of power" within COOLJC.[39]

Reproducing the church's idea of the link between appearance and power, each runner at that February service was dressed "according to a standard." The first runner, a small-framed woman who appeared to be in her mid-thirties, wore an A-line shirtwaist dress, falling to midcalf. The cardigan sweater she wore on top could have been indicative of a sleeveless garment underneath or an extra layer to move the shape of her outfit outward. Her pumps with their inch-and-a-half heel produced a soft and insistent thumping on the burgundy-carpeted floor, while her lace doily-style head covering strained against the bobby pin that kept it attached to the crown of her head. The other two women were adorned in straight-line, midcalf-length skirt suits with appliqué-lapelled jackets that fell below the hips, a style commonly seen on Sundays. Both wore modest hats, one a wide-brimmed cloche and the other a beret. Women's style presented an outward marker of distinction for a self-described "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Pet. 2:9).[40] This liturgical work reiterated biblical teachings and did so within the bounds of COOLJC's gendered expectations of the female body and its appearance.

The runners performed aesthetic labor by reinforcing appropriate COOLJC values in worship, self-presentation, and community relations. They demonstrated "the beauty of holiness" in appearance and in action as spiritual gatekeepers. In this way, members experienced, in real time, the paradoxical proclamation of Jesus that the Kingdom is both present and forthcoming—"already and not yet."

DEMOCRATIZING "ALREADY AND NOT YET"

Operating within the COOLJC aesthetic-religious environment, the three women runners—the first responders—unleashed their spiritual power to bind the congregation, to "believe God for a healing," and to democratize "already and not yet." Here we see Bell's idea of misrecognition at play. On its face, running responded to the need for physical healing. Running, however, demonstrated an active amalgamation of materiality and spirituality and presented an "already and not yet" infused with particular raced and gendered meanings. When women catalyze congregational anointing, their actions stand in relief to the male-headed church polity, as they pull "the true power of the living God" into the space from their position below the dais. Sprinting counterclockwise around the whole of the sanctuary, each woman called attention to and displaced the top-down hierarchy. She produced the "already and not yet" of "neither male nor female" in Jesus Christ, just as her enslaved pre-Pentecostal forebears, moving counterclockwise in ring shouts, activated "neither bond nor free" (Gal. 3:28). She reiterated the materiality-physicality of self-making and community making while operating in a spiritual register. Cleaving the tension between boundless spirit and gendered delineations of respectability, she yanked the democratized "not yet" of the Kingdom into "the already" of the earthly church. Running to heal the drummer, too, acted to realize healing of the church body and restore it to the fullness of "already and not yet."

The runners' ability to push material boundaries sits in stark contrast to doctrinal regulation, so rigorously regulated on women's bodies. Liturgical work of this sort produces, reproduces, and reconfigures the meanings of the sounding bodies of women that are both spontaneous and regulated. Worship places women's bodies at the heart of religious life, as "the body mediates that 'more' and makes visible what cannot be seen."[41] Holy Ghost anointing, singing, shouting, crying, speaking in tongues, and running collaborate, making women's bodies and the sounds they create definitive markers of community aesthetics, that which is deemed correct and valuable. The church relies on women's spiritual power, exhibited in particular agreed-on ways, to set the church on fire and display the beauty of holiness.