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Spiritual Warfare: Embodied Spirituality and Lived Religion in the Protestant American South

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Abstract

In the American South, Protestantism embeds itself in every nook and cranny of society. Road signs litter the Southern terrain, projecting brief yet gripping messages: "JESUS SAVES," "CHRIST IS ALMIGHTY," "REPENT NOW." One famous Alabama sign even touts the phrase "Go to Church or the Devil Will Get You." Material culture showcases the intense form of Protestantism practiced in the South, but in reality, there is a phenomenon occurring here that goes beyond mere objects. In the South, a distinct form of Protestantism exists: one which seizes the body and forms a literal, physical connection between the practitioner and the so-called "Spirit." Employing sources such as Dennis Covington's *Salvation on Sand Mountain* (1995), Zora Neale Hurston's *You Don't Know Us Negroes* (2022), and Henry Ansgar Kelly's *The Devil, Demonology and Witchcraft* (1974), the nuance and power of this distinctly American form of lived religion can be revealed. Through an examination of phenomenon such as conversion visions,"catching the Spirit," and serpent handling, it is made clear that Southern Protestantism is the product of a unique blend of religious traditions - some of which are even derived from African diasporic rituals - that produces a form of spiritual embodiment indigenous to the region. Understanding this form of religious practice may lead to a new way of comprehending both the religious identity, and the rich culture, of the American South.

1. Introduction and Methodology

Southern Protestant religious culture is undeniably ubiquitous throughout the American South. In states such as North and South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and Alabama, Protestant churches often stand shoulder-to-shoulder on country and urban corners alike. Road signs litter the Southern terrain, projecting brief yet gripping messages: "JESUS SAVES," "CHRIST IS ALMIGHTY," "REPENT NOW."[1] While the United States as a whole has historically been a highly religious country - and was even referred to as "the most religious nation on earth" by religious studies scholar Robert C. Fuller - it is difficult to deny that the religious climate of the South is distinct.[2] Southern Protestantism is a product of many influences, one of the most important being the imported traditions of various African faith systems. These African diasporic systems have been extraordinarily impactful on the religious expression of the South as a whole, particularly in the Black community.[3] The influence of African diasporic tradition on Southern Protestantism is partially responsible for the most unique phenomenon that can be observed in this form of Christian worship: embodied spirituality. Embodied spirituality has been particularly embraced and made central to marginal Protestant groups that are prosperous in the South, including the Pentecostals, Church of God, and Holiness groups. The unique physical phenomena observed in these groups include, but are not limited to, conversion visions, "catching the Spirit," and serpent handling. Protestantism in the South is highly concerned with the impact that spiritual powers of both good and evil can have on the human body and soul. Often in these epistemologies, it is one's physical connection to the powers of God or Satan alike that opens the door for spiritual binding. The American South has a unique conception of physicality in faith that produces distinctive forms of worship and ritual that are indigenous to that region. Understanding these forms of lived religion is critical both in doing justice to the rich history of Christianity

in the South, and in comprehending the way that good and evil are fiercely dichotomized by this theological system. Additionally, it can enlighten contemporary scholars on the influence of African diasporic tradition in this distinctly American form of Christianity.

The embodied dimension of Protestant lived religion is not a new phenomenon in American Christianity, nor did it originate in the South. In fact, the belief that good and evil can interact with human beings in a physical manner is central to one of the first forms of Protestantism to touch North American soil: Puritanism. In 1629, a group of 400 English Puritans established the Massachusetts Bay Colony with the hopes of reforming and making "pure" the religious landscape of the New World. Rejecting Roman Catholicism and embracing Protestantism on land that was new to them, the Puritans established a form of uniquely American Christianity. This form of Christianity bore a great awareness of the dichotomy of heaven above and hell below. Puritans saw the physical influences of Satan as an everyday threat, and believed that Satan could infiltrate the body as a means to access, and ultimately corrupt, the soul. For them, Satan and his powers of evil were every bit as real as the Trinity in heaven. In fact, Puritans actually felt the direct, threatening presence of Satan much more powerfully than they felt the presence of the Lord.

The legacy of Puritan theology is not just reflected in the practice of American Protestantism, but in the academic study of American Protestantism as well. The literature surrounding American Protestantism cannot just reveal what the field of Religious Studies does know about this religion, but also where the knowledge of the field is lacking. One strong monograph regarding the Puritans in their concepts of evil and embodied spirituality is Elizabeth Reis' *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England*. In this book, Reis explains how Satan's powers of corruption were interpreted by these early Protestants: "Puritan anxiety owed less to the unattainability of heavenly glory than to the likelihood of hellish horror. Calvinism made salvation an uncertain reward even for the most righteous, but surely damned were those who followed the devil's path. Predestination notwithstanding, sinners could indeed work their way to hell."[4] Reis' book shows that this concept of eternal damnation was not only horrifying on a spiritual or conceptual level, but on a very tangible and physical level too. In her portrayal of the complex relationship between the body and the spirit, Reis' account of early American Protestantism excels. Reis' examination of embodiment, even though limited to American Puritanism, provides insight into a phenomenon that is present in other forms of Protestantism, such as predominantly Southern evangelical groups.

With an embodied sense of spirituality found in the American Protestantism handed down from Puritans to contemporary worshippers, comes a very distinct form of fear and anxiety. This topic is addressed by David D. Hall's book *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Beliefs in Early New England.* This book specifically deals with the conceptualization of death in Puritan theology, wherein it was only the fate of witches which could be truly certain: if anyone were found in the devil's grasp, they were sure to be damned to hell.[5] According to Hall, the dread of the corruption of the body through death was widespread, but the horror of the corruption of the body through Satan was especially enormous. Hall writes, "Death was perceived as the 'King of Terrours' who ushered dying men to hell unless they had repented. All these dangers had their counterpart in ritual….Ritual was a formalized procedure, a patterned means of connecting the natural and the social worlds to supernatural power."[6] What Hall's analysis reveals is that even the greatest fears and anxieties of early American Christians could be balanced and mitigated by the power of ritual. This pattern is still extremely meaningful and prevalent in American Protestantism today, particularly considering lived religion and embodied ritual. *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment* usefully addresses Puritan theology and lived religion from the angle of anxiety, ritual, and conceptualizing the corruption of the body.

However, Hall's and Reis' scholarship are both limited to the era of early American Protestantism, and their analyses cannot be extended directly into contemporary Protestant practices. Additionally, their work does not address the changes that occurred to American theological systems as New England Protestantism migrated south. These are the changes that transformed Southern Protestantism into the unique and distinct form of religiosity that it is today. Some of the gaps that are left by Reis' and Hall's scholarship begin to be filled by the work of other authors, such as Samuel Hill, Charles Wilson, and Robert Orsi.

The field of Southern Religious Studies was pioneered by the work of Samuel Hill in his 1966 publication *Southern Churches in Crisis.*[7] While the centered focus on the American South that this book takes is still quite useful in the contemporary study of Southern Protestantism, it does have some drawbacks to the academic study of religion. Primarily, this book is written from the decided standpoint of a Baptist, and it is written specifically for an audience of Evangelicals. Be that as it may, *Southern Churches in Crisis* still does important work in the way of studying Protestantism in the South as its own unique phenomenon. Additionally, Hill's work addresses Jim Crow segregation, portraying the way that religion and race relations inform one another in the American South. Specifically, he castigates the Protestant South in its support of Jim Crow, and argues that the moral tenets of the Baptist faith - and Christian faith at large - are in fundamental opposition to the implementation of racist legislation. Even considering its arguments supporting civil rights, Hill's work fails to represent the actual experience of the Southern Black Protestant, and does not examine the way that Black Southerners themselves practice their own form of Protestantism.

Additionally, its standard terminology for religion - which hinges on a very rigid, denominational, institutional definition of religion - is rather antiquated.

In his 1980 book *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920,* Charles Wilson makes a specialized examination of religion in the American South.[8] His assessment of Christianity in the American South is deeply involved in the lived practice of Southern Americans, and intertwines with the social climate of the period during and after the Civil War. *Baptized in Blood* takes strides in advancing the study of Southern Protestantism by considering the many ways in which it is distinct from Protestantism practiced outside of the South, specifically within the context of the continuing legacy of Civil War related racism and white supremacy. Additionally, Wilson's scholarship applies Durkheimian theory in order to outline a religion of the "Lost Cause," showing a thorough interest in the distinct cultural and religious climate of the South. With his work following *Baptized in Blood,* Wilson performs an analysis of the Christianity of the American South that leads him to a multicultural approach to folklore, where he compares the phenomenon of evangelical Protestantism in recent years with the religious climate of Southern Italy.

While Charles Wilson's study of Southern civil religion begins to address the cultural phenomena surrounding religion, it was Robert Orsi's 1985 book *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* that jump-started the methodology of lived religion in the field of Religious Studies.[9] In this book, Orsi rejects previous forms of religious studies that take interest in the liturgical, formal sides of religion that often take place only in the context of physical texts and dogma. Rather, he examines the phenomenon of American Christianity by assessing what practitioners are actually doing in their day-to-day lives that embodies their practice of religion. Orsi writes, "It is pointless to study particular beliefs or practices…[like] the Pentecostal theology of sanctification - apart from the people who use these ideas in the definite circumstances of their lives. The emphasis in the study of lived religion is on embodied practice and imagination, as men, women, and children exist in and move through their built and found environments."[10] *The Madonna of 115th Street* paves the way for the lived religion approach to Religious Studies that is so crucial in the specified study of embodied religion in the South. However, he only briefly mentions the Pentecostal movement and Southern Protestantism, so his work is clearly limited in this particular sector of the field.

The literature concerning American Christianity addresses the topic from a variety of ways, using various methodological approaches to span across various time periods, denominations, and forms of religious expression. However, what these publications do not directly address is the specifically Southern Protestant concept of the body's relationship with salvation and or damnation, and how this distinct theology manifests in worship and lived religion. As American Protestantism spread through the South, belief in "witches" described by Reis and Hall diminished, but the belief in the powers of Satan remained. In Southern Protestant circles, the dichotomy between good and evil, heaven and hell, and God and Satan, is as relevant today as the fear of Satanic possession was for the Puritans. The specific embodied form of Christianity practiced by the Puritans set the stage for a form of distinctly American, embodied Protestantism to emerge.

2. Spiritual Warfare

It is particularly in the communities in the American South that this legacy of the Puritans can still be observed. Faith communities on the fringe of more popular denominations are especially expressive in the embodiment of their faith and worship practices. While the belief in the powers of Satan directly tampering with the physical body is still very real for such groups, this threat of bodily corruption is now interpreted differently. Evangelical Protestants in the South have a distinct epistemology of the body's relationship to the powers of good and evil that can be observed through distinct faith practices that are unique to that region. Some of these practices include conversion visions, the "catching of the Spirit," and serpent handling.

While the fear of evil corrupting the body can be found in global Christian settings across time, contemporary American Protestants have developed a general rejection for the concept of "possession" that may still be accepted by some Catholics. In *The Devil, Demonology and Witchcraft,* Henry Ansgar Kelly describes the more modern Christian interpretation of evil apprehending the body: "The fact that Jesus is shown to perform some of his cures in a manner suggesting that he confirmed the popular diagnosis of possession does not mean that he was actually giving divine sanction to the theory….We saw that in the synoptic tradition all diseases were thought to be under the control of the devil. This notion today receives little support even among those who believe that the Bible requires belief in the existence of the devil. It would, therefore, seem possible for them to deny the existence of possessing demons while leaving the existence of the devil intact."[11] Kelly's point is taken well. Talk of witches and demons is less common in contemporary evangelical settings, but belief in the devil is still strong. And though the term "possession" may not

commonly appear in the larger cultural sphere of the United States anymore, the belief in physical contact between spiritual forces and human bodies is still as strong as ever. Particularly for some communities Southern evangelical Protestants, the bodily influence of Satan and evil spirits is a very real concern. Fear of the physical intervention of Satan and the powers of evil is just as real for Southern Protestants as the joy of the physical presence of the Lord - if not even more real.

Evidence of these sentiments can be found scattered all across the South, particularly in evangelical signage. Church signs serve as advertisements for religion, and tend to push ideas that fall better into the category of theological generalizations rather than messages specified to one congregation. Examples of common signage include "Christ Is the Answer," "Get Right with God," "Jesus Saves," and so forth.[12] These such messages are meant somewhat to encourage conversion to Protestantism, but are more so concerned with reigniting interest in Christianity among those who were already raised in the faith. Passive belief is not enough to satisfy the Southern Protestant need for salvation: if one is not enthusiastically accepting Jesus Christ as one's "Lord and Savior," then such persons are falling short. And what does falling short mean? No less than eternal damnation. Hence where the fear of the devil comes in. When "Jesus Saves" is not enough, "God Punishes and Satan is Lurking" may serve as more convincing of a message.

Figure 1. 'Go to Church or the Devil Will Get You' sign returns to I-65.[13]

This famous sign reading "GO TO CHURCH Or the Devil Will Get You!" is a strong example of fear mongering tactics common in Southern evangelical road signage. The sign, which has stood on the side of I-65 in Chilton County, Alabama for the better part of three decades, may seem extreme to some passersby, but in reality is fairly representative of much of the rhetoric found on signage in this region of the country.

The power in signs such as these lies in their viscerality. The simple message "GO TO CHURCH" may carry enough conviction to sway some viewers to consider strengthening their faith, but the threat of the devil's physical pursuit of non-churchgoers is a much more immediate concern. Additionally, Satan's appearance in the sign is one that strikes a physically threatening appearance. He is depicted as active rather than passive: he is scythe-wielding and poised to attack. The image of Satan as an approaching, physical threat makes the need for "salvation" to appear as much more urgent. Theologically, many forms of Protestantism hold that non-Christians will go to hell upon their deaths, but messages such as this one in Chilton County, Alabama aim to push the physical punishment of non-believers further up in the mind. Hell is not just waiting patiently for the unsaved soul to trickle down, but instead is physically walking the earth, stalking victims to cut down with its blade. The drama of these images and verbal depictions of good and evil are cultural signals meant to reinforce the religious vigor of an entire community. Under this conception of a physical incarnation of both good and evil that humankind is tasked with engaging, all religious traditions become apocalyptic. One's belief in God, acceptance of Jesus, dedication to the gospel, and presence of the church works as an immediately protective armor against very real, embodied threats. And while evil is constantly capable of corrupting the body and mind of the unsaved, it is not just the powers of evil that can seize control of the body. Indeed, the powers of God and the Holy Spirit may also interact powerfully with the physical form, leading the human vessel to have visual and physical experiences beyond the secular realm.

This belief in the physical incarnation of Satan leads many worshippers to seek salvation through a physically embodied God. Critically, the Holy Spirit can directly contact and manipulate the body of the Southern Protestant practitioner in various capacities. Some of these forms of embodied spirituality may occur while the practitioner is alone, while others may occur in group congregational settings. The contact between worshiper and Spirit may be intentionally brought on by the practitioner - this is particularly common in formal church settings - or it may occur spontaneously, apparently on the Spirit's terms. The physical manifestation of Spirit interacting with the body may cause phenomena such as glossolalia,[14] "catching the Spirit" (fits of crying, screaming, and thrashing), or vivid, private visions that are commonly reported in conversion narratives. Additionally, embodied spirituality may be carried out through worship practices such as taking up serpents. All of these forms of embodied spirituality are characteristic of many forms of the Southern Protestant evangelical faith. When observed and studied, these practices unearth a rich form of lived religion and folklore that is indigenous to the American South, and stands apart as regionally unique when compared to American Christianity at large.

Zora Neale Hurston, the first Black female anthropologist, is known in the Religious Studies community for her extensive research on African American folklore. In her essay "Conversions and Visions," Hurston examines the meaningful relationship conceptualized by the Black church between the body's experience with faith, and the salvation or damnation of the practitioner. According to Hurston, within the context of conversions in the Southern Black Protestant church, the key element that connects the physical experience with the spiritual experience is "vision." The experience of the vision can be a touching emotional experience, but it can also be quite a terrifying one. In "Conversions and Visions," a Deacon named Ernest Huffman outlines his experiences leading up to conversion. He testifies that in his youth, all of his friends were coming to join the church and find Jesus, but he took no interest in conversion. Huffman describes the events of his sudden, revelatory vision as follows:

> ...I was walkin in my sins, wallerin in my sins, dat He tetched me wid de tip of His finger and I fell right where I was and laid there for three long days and nights. I layed there racked in pain under sentence of death for my sins. And I walked over hell…wid hell gapped wide open beneath my sin-loaded and slippery feet. And de hell hounds was barkin on my tracks and jus before dey rushed me into hell and judgment I cried: "Lawd, have mercy," and I crossed over safe. But still I wouldn't believe. Then I saw myself hangin over hell by one strand of hair and de flames of fire leapin up a thousand miles to swaller my soul and I cried, "Jesus save my soul and I'll believe…"[15]

Deacon Huffman awoke from this vision to be greeted by a stranger who anointed him with the "oil of salvation."[16] He became a lifelong believer, granted steadfast and permanent faith by his climactic visionary experience.

What makes Deacon Huffman's conversion narrative so powerful is its corporeality. There are several examples of embodied faith in this story that make it so compelling. The first is its spontaneity. In his testimony, Huffman himself makes no attempt to convert to Christianity initially: he has no prior interest in contact with the spiritual, but instead is unapologetically "wallerin in his sins" prior to his conversion. Physical contact occurs between Huffman and the spiritual presence of the Lord when God spontaneously reaches out and touches him with a finger, catapulting him into his intense revelatory experience. This imbues Huffman's conversion story with power, as it gives the impression that any non-believer may be swayed by the power of God without consciously attempting to connect with the Spirit. This paints an image of the Spirit as a mighty force that can manipulate the human body however it pleases. The manipulation of the body is the second, and most impressive element of Huffman's story. It is also the most distinct and common theme in conversion narratives of Southern Protestants. Though Huffman's encounter with the Holy Spirit is described as a "vision" in "Conversions and Visions," his experience is clearly much more than a passive viewing of events. As he is carried through the sequence of events in his vision - falling and lying on the ground for three days and nights in agony, walking over hell with unsteady, slippery feet, being chased by hell hounds, being dangled over hell - Huffman is in real, bodily peril. When Huffman states "I saw myself hangin over hell by one strand of hair and de flames of fire leapin up a thousand miles to swaller my soul," he is recalling a true moment of physical teetering between salvation and eternal damnation.[17] He is saved by his moment of conversion: his verbal confession. Only upon crying out "Jesus save my soul and I'll believe," Huffman's vision ends, and he is delivered to safety.

While Christianity as a whole hinges on the metaphorical spiritual powers of God, Southern Protestants emphasize the literal physical powers of God. There are many ways in which this power can manifest in church practice and lived religion. Conversion experiences may even be considered among the tamer methods through which the spiritual powers of God can manifest, especially compared to certain Pentacostal traditions that will be explored later in this essay. Though they might not be the most controversial of traditional practices found in rural evangelical communities, stories of visions and conversions are often extremely compelling among believers and non-believers alike. Such conversion narratives as these serve Southern Protestant groups dually. First, they illustrate the power of the Holy

Spirit by showcasing its ability to directly manipulate the body. The power of God is not imagined as a distant, amorphous force that eludes humankind on Earth, but rather a true, embodied source of power that may intervene at any time. Secondly, they highlight the weakness of the human form against the spiritual powers of both good and evil. While Deacon Ernest Huffman was touched directly by God in his vision, he was also chased by hell hounds and dangled above the open mouth of hell. His feet were physically weak as they carried him, slipping as he walked, illustrating the feebleness of the unsaved man. This motif of the unsaved mind and body failing is a common one in pre-conversion tales, and it rings true to deliver one message: humankind without salvation is nothing against the powers of hell.

When a worshiper is interested in seeking salvation and contacting the power of God directly, they may open themselves to what is often referred to in evangelical Protestant settings as "the (Holy) Spirit." The Holy Spirit is part of the Trinity that stands at the heart of Protestant worship. According to the Trinity, the three persons of God are considered three separate persona: God the Father, God the Son, and the God the Holy Spirit. What makes the Spirit unique is that it is often thought of as an invisible manifestation of God's power, which may transcend the earthly realm and directly interact with human beings and other secular matters. The Spirit, though rarely physically depicted in Protestant artworks and mythology, is loosely anthropomorphized, as it is an embodied force of God himself. It is likely due to this connection and similarity to the human body that the Spirit is overwhelmingly known to impact the body of the practitioner rather than any inanimate objects or manifesting in an otherwise inhuman form, such as a ray of light, an auditory sound, and so on.

The practitioner may or may not knowingly channel the Spirit during worship, but when the Spirit does make contact with the body and is "caught" by the body, this is a sign of the worshiper's salvation. This sense of the Spirit being "caught" by the body is the reasoning behind the common colloquial term for the phenomenon "catching the Spirit." "Catching the Spirit" has also been described as "Frenzy" by W.E.B. Du Bois,[18] "Shouting" by Zora Neale Hurston,[19] and "praying in the Spirit" or "charismatic prayer" by Etienne Vetö.[20] Because the catching of the Spirit is indicative of a person's salvation, it is highly sacred and very exciting when a practitioner catches the Spirit during a group worship setting. Catching of the Spirit may occur for an individual, or *en masse*, but either way, it is an extreme and potent form of embodied spirituality that exists widespread in Southern Protestant church settings.

There are several signs that indicate that a worshiper has made contact with the Spirit. Oftentimes, the practitioner will display a combination of flailing limbs, cries and screams, falling on the ground, and even violently thrashing. W.E.B Du Bois explains that the Spirit causes "the mad abandon of physical fervor, – the stamping, shrieking, and shouting, the rushing to and fro and wild waving of arms, the weeping and laughing, the vision and the trance."[21] The "vision and trance" referenced here by Du Bois is gesturing to a key element that is often found in narratives of catching the Spirit, which is the fugue state. In this state, the practitioner experiences a kind of loss of self, where they temporarily lose touch with their consciousness and seem to vacate their body, leaving it accessible to the Spirit. A member of the Church of God in Beaufort, South Carolina, described the sensation as follows: "I feel drowsy, as if something were giving away in me and I drift off from my ownself and start to hear, see things, both at the same time. I awake into normality suddenly and reality comes slowly back. Sometimes it takes a few minutes, sometimes hours."[22] For the person experiencing contact with the Spirit, these instances of divine contact can be both inspiring and transformative. The sense of sanctification is strong for worshippers who feel that they have literally, corporeally interacted with the Holy Spirit of the Lord.

Additionally, when catching the Spirit takes place in a group setting that may be witnessed by an entire congregation, these displays may play a role in evangelization. During these interactions between the corporeal body and the Spirit of the Lord, the body becomes a spectacle for those surrounding worshippers who observe the phenomenon secondhand. The message of these spiritual events is centered directly on the body, as it is seen as evidence of God's ability to manipulate the body during worship practice. The physical body of the worshiper becomes a conduit through which the Holy Spirit can exist before the congregation and walk the earth. The felt experience of Jesus' power in the church can be profound, and for many practitioners provides a great sensation of certainty in their faith.

During her anthropological observations of Black Protestant churches throughout the South, Zora Neale Hurston writes extensively about the phenomenon of contacting the power of God through worship. In her essay titled "Shouting," Hurston offers a definition of "catching the Spirit": "It is a sign of special favor from the spirit that it chooses to drive out the individual consciousness temporarily and use the body for its expression."[23] The phenomenon of "catching the Spirit" is common in the South, and though it can be found in various congregations all throughout Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, and beyond, the occurrence can take place in various capacities and contexts. For example, in the Black church, some have speculated that "catching the Spirit" is actually a religious connection between American Protestantism and ancestral African traditions. In the same essay, Hurston asserts that "There can be little doubt that shouting [i.e. 'catching the Spirit'] is a survival of the African 'possession' by the gods."[24] This form of dramatic, physical interaction with the Holy Spirit is an inheritance from African Ancestral traditions, even

when it is observed in homogeneously white Southern Protestant groups today. Du Bois discusses this appropriation as follows: "The Methodists and Baptists of America owe much of their condition to the silent but potent influence of their millions of Negro converts. Especially is this noticeable in the South…where the religion of the poor whites is a plain copy of Negro thought and methods."[25] Inspired by the emotive, embodied form of Christianity practiced by Black communities, many rural whites began to accept elements of physicality and bodily expression into their Protestant practices. It is in this way that embodied spirituality has spread through the South, through Black communities reaching back to ancestral African forms of practice, and white communities mimicking their forms of spiritual physicality. Thus, embodied forms of Protestantism remain distinct to the Southern region of the country.

Though catching the Spirit is a more common, mainstream experience throughout the South, the more isolated, rural communities of Appalachian Protestants practice several different forms of embodied faith that are more distinct to their isolated congregations. There also exists some tension between more expressive and marginal Southern Protestant communities, which are set apart from more mainstream denominations such as Baptists and Methodists. Communities who are generalized here as being more expressive and unorthodox include (but are not limited to) the Pentecostals, the Church of Christ, and the Holiness movement. However, this does not mean that more mainstream congregations do not accept spiritual expression into their worship sessions. For example, Dennis Covington describes some of his earlier encounters with the catching of the Spirit in his memoir, *Salvation on Sand Mountain: Snake Handling and Redemption in Southern Appalachia:*

> I grew up in a Methodist church, but ours must have been an odd kind of Methodism. We were in a small congregation in East Lake, an urban residential neighborhood of Birmingham, and occasionally we'd get a preacher from what we thought of as the sticks, from a place like East Gadsden, a small mill town at the foot of the Appalachians…In the middle of a sermon…Brother Jack Dillard, my favorite, would suddenly be so overcome by the Spirit, he would run down to the piano and start banging on it. He could not, in fact, play the piano, but it didn't seem to matter.[26]

Covington was not a member of one of the small, rural, Pentacostal churches that would usually be associated with catching the Spirit. In fact, he was a Methodist - a highly mainstream denomination of Christianity often stereotypically known as more restrained and sober-minded than its common Southern sibling, the Baptist denomination. According to Pew Research Center's "Religious Landscapes Study," Methodists account for roughly the same percentage of the population for all regions of the U.S., with Methodists from the West, Midwest, Northeast, and South all comprising about 5% of their respective populations.[27] Many American Methodists located outside of the South may be surprised to hear of catching the Spirit occurring within the Methodist church, as widespread Methodism outside of Appalachia is comparably restrained and less corporeal.

There is an element of proximity between the body and the Spirit in the Methodist denomination that is simply manifesting much more literally for Southern and/or Appalachian practitioners. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, placed a major emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit to deliver the practitioner through salvation. In his establishment of Methodism, Wesley upheld that salvation through the Holy Spirit could provide worshippers a perfect love for God and fellow brethren alike. This is evidence that early Methodism had an interest in salvation through the Holy Spirit, and asserted that one could be absolutely and totally assured of their deliverance through their sensation of the Spirit. What this reveals is that denomination is less important than interpretation: both widespread and Appalachian Methodism stemmed from the same Wesleyan origins. Methodism as a whole holds that salvation is a felt occurrence that happens through interaction with the Holy Spirit, it is just that this sensation is interpreted as physical, grand, and spectacular in some Southern, and/or Appalachian communities.[28]

This "odd kind of Methodism," to use the words of Dennis Covington, feels so odd because the practices and faith expressions that Covington is recalling aren't really following in Methodist tradition in the way that much of the rest of the country has embraced it. Instead, groups that favor more embodied forms of Christian expression trace their theological lineage back to Methodism, but have gravitated more to the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification. The idea of sanctification - being "made holy" and receiving a second blessing from God after initial conversion - was jettisoned, for the better part, by mainstream Methodism. However, it remains integral to the theological beliefs and lived religion of more marginal groups in the South.[29] Because these fringe forms of Protestantism read as so distinct from the mainstream practices of the larger America, the religious identity of these groups consistently meld with their regional identity. Indeed, many practitioners in the South who believe in sanctification and practice embodied spirituality may resist denominational labels, meaning that forms of embodied faith like catching the Spirit are considered more characteristic of regional identity than denominational identity. In this way, regional lineage and identity is very closely tied to Southern Protestant religious practices.

One of the most important keystone features of the Southern identity that is represented in these marginal denominations is the African American heritage held by many practitioners. Over many decades of oppression and slavery, enslaved African peoples held onto many cultural and religious practices from their cultural groups which would later blend with American Christianity. According to a National Museums Liverpool article entitled "History of Slavery: The Americas," "Family and community life were sustained away from the gaze of the owner and ensured the survival of languages, songs, music, stories and the practice of religion. These supported a whole culture which resisted the dehumanising effects of slavery."[30] Enslaved individuals held onto many of their religious practices in private circles, even under harsh circumstances of forcible conversion to Christianity by their captors. These religious practices could come from a very wide variety of indigenous African traditions, the majority of which were native to the regions where enslaved peoples were primarily captured: Western and Central Africa. Enslaved peoples may have been Yorùbá, Kongolese, Akan, Igbo, and more, with each regional identity bringing in its own distinct, inherited tradition.[31]

The blending of various African religious traditions and American Christian traditions did occur, but it is worth noting that this cultural cross-contamination did not happen gracefully. It also was not an original factor in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Because enslaved peoples were so dehumanized by their Euro-American oppressors, conversion to Christianity was not commonplace until the Second Great Awakening, which took place during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[32] It was during this time that evangelical Protestantism had reached an all-time high, and there was a sudden vigor towards large-scale conversion, which expanded to include enslaved people. This conversion was not intended to humanize or dignify enslaved people, but rather as a tool to further oppress them, and even justify their enslavement theologically. Prior to the Second Great Awakening, many evangelical Protestants were against slavery due to their fundemental beliefs in the rights of man under God. However, in the late eighteenth and early nineteen centuries, evangelicals began to use the Bible to defend the concept of a Christian hierarchy that bound enslaved people to the control of their masters.[33] This theological defense of slavery became a brainwashing tactic that was favored by slaveholders, and therefore the conversion of enslaved people became popularized with this intent in mind.

However, the mass conversion of Southern enslaved African Americans to Protestantism backfired spectacularly. In fact, the Christian teachings handed down from the white masters led enslaved Black people to question their subjugation. As they learned to read and interpret the Bible, enslaved African Americans repeatedly saw messages about God's salvation of the body and soul alike.[34] The Christian insistence upon breaking physical shackles through spiritual liberation, and rising above earthly oppression through salvation, could not coexist with the state of indignity and servitude inflicted by slavery. Bodily autonomy was a state that went hand-in-hand with spiritual enlightenment, so the Christianization of enslaved people naturally led them to question their bondage. In his article "Slavery and Theology: The Emergence of Black Christian Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century America," Timothy L. Smith argues that "Perhaps only a generation of Christians reared in slavery could have perceived…the social implications of Jesus' doctrine of stewardship[.] Having been subject to persons who presumed to own their bodies and souls, they saw readily that acknowledgment of God's ownership not only certified their right to liberty from lesser masters but also brought dignity and hope to their struggle."[35] According to Smith's interpretation, enslaved people were able to use Christianity as a tool to point towards the hypocrisy of their oppressors, and therefore a tool of liberation. Protestantism taught that God was the creator and therefore owner of the body, and salvation through God meant salvation of the body and spirit in tandem.

There is no doubt that the introduction of Protestant ethics and moral ideologies shaped the concepts of freedom and equal creation under God that played a role in the liberation of enslaved African Americans. Indeed, evangelical Protestantism in particular played a great role in the abolitionist movement in the mid nineteenth century. This connection between Christian theology and freedom of the body is a powerful instance which showcases the embodied form of faith in Southern Protestantism. For enslaved people, Protestantism's concept of the body as sacred came to suggest a promise of freedom, and furthermore, ammunition with which to fight for freedom.

However, in examining the history of Black Protestantism in the South, it is crucial to not misrepresent what this form of Christianity really meant to the African American community. Later in "Slavery and Theology," Smith states "The fact that evangelical Protestantism became the folk religion of Black people in the United States while they were yet slaves seems a sufficient explanation for the moral and rational depth their faith displayed."[36] While it is impossible to argue that evangelical Protestantism was not extremely impactful on the lives of enslaved African American in the nineteenth century, the assertion that evangelical Protestantism is the "folk religion" of Black people in America is lacking nuance. In reality, Black Protestant lived religion and expression has been crucially shaped by African diasporic traditions. Particularly in the realm of the mind and spirit connection, Southern Black Protestantism has been very heavily influenced by ideas of spiritual "possession,"[37] religious visions, and encounters with the Spirit. These forms of embodied spirituality can be found in Southern Protestant congregations stretching across all racial and ethnic

identities today, but they were indeed pioneered and first conceptualized by Black Christian communities whose practices were blended with African diasporic tradition. Because of this, the mind and body connection that defines Southern Protestant folklife is totally inexorable from the African diasporic traditions from which it is derived. Zora Neale Hurston represents this cross-cultural pollination in her essay "Characteristics of Negro Expression," writing that "Negro folklore is not a thing of the past….The Negro is not a Christian really."[38]

While Southern evangelical Protestantism was usefully subverted by enslaved African Americans, many freed communities in the early twentieth century could not forget that it had first been introduced to Black people as a form of violence against their ancestral cultural practices. In order to escape this legacy in Christian faith, some Black Protestants sought the creation of a new religious sphere where embodied worship could be more centralized. This desire led to the formation of the fringe Protestant group(s) identified earlier in this essay: the Seventh Day Church of God. In her essay "Ritualistic Expression from the Lips of the Communicants of the Seventh Day Church of God," Zora Neale Hurston includes various interviews and primary source encounters with members of the Church of God. Based on her assessments of the practices in the church, as well as her numerous conversations and encounters with church members, Hurston is able to conclude that "This Seventh Day Church of God, holiness, is a further or newer step in the sanctified church in the United States. To the Interviewer this church seems to be a protest against the stereotype form of Methodist and Baptist churches among Negroes. It is a revolt against the white man's view of religion which has been so genrally accepted by the literate Negro, and is therefore a version to the more African form of expression."[39] Methodists and Baptists were the most evangelical Protestant groups at the time of African enslavement in America, and therefore would have been the denominations through which most freed enslaved people were introduced to Christianity. The Church of God and similar factions, including Pentecostalism and Holiness groups, has always been a marginal group under the large umbrella of Protestantism. While these fringe groups have historically been uniquely inter-racial, the Church of God began as a Black church through which African diasporic traditions of embodied spirituality could be comfortably blended with traditional American Protestantism. The formation of this church was an act of rebellion against the forms of Protestantism that had first been introduced to African Americans with harmful and exploitative intent. The church itself, complete with its central tenets of bodily contact with the Holy Spirit, was a sacred space for the ultimate freedom and liberation of the once-shackled body.

The historical context of Pentecostal tradition in the South shows how embodied forms of Protestantism are about power: where it comes from, who can have it, and how it is accessed. According to Yvonne Chireau's *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition,* "Pentecostal belief revolved around invisible forces, beings, and powers in the spiritual realm, and like the Conjure practitioners, Pentecostalists viewed unusual events as signs of divine or satanic intervention in the physical realm."[40] The "unusual signs" that Chirea gestures to here are the physical manifestations of Spirit: the embodied spirituality that is observed particularly in the Southern Protestant realm of practice. When the practitioner engages in forms of embodied spirituality - whether this takes the shape of catching the Spirit, glossolalia, or taking up serpents - they are tapping into the cosmic forces of good and evil that, in the theological framework in which they are operating, possess all the power in the universe. "Unusual signs" that appear in the embodied practices of the Protestant South hold all of the power in their order of lived religion, as they are believed to be directly orchestrated by God or Satan.

One of these such "unusual signs," or forms of embodied spirituality, is serpent handling. Serpent handling is perhaps the most sensationalized and contentious ritual practiced by Southern fringe Protestant groups. Identified exclusively as a marginal practice, occurring only in the Church of God, Pentecostal, and Holiness group settings, this practice involves worshipers taking up venomous snakes into their hands in front of the congregation during a formal church service. The practice of serpent handling is predominately popular in Appalachian churches, and it is typically carried out with venomous rattlesnakes, copperheads, and cottonmouths which are caught in the surrounding wild.[41] At its core, the phenomenon of snake handling is a power-based ritual of embodied spirituality. Through the practice of ritually taking up venomous serpents, the practitioner achieves the temporary transformation of their body into a conduit through which the Holy Spirit can manifest. For the practitioner, this transformation is highly intimate. In Dennis Covington's memoir about attending the Church of Jesus with Signs Following in Alabama, *Salvation on Sand Mountain,* he recounts discussing this topic with church member Uncle Ully Lynn: "'What's it like to take up a serpent?' I [meaning Covington] asked him then. 'It's hard to explain,' Uncle Ully had said. 'You're in a prayerful state. You can't have your mind on other things. The Spirit tells you what to do.'"[42]

This "prayerful state" may be compared to the state "drowsiness" described by a member of the Church of God in Beaufort in South Carolina referenced earlier in this paper.[43] However, unlike the visions received by practitioners such as that South Carolina Church of God member, the trancelike state experienced by worshipers during serpent handling is not merely passive. The vision is an experience of embodied spirituality that puts the practitioner in a submissive, passive role. As seen in the earlier examination of vision experiences, these experiences are believed to occur on God's terms. They are often recalled as conversion narratives, meaning that the practitioners experiencing

them are not yet members of the church, and are therefore not initiating engagements with the Spirit intentionally. The vision also often puts one in a precarious or even threatening position, therefore encouraging them to convert - recall Deacon Huffman's vision of himself being dangled over hell by one hair, and chased by hell hounds until he cried out in surrender to Jesus.[44] In contrast to the vision experience - which is often spontaneous, and even unwelcome for some - the process of snake handling is always initiated by the practitioner. They are choosing to forge a channel through which the power of the Spirit can overtake them, momentarily assuming their body, and imbuing the practitioner with power. During visions, the receiver may fear the loss of their lives or their selves. During serpent handling, the momentary loss of self is desired and revelled in by the practitioner. In *Salvation on Sand Mountain*, Covington describes his own experience with this phenomenon when he takes up a rattlesnake during service:

> I felt no fear. The snake seemed to be an extension of myself. And suddenly there seemed to be nothing in the room but me and the snake. Everything else had disappeared….And I could not hear the earsplitting music. The air was silent and still and filled with that strong, even light. And I realized that I, too, was fading into the white. I was losing myself by degrees, like the incredible shrinking man….I knew then why the handlers took up serpents. There is power in the act of disappearing; there is victory in the loss of self.[45]

In this instance, Covington describes the loss of self during a snake handling ritual as a victory. This clearly gestures to the fact that losing oneself to the power of the Lord through ritual is the intent of taking up serpents. In the temporary sacrifice of the self - the flawed, human self that craves the salvation of the Spirit - the practitioner is awarded with the spiritual ecstasy of extraordinary, physical intimacy with the Holy Spirit.

For the handler, the faith showcased by the temporary sacrifice of the physical body becomes a sort of exchange which may earn the temporary imbuement of the Spirit. It is in this way that power moves through this system of ritual: the practitioner gives up the safety of the physical body by taking up the snake, and surrenders their consciousness to the Lord in order to enter a trancelike state. The power felt by the practitioner during these interactions can be intense, and even intoxicating. Dennis Covington reflects on this transmission of power, and what it may mean to the communities that practice the taking up of serpents: "You can never exhaust the power when the Spirit comes down, not even when you take up a snake, not even when you take up a dozen of them. The more faith you expend, the more power is released. It's an inexhaustible, eternally renewable resource. It's the only power some of these people have."[46]

It is clear, however, that power is not the only thing gained by serpent handlers during these dangerous rituals. There is another major result of snake handling services that cannot be overlooked, and that is snake bites. After hearing his explanation of what it is like to enter the trance state of snake handling, Covington proceeds to ask Uncle Ully why some practitioners are bitten during snake handling services. Uncle Ully responds "'In that situation…somebody must have misjudged the Spirit.'"[47] This seems to be a common thread of thought throughout congregations who practice this controversial ritual. In his article "Holy Ghost People: The Snake-Handlers of Southern Appalachia," Steven M. Kane reflects on the common explanations for snake bites that he has heard during his interviews with serpent handlers: "Many snake-handlers interpret complications or death from snake bite as evidence that the victim 'didn't have enough faith' or was 'out of the will of the Lord.' Others see snake bite as an indication that a devotee failed to 'wait on the anointing' and attempted to handle 'in the flesh' rather than 'in the spirit.'"[48] According to the reasoning of those carrying out the ritual of snake handling, wounds and deaths occur because of a disruption in the exchange of power between flesh and Spirit. If the body is not properly primed and sacrificed for the momentary possession by the Spirit, then the body is presently punished for the lack of faith with a snake bite. The practitioner is then allowed a second chance to illustrate their faith in the Lord: refusing medical care. Indeed, many worshipers who fail to successfully take up serpents without experiencing bodily harm will relish in the ability to show their faith in God by trusting in him to heal their snake bites without medical intervention. As one Tennessee snake handler testifies, "I've been bitten twice, but I didn't go to no doctor. I let the best doctor there is - Doctor Jesus - take care of me. Them medical doctors start hacking you up...why, you're more likely to die if you go to them than if you put your trust in Jesus."[49] If a worshiper is unable to fully turn themselves over to the Spirit momentarily during a snake handling ritual, then they must face being forced to turn their body over to the peril of a snake bite after the fact. In this way, snake handling reinforces a central tenet of Christianity, which is the absolute faith in God and Jesus Christ. It also reinforces an unforgiving and precise form of power transferral, where the Spirit must be approached with caution and willing sacrifice in order to provide power to the practitioner rather than punishment.

The ritual of snake handling is not just sacred and empowering for the practitioner handling the serpent, but for the whole of the congregation as well. In the earthly body of the practitioner, the Holy Spirit of God is personified. Beyond this, however, the phenomenon of snake handling allows the Spirit of God to engage in a physical duel with the forces of Satan in front of the very eyes of the congregation. In "Holy Ghost People," Steven M. Kane writes that "According

to some communicants, the snake is a 'visible image of the Devil' or has the 'same evil spirit as the Devil.'"[50] By embodying the Spirit of God and directly engaging with the spirit of the Devil during snake handling, the practitioner may illustrate the eternal, apocalyptic battle between the forces of 'good' and 'evil' that is paramount to Christian theology. For the congregation, this experience can be intensely empowering and transformative on a psychological level. Through this ritual of embodied spirituality, the congregation is able to transform from the mere earthly level to an intermediary level where they are able to gain a closer proximity to God. They may even see that they possess a uniqueness or otherwise special quality in their spirituality that can be compared to characters in the Biblical canon. One of Kane's Tennessee snake handling sources explains this sensation as such: "Some people believe that miracles and signs ended with the Apostles. But if I got the same Holy Ghost as John and Peter, then I ought to be able to do the same things they did. Like heal the sick and cast out devils and handle serpents."[51] If the Holy Spirit may be directly contacted and interacted with by these congregations, and they are able to even go so far as to physically combat the devil through these power systems, then their divine strength is more than apparent.

It is clear that this form of thinking is commonly held by members of marginal Southern Protestant churches. A communicant of Zora Neale Hurston, Senior Bishop R.A.R. Johnson, describes the feeling of proximity to canonical Bible figures during his establishment of the Holy Church of the Living God as follows: "We then began to study the origin of the true church of the Living God. And its dates goes back beyond the flood, - even to the Garden of Eden where God Himself shepherded the church. And in the Holy Church of the Living God, Adam and Eve and their first child were members. So was Enoch who was translated, because he walked with God in perfection. We can prove that Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all prophets, apostles and Jesus Christ were members of this Holy Church."[52] Oftentimes, the ability of the practitioner to experience the direct touch of God through visions, catching the Spirit, and serpent handling, is taken as a direct confirmation of the chosenness and specialness possessed by a congregation. These forms of embodied spirituality are so extremely powerful because they lead people to believe that they are chosen by God, and granted with a form of spiritual power and awareness that dates back to the times of Eden. The physical body of the worshiper becomes a conduit through which the Holy Spirit can exist before the congregation as perfection, as it did in Eden, and walk the earth again, as it had through Jesus.

3. Conclusion

In the American South, Protestantism is marked by a persistent concern with the presence of spiritual powers of good and evil, and how these powers tamper and interact with the physical body. This acute awareness of the physical body as it relates to the apocalyptic battle of good and evil creates a cultural atmosphere in the South that stands apart from that of the rest of the nation. Whether it be the intense fear of the Devil's corruption of the body, or the ecstacy and celebration of the Holy Spirit's contact with the physical self, the presence of embodied spirituality in the South is ubiquitous, particularly in lived religion. Southern Protestant lived religion and religious rituals explore the physical dimensions of faith in a variety of ways, each of which serve the individual practitioner and surrounding congregation on multiple levels. Rituals of embodied spirituality such as visions, catching the Spirit, and serpent handling all allow the practitioner to interact with the Spirit on a corporeal level, instilling evangelicism, ensuring sanctification, and often distilling a sense of "chosenness" or apocalyptic certainty in the mind of the worshiper. By observing Southern Protestant practices of embodied faith and putting them into conversation with the field of religious studies and the history of Christianity in America, it is clear that these specific forms of physical worship are the product of many combining influences. These influences include the American Puritans' embodied worship practices and theological beliefs of Satan's power, Wesleyan influences regarding the process and importance of sanctification, and African diasporic traditions and rituals imported via the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The African traditions carried out by ancestors of enslaved individuals have particularly shaped the religious landscape of the American South, and introduced forms of embodied ritual such as catching the Spirit that have now come to define the religious topography of the region. The conception of the bodily dimensions of good and evil held in the American South is a distinct phenomenon that reveals a rich form of Protestant folklore and worship. Understanding these traditions, rituals, and epistemologies exhibits a new dimension of the American South in both its religious expression and culture. Through the study of embodied spiritual practice in the American South, a new America is unearthed: one which is constantly engaged in a deeply intimate, and physical form of spiritual warfare.

4. Endnotes

1. Glenn Hinson, William Ferris, and Charles Reagan Wilson, *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, Volume 14: *Folklife* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2010), 356.
2. Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious* (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2003), 1.
3. As of 2010, the United States Census Bureau reports that 55% of the Black American population lived in the South. "2010 Census Shows Black Population Has Highest Concentration in the South - 2010 Census - Newsroom - U.S. Census Bureau," United States Census Bureau, May 19, 2016, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010_census/cb11-cn185.html#:~:text=The%20percentage%20of%20the%20black%20alone%20population%20also%20increased%20in,total%20population%20in%20106%20counties.
4. Elizabeth Sarah Reis, *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1999), 4.
5. David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).
6. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment*, 167-168.
7. Samuel S. Hill, *Southern Churches in Crisis Revisited* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2020).
8. Charles R. Wilson, *Baptized in Blood the Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865 - 1920* (Athens, GA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1983).
9. Robert Anthony Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950; Second Edition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).
10. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, xxi.
11. Henry Ansgar Kelly, *The Devil, Demonology and Witchcraft: The Development of Christian Beliefs in Evil Spirits* (New York, NY: Doubleday Company, Inc., 1974), 91.
12. Glenn Hinson, William Ferris, and Charles Reagan Wilson, *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, Volume 14: *Folklife* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2010), 356.
13. Bethany Davis, "'Go To Church Or The Devil Will Get You' Sign Returns to I-65," https://www.wsfa.com, Acces March 30, 2022. https://www.wsfa.com/story/38215348/go-to-church-or-the-devil-will-get-you-sign-back-up-on-i-65/.
14. Commonly referred to as "speaking in tongues."
15. Zora Neale Hurston, *You Don't Know Us Negroes: And Other Essays* (New York, NY: Amistad, 2022), 113-114.
16. Hurston, *You Don't Know Us Negroes*, 114.
17. Hurston, *You Don't Know Us Negroes*, 113-114.
18. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago, IL: A. C. McClurg & Co. 1903).
19. Hurston, *You Don't Know Us Negroes*, 117.
20. Etienne Vetö, "'Praying in the Holy Spirit' Spirituality and Pneumatology," *New Blackfriars 97*, no. 1068 (2016): http://www.jstor.org/stable/24766553, 157.
21. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*.
22. Hurston, *You Don't Know Us Negroes*, 144.
23. Hurston, *You Don't Know Us Negroes*, 117.
24. Hurston, *You Don't Know Us Negroes*, 117.
25. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*.
26. Dennis Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain*: *Snake Handling and Redemption in Southern Appalachia* (Westminster, London, ENG: Penguin, 1995), 8.
27. "Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, September 9, 2020, https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/.
28. "Spectacular" in the sense of display, exhibition, or performance, not necessarily in a striking or aesthetically appealing sense.
29. Once more, the Pentecostals, the Church of Christ, Holiness groups, etc.
30. "The Transatlantic Slave Trade," National Museums Liverpool, accessed March 30, 2022, https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/history-of-slavery/transatlantic-slave-trade.
31. "The Transatlantic Slave Trade," National Museums Liverpool.
32. "Slavery and the Making of America. The Slave Experience: Religion: PBS," The Slave Experience: Religion, PBS, Accessed March 30, 2022,

https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/slavery/experience/religion/history2.html#:~:text=As%20late%20as%201800%20most,of%20enslaved%20men%20and%20women.
33. “Slavery and the Making of America . the Slave Experience: Religion: PBS,” The Slave Experience: Religion, PBS.
34. For example, see 1 Corinthians 3:16-17: “Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.” For more examples, also consider 1 Corinthians 15:44, and Psalm 139:13-18. (Crossway Bibles. 2007. ESV: study Bible : English standard version.)
35. Timothy L. Smith, “Slavery and Theology: The Emergence of Black Christian Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Church History* 41, no. 4 (1972): https://doi.org/10.2307/3163880, 509.
36. Smith, “Slavery and Theology: The Emergence of Black Christian Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century America,” 497.
37. While the term “possession” often has a pejorative connotation in the field of religious studies, it is a term favored by Zora Neale Hurston in her anthropological work, and this is why it is implemented here.
38. Hurston, *You Don't Know Us Negroes*, 89.
39. Hurston, *You Don't Know Us Negroes*, 133.
40. Yvonne P. Chirea, *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 109.
41. Steven M. Kane, “Holy Ghost People: The Snake-Handlers of Southern Appalachia,” *Appalachian Journal,* vol. 1, no. 4 (1974): http://www.jstor.org/stable/40931991, 259.
42. Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain*, 3.
43. Hurston, *You Don't Know Us Negroes*, 144.
44. Hurston, *You Don't Know Us Negroes*, 113-114.
45. Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain*, 169-170.
46. Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain*, 168.
47. Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain*, 3.
48. Steven M. Kane, “Holy Ghost People: The Snake-Handlers of Southern Appalachia,” *Appalachian Journal,* vol. 1, no. 4 (1974): http://www.jstor.org/stable/40931991, 260.
49. Anonymous Tennessee snake handler in Kane, “Holy Ghost People,” 260.
50. Kane, “Holy Ghost People,” 259.
51. Kane, “Holy Ghost People,” 256.
52. Senior Bishop R.A.R. Johnson in Hurston, *You Don't Know Us Negroes,* 138.

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