



Segregation and Spirituality: Rediscovering American Pentecostalism's Biracial Roots Within Binary Traditions

Citation

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Segregation and Spirituality: Rediscovering American Pentecostalism's Biracial Roots within
Binary Traditions

Dennis B Lacy

A Thesis in the Field of Religion
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

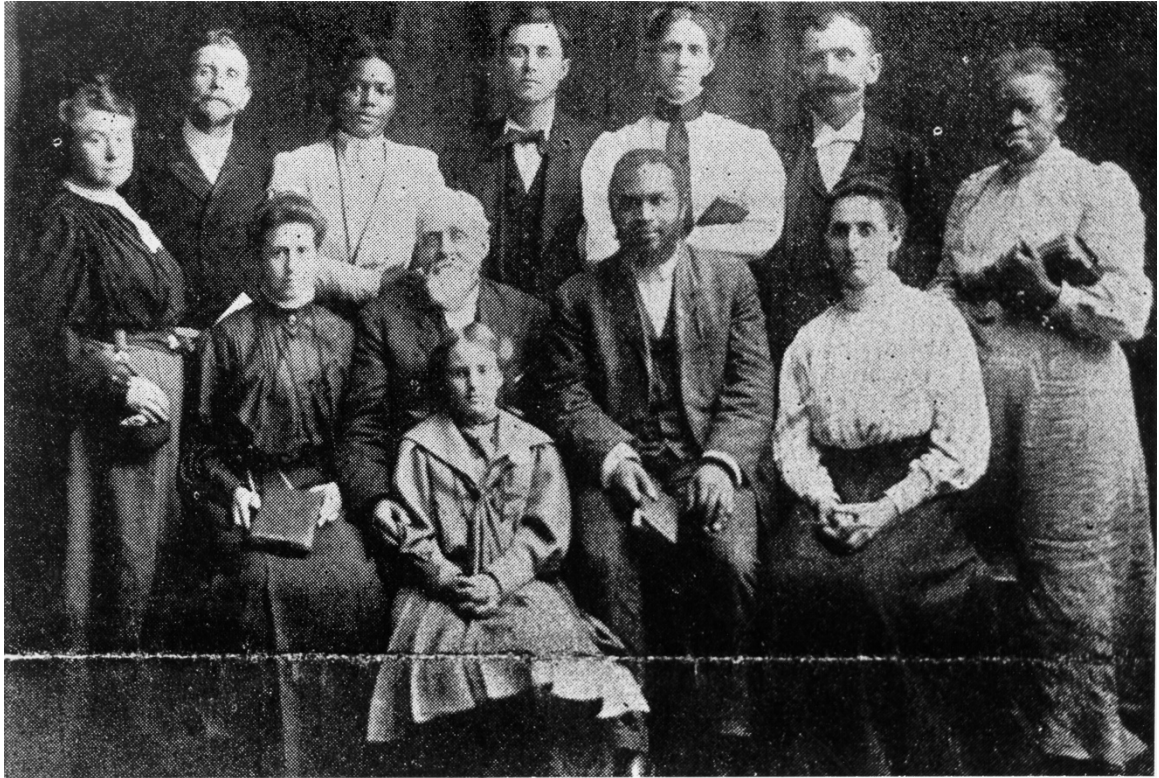
Harvard University

May 2019

Abstract

Accepted and rejected, American Pentecostalism permeates and dominates the global religious scene over the last one hundred years. What is it about this eccentric movement which arouses diametrically polarizing responses? An analysis of the movement's inauspicious beginnings in 1906 at 312 Azusa Street, in the context of the normative racially segregated patterns of religious gatherings of Post Reconstruction American culture, reveals that Pentecostalism's nature contains dual heritages—one European and one African. American Pentecostalism's saga includes the inflammatory practice of race mixing and upsetting the prevailing trend of segregated church attendance. The socially progressive Pentecostal revival evoked mixed feelings of amazement and abhorrence, allure and repulsion; thereby exposing America's desperate need for enclaves of inclusion to release the tightly wound spring of racial tension. The Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, which ignited American Pentecostalism, transcended the binary trend of segregation by fusing European theology and African tradition together to produce a new, racially inclusive phenomenon.

Frontispiece



The Azusa Street Revival's Biracial Leadership Team

Used by permission from Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center

Dedication

*To my wife Stacy,
come what may.*

Acknowledgments

Mere words fall short of conveying the entirety of my appreciation to my support system. First and foremost, I thank my family who sacrificed and supported my dreams of higher education. Stacy, Micaiah, and Caleb are my everything, and I could not be prouder of you all. Dennis, Sue, Lary, and Terri enthusiastically supported this project and my personal growth. Also, many thanks to my academic community for their encouragement throughout this process. Dr. Shoemaker and Dr. Moore's unsurpassed excellence inspired my academic journey. My fellow students, like Mario and Joan, were faithful friends and encouragers consistently. Much appreciation goes to the staff of the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center; including Ruthie, Glenn, and Darrin.

Inexpressible appreciation goes to my day jobs for practicing patience as I completed this work. My enduring appreciation also extends to the Board, Staff, and members of North Highland Church. Thank you is also in order to Ouida, the Board of Directors, and the staff of Global Student Inc. for graciously allowing me to further my education. Without your support, assistance, and grace, this project would have been impossible. Lastly, I thank God for blessing me with the means to accomplish this work. Though I am weak, He is strong.

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Chapter I.

An Introduction to American Pentecostalism

“...no part of the American landscape and very little of the world remained untouched by the revival that emerged from Azusa Street.”

-Yong & Alexander

The Pentecostal movement is among the fastest growing religious movements in the world. Not confined to one single denomination, the Pentecostal message spread interdenominationally and internationally—escalating into a dominant cultural force. According to a Pew research study, the movement, known by many names including Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Renewal movement, totals five-hundred and eighty-four million global adherents (Pew 2011). Early critics quickly dismissed the sect as a fad of religious hysteria; however, Pentecostals now make up twenty-six percent of the world’s Christian population (Pew 2011). Given the global salience of Pentecostalism, rediscovering the movement’s American origins becomes imperative to understanding this sizeable group. This thesis explores the humble beginnings and religious heritages

which combined at 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles, to create a new religious movement called American Pentecostalism. Individuals like Charles Parham and William Seymour, embodying European and African religious genetic-code, both contributed to American Pentecostalism's amalgamated DNA. For many scholars of Pentecostalism, the racially interracial revival at 312 Azusa Street Revival led by William Seymour is the undisputed epicenter of American Pentecostalism. While the movement's branches eventually unfurled around the world, Pentecostalism originally sprouted out from American soil at the turn of the twentieth century. Therefore, adopting a cultural studies approach for understanding American Pentecostalism, including unpacking the racial tensions present within the milieu of the segregated Post Reconstruction Era, is vital to gaining a clear understanding of the movement's racially diverse genesis.

Chapter II.

Background and Literature Review

The historiography of American Pentecostalism is as diverse as the movement itself. Since 1906, each generation of religious scholars has grappled with explaining the success of Pentecostalism and accurately portraying Pentecostal identity. Interestingly enough, throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, different generations studied the origins and progression of Pentecostalism from a different aspect that reflects the culture of their time. These differing perspectives narrowly focus on specific cultural context clues for the secrets behind the success and continuing growth of this diverse movement. Each generation of scholars is motivated by their context to study a particular aspect of the movement. While this narrow focus leads to answers, they represent only a single aspect of the complete picture of Pentecostalism. Each generation of historians that gazed at American Pentecostalism contributed a specific voice. This work aims to add cultural insights to the historical conversation surrounding American Pentecostalism.

Before 1970, most religious historians piously overlooked the movement, which meant initial historical inquiries on Pentecostalism arose from within the religious community. Pentecostal insiders attributed the movement's success to spiritual and providential reasons. These insider works adopted an approach in favor of divine intervention as the explanation for the movement's origins. Early works like *Suddenly from Heaven: A History of the Assemblies of God* revealed in their title the belief in the divine sources of Pentecostalism. One can glean valuable insights from insider

perspectives; however, academic scholars often disregard this approach as ahistorical—lacking a holistic cultural studies approach. Similar early works point to the Divine as the sole source of the movement's creation while neglecting to account for humanity's impact on causality. For the first sixty years of Pentecostalism, insiders were the only group interested in studying the movement. Many religious historians discredited Pentecostalism's salience and predicted its soon demise. However, by the 1970s, the naysayer historians were silenced as a shift emerged in American Pentecostal studies.

Pentecostalism was not dissipating as some historians predicted. Instead, the movement expanded rapidly throughout the US and abroad. The religious insiders were not the only ones who were taking notice of the far-reaching hand of American Pentecostalism. As the movement grew, so did the body of critical scholarship. Religious insiders and historians aligned on the idea that Pentecostalism was a movement worthy of critical study. Historians and academic scholars began to take America Pentecostalism seriously. So, the 1970s brought a shift in scholarship as new voices joined the scholarly conversation. New scholars brought fresh approaches incorporating a cultural studies framework, which resulted in newfound perspectives on the origins of American Pentecostalism. Armed with contemporary analytical tools, historians rediscovered the origins, quick growth, and unique practices of this peculiar people. While the insiders of Pentecostalism pointed to supernatural outpourings of the Holy Spirit as the only influence to explain the origins of the movement, historians in the 1970s studied the origins of the movement and provided a different explanation for Pentecostalism's popularity—namely upward mobility. For the next wave of scholars, Pentecostalism's appeal can be reduced down to simple socioeconomics—dollars, and cents.

Historians in the 1970s looked to economics as the most significant influence on American Pentecostalism. As his book title suggests, Robert Mapes Anderson's work *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of America Pentecostalism* argues that Pentecostalism's earliest followers were destitute, crawling out from the nation's impoverished and economically depressed underbelly (Anderson 113). Anderson blames modernization and American industrialization for creating strife between social classes. America underwent a significant shift from an agrarian to an industrial society during the nineteenth century. Individuals abandoned their family farms and chased the dream of living the luxurious, big-city lifestyle. However, instead of walking on streets of gold, the humble working-class was served up generous helpings of disappointment and social dislocation. While modernity had many advantages, Anderson contends it created grievous class tension. Social pressure forced low-class workers to seek agency through other cultural channels—namely religion. David Edwin Harrell agrees that Pentecostals were poor and primarily motivated by economics and class divide (Harrell 130). Anderson maintains American Pentecostalism instilled a message of hope and social liberation to the disinherited, dislocated, and the disenchanting (Anderson 96). This approach contextualizes Pentecostal belief within the realities of early twentieth-century American culture. For example, theology centered around the second coming of Jesus provided a sense of hope to Americans living in severe poverty, while the practice of speaking in tongues granted a euphoric religious alternative to the anxiety of modern society. For Anderson, the maladjusted, meager, and misplaced members of society gravitated towards the message of Pentecostalism. So, the first generation of historians framed the Pentecostal identity in terms of spiritual “holy-rollers,” and historians like

Anderson and Harrell framed the Pentecostal identity in terms of poverty. In this way, historians moved Pentecostals from the cultist outskirts of society and squarely into the degenerate low-class.

Just a few years later in the 1980s, Grant Wacker wrote a review of Anderson's *Vision of the Disinherited* in the *Religious Studies Review* journal. Wacker praised Anderson's work *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of America Pentecostalism* as comprehensive but simultaneously critiqued the work for its ability to portray Pentecostals as a caricature of poverty. Wacker builds upon Anderson's foundational argument that social class and economic protest were primary contributors to the creation of American Pentecostalism. However, for Wacker, all Pentecostals were not poor, illiterate degenerates. Wacker attributes the growth of the movement as drawing from America's middle class (Wacker 18). Economics and social status were a factor, but for Wacker, "Functional adaptation to strain was only part of the story—and the most obvious part at that. The propulsive force was deeper and murkier. Stunning healings, repeated claims of persons raised from the dead, glossolalie ecstasy, and eschatological visions of every sort were the stuff of daily life, the palpable elements of the really real" (Wacker 20). So, while historians like Anderson focused on economics and class status to explain Pentecostalism origins, historians like Wacker began to study how a Pentecostal milieu interacted with Pentecostal theology. In this generation, historians transform the 2D caricature of the poor Pentecostal into a diverse 3D Pentecostal identity.

As time progressed into the 1990s, the historian's gaze fell upon another unique aspect of American Pentecostalism—theology. Randall Stephens points to scholars like Grant Wacker, Edith Blumhofer, and D. William Faupel who focus on the "restorationist

and millennial roots of the movement” (Stephens 3). Restoration theology highlights the need to return to a better time and place. These historians claim that early Pentecostals rejected modernity and longed to return to a mythical “golden era” of American history. They believed God allowed America to continue down its sinful pathway, simply to expedite the imminent return of Jesus to save his church. Historians in this period point to pre-millennial theology, the second coming of Jesus, as a primary identity marker and a possible reason for growth. End-times theology created an urgency to spread the news quickly. Theology embedded with second coming beliefs significantly increased Pentecostal missionary activity, thereby rapidly expanding the religion’s base. Historians adopting a second-coming approach to American Pentecostalism reject the position that Pentecostals clamored for upward mobility and increased social standing. Instead, pre-millennial theology cultivated an altruistic attitude, salvific in nature, focused on heavenly benefits instead of monetary returns.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, most historians claimed European-based theology was the primary contributor to the spread of Pentecostalism. Historians like James Goff in his work *Fields White Unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism* connect the success of Pentecost to Charles Parham’s theological belief of speaking in tongues as a sign of Holy Spirit Baptism. Goff stands firmly in support of Pentecost’s European heritage when he claims, “Parham, more than Seymour, must be regarded as the founder of the Pentecostal movement. It was Parham who first formulated the theological definition of Pentecostalism by linking tongues with the Holy Spirit baptism” (Goff 10). Vinson Synan’s *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition* places the origins of Pentecost mainly within the Wesleyan-

Holiness belief in personal perfection. For Synan, the focus on Christian sanctification is vital because speaking in tongues was the physical evidence of sanctification. Therefore, the Holiness tenet of sanctification was a type of prerequisite for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and conversely, the baptism was the proof of Christian sanctification. The doctrine and practice reinforced one another. Doctrine became the new battleground for Pentecostal studies, and not all historians agreed with Goff and Synan's approach of granting the origins of Pentecost to European Wesleyan-Holiness doctrine. Anderson points to the Reformed Keswick stream of Pentecostalism as a better representation of Pentecostal tradition.

Keswick theology rejected the Holiness orthodoxy stating sanctification and spirit baptism were one and the same (Anderson 41). This reformed segment of Pentecostal leaders believed in both doctrines, except that sanctification was a continuous life-long process and spirit baptism was a single, spiritual event. Edith Blumhofer challenged the significance of the Wesleyan impact, stating that Reformed and Fundamentalist doctrine had a more significant effect on Pentecostal theology (Stephens 4). These doctrinal ideals continued to support the diverse ways that Pentecostalism had reached so far so quickly.

However, the doctrines of end-times and individual holiness were only a facet for the spread of Pentecostalism. Other historians during the late 1990s chose to focus on the orthopraxy of Pentecostalism instead of the orthodoxy. These historians spent significant study on the exuberant religious ritual of speaking in tongues. Martin Marty concludes the main Pentecostal distinction is not a theological disagreement, but instead a practical distinction of speaking in tongues (Anderson 4). Interestingly, while speaking in tongues is one of the primary characteristics of the movement, some historians contend the

overemphasis on the practice of speaking in tongues was the main reason non-Pentecostal leaders so vehemently opposed the burgeoning movement. Although historians disagree as to which doctrine Pentecostals hold most dear, they have proved that theology played a significant role in the formation and expansion of American Pentecostalism. Historians continue to define Pentecostal identity, and this new aspect focused on theology and doctrine truly transforms that initial image of an uncivilized fanatic on the fringes of society, to one of a spiritually alive community with formalized theology.

In the twenty-first century, historians continue to study the growing movement and explain Pentecostalism's success. This most recent wave of scholarship embraced a cultural studies approach to studying American Pentecostalism, which has shifted the focus on the racial integration within Pentecostalism's origins. Interestingly, historians disagree on the impact and influence racial integration played in the formation of American Pentecostalism. A band of historians champions Pentecostalism's interracial heritage, while others quietly downplay the significance of its ethnic unity, and still, others believe racism was alive and well in Pentecost. However, all of these voices do at least acknowledge that there is a significant part that racial and cultural diversity played in Pentecostalism's beginnings.

The long reach of racial segregation which followed the Reconstruction era of American history stretched its arms into every facet of American life. Although the 13th Amendment abolished slavery, racism was normative throughout nineteenth-century America. After the Civil War, racial tensions soared as new ideologies surfaced which challenged established societal norms. During this transitional period in American history, many groups sought to redefine American culture in their terms. Unfortunately,

American culture felt the heavy weight of segregation nationwide. Race mixing, miscegenation, and interracial public gatherings were all frowned upon; and in some places in America, illegal. Racial imbalance existed in all aspects of early twentieth-century life—and church was no exception to the rule. Organized church services followed binary patterns of segregation; whites worshiped with whites and blacks worshiped with blacks. In contrast, William J Seymour’s Azusa Street Revival in 1906 stands as a monumental anomaly, resisting the binary trend toward segregated worship trends; drawing together descendants from both European and African heritages. Focusing on American Pentecostalism’s biracial roots and inclusive meetings opens new avenues to study; but this lens also illuminates shameful aspects of the movement’s historiography. Drilling down to expose the racial tensions of Post-Reconstruction segregation helps historians analyze the impact segregated society had on the interracial meeting at Azusa Street, and vice versa.

Recently, a new batch of historians who adopt a cultural studies perspective believes Pentecostalism’s achievements are credited to its ability to exist as a counterculture movement—breaking the segregated norms of the day. Randall Stephen in his detailed historiography of Pentecostalism reveals that “A few historians of Pentecostalism trace the movement’s success to its racial progressiveness” (Stephens 5). While previous scholars, like Anderson, argued Pentecostalism attracted mainly lower class citizens, modern historians claim it was specifically the black community that readily accepted and propagated Pentecostalism. In *Afro-Pentecostalism*, Yong and Alexander wrote that “While it is reductionistic to think that the earliest Afro-Pentecostals derived homogeneously from the lower classes, it is also undeniable that

Pentecostalism made its most substantive inroads among this social stratum of the black community” (Yong and Alexander 6). Yong and Alexander continue by pointing to the Azusa Street Revival as the epicenter of the interracial religious movement:

“From out of these late nineteenth-century Holiness movements, it is now widely accepted that blacks made up a substantial portion of William Seymour’s Azusa Street congregation, which fueled the spread of the Pentecostal movement across the country beginning in 1906. Once their tongues were touched by the fires of Azusa Street, blacks left Los Angeles, serving with others of every race and culture as missionaries at home and abroad, to take the message of the Spirit being poured out on them in a new way. The movement was decidedly multiracial, and black Pentecostals founded churches and denominations—some of them interracially constituted—which at first dotted the West and the South, where they were largely confined. Then they moved with the Great Migration to major urban centers in the North and East and to every town and hamlet in between, establishing predominantly black congregations. Within twenty years, no part of the American landscape and very little of the world remained untouched by the revival that emerged from Azusa Street” (Yong & Alexander 2).

The theme of Pentecostalism’s cultural diversity continues as historian Cecil M. Robeck in his work *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* notes, “the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the black and the white, male and female” attended Seymour’s meetings (Robeck 1). Frank Bartleman in his eyewitness account *How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles: The Story behind the Azusa Street Revival* provides first-hand verification of Pentecost’s interracial worship services. Bartleman famously touted the color line was washed away at Azusa Street (Bartleman 55). Citing eyewitnesses like Bartleman and others which echo the biracial nature of

Azusa, historians are provided a new lens to interpret American Pentecostalism—as a social protest against the segregated social norms of the early twentieth century.

As historian's acknowledgment of American Pentecostalism's racial integration increases, so does the inquiry into the salience of African and Slave religion within the movement. "One of the most durable and adaptable constituents of the slave culture, linking African past with American present, was his religion" (Robateau 4). However, African Slave religion is not static, as it evolved and transformed when African roots were planted in American soil. Some historians go as far to state that to understand Black religion in the 20th century thoroughly, you must study Pentecostalism (Hardy 131). These historians believe that Pentecostalism was birthed "during a period in the United States marked by the expansion of de jure Jim Crow segregation, Azusa Street represented a remarkable—even miraculous—period of religious racial integration that is quite unique in American history" (Yong & Alexander 65).

However, not all historians agree that Azusa Street, and the origins of Pentecost, were characterized by remarkable levels of harmonious interracial unity. Some modern scholars believe early scribes of America Pentecostalism refused to give credence to Pentecost's African influence. Randall Stephens points to historians Leonard Lovett and Ian McRobert who claim racial imbalance throughout Pentecost's historiography. Lovett argues historians have overlooked the movement's black roots, while MacRobert claims historians deemphasized the role black leadership played at Azusa and ignored African themes represented in early Pentecostal worship (Stephens 6). Other historians disagree, while admitting the services at Azusa Street displayed signs of racial integration, they claim the unity and racial integration has been overly exaggerated. Edith Blumhofer

dismisses the myth of a unified Azusa Street and Yong and Alexander added that “Although, as scholars like Iain MacRobert have documented, this period of integration was under constant assault and ultimately gave way to the formation of racially separated but nearly theologically identical Pentecostal confederations and denominations” (Yong & Alexander 65). Far from having shared such a “common sectarian, egalitarian ethos,” Joe Creech argues that “Pentecostalism arose from multiple pockets of revival that retained their pre-existing institutional structures, theological tendencies, and social dynamics,” (Yong & Alexander 66). Still, other historians contended racial integration was a fleeting characteristic of Azusa Street which was unsustainable outside of 312 Azusa Street. The discussion surrounding American Pentecostalism’s interracial heritage sparks a variety of debates and polarizing viewpoints which can be likened only to the diversity of those who attended Seymour's meetings at 312 Azusa Street.

Unphased by a historical interpretation which downplayed Azusa’s interracial nature and credited Pentecost’s success to its European roots, the stream of scholars assessing Pentecostalism’s African heritage surged forward. George Simpson in his work *Black Pentecostalism in the United States* speaks to this perspective by adding,

“The Pentecostal Revival has been called a contribution from the black community to the white one. Contrary to a declaration at the beginning of the revival, the movement divided between 1908 and 1914 into a black part and a white part. Most black denominations, however, included some white members and some of the white groups retained a few black members. The reasons for this separation have never been clearly identified, but Hollenweger attributes the segregation largely to the criticism by the traditional white denominations of Pentecostalism humble black beginnings rather than merely to prejudice on the part of the white Pentecostals” (Simpson 206).

In their seminal work *Afro-Pentecostalism*, Yong and Alexander state the black “segment of Pentecostalism has not received the kind of critical attention it has deserved. As a central contributor to historic Pentecostalism and as one of the fastest growing segments of the Black Church, the African American Pentecostal movement increasingly clamors for scholarly assessment” (Yong & Alexander 1). In *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism* Estrela Alexander argues the roots of Pentecostalism lie in “African spirituality with its beliefs in a supreme being, in the sacredness of creation, in the supernatural, in rituals of life and in ancestor veneration” (Alexander 7). She continues that negro spirituality or “slave religion” of the antebellum era focused on African rituals like “trances, visions, Spirit possession and the holy dance” (Alexander 7). Some Pentecostal historians concentrate on the white Holiness origins of Pentecost, championing figures like Charles Parham while virtually ignoring contributions made by African Americans. Alexander, however, follows in Anderson's path of placing William Seymour, the chunky, black, Southern preacher from Louisiana, as the proper founder of Pentecostalism (Alexander 8).

However, there are also historians who believe race played a negative role within the Pentecostal community. In his work, “Assessing the Roots of the Pentecostalism: A Historiographic Essay,” Randall Stephens identifies that Iain MacRobert contends race was the driving force behind major schisms in the Pentecostal movement (Stephens 6). MacRobert asserts denominations like the Apostolic Faith Union and the Assemblies of God developed out of white racism. He believes the founders of these predominantly white denominations ultimately turned their backs on Pentecostalism’s interracial origins and divided the movement along racial lines. Historians like MacRoberts believe the

majority of historians have focused their scholarship on either the socio-economic pressures or theological beliefs of Pentecostalism—neglecting the impact the black community played on the origins of Pentecost (Stephens 8). Even though a small handful of historical works recently surfaced to account for the African American influence on American Pentecostalism, Stephens believes that “As of yet, however, the amount of scholarship is not equal to the movement’s numeric strength. Pentecostalism’s mass appeal should challenge historians to look deeper into the movement’s distant past” (Stephens 8).

To summarize, each generation of scholars spoke with a distinct voice as they analyzed the origins and success of American Pentecostalism. Each generation used the context clues of the time-period they were living to search for findings related to the movement’s appeal. Each step in the historiography, scholars attempted to sketch a portrait of a Pentecostal. The first images portrayed were that of a social outcast and degenerate. Each future incarnation rose in social stature and dignity as the portrait of a Pentecostal got “cleaned up.” The Pentecostal image shifted from mainly poor black folk to include European-descends, mostly sophisticated whites. Over the last hundred years, historians battled over ascribing Pentecost’s origins to either a European or African heritage. However, instead of homogenously esteeming the movement’s success to one lineage, a more inclusive method adopts a dual heritage approach to better analyze the diversity within the movement. Therefore, this thesis will closely examine the pre-Azusa European and African heritages which merged to create American Pentecostalism. This study will challenge the historians who downplay the significance of ethnic diversity within Pentecost and add to the current cultural studies conversation. This project will not

be the final chapter on America Pentecostalism, but instead a continuance of the historiography and the ever-elusive quest to explain and portray this diverse group of people.

Chapter III.

Birds of a Feather: Post-Reconstruction Era Segregation

“I do not imagine that the white and black race will ever live in any country upon an equal footing. But I believe the difficulty to be still greater in the United States than elsewhere. An isolated individual may surmount the prejudices of religion, of his country, or of his race, and if this individual is a king he may effect surprising changes in society; but a whole people cannot rise, as it were, above itself. A despot who should subject the Americans and their former slaves to the same yoke, might perhaps succeed in commingling their races, but as long as the American democracy remains at the head of affairs no one will undertake so difficult a task; and it may be foreseen that the freer the white population of the United States becomes, the more isolated will it remain.”

-Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1835

“Birds of a feather will flock together.”

-The Dictionarie in Spanish and English, 1599

Layers of vehemently rooted racism in America revealed itself after the Civil War. The emancipation of the slaves, although positive progress for U.S. legislation, unearthed deep-seated fear of the “other,” further dividing our nation into a dark era of segregation. In this chapter, we carefully examine the tense time period when American society transitioned from slavery into segregation. In the hot-bed of cultural tension between whites and blacks, American Pentecostalism emerged. The American church shall serve as the focal lens we gaze through to study race relations, thereby providing a

solid context, as the church was a cultural intersection of American society. This chapter will revisit the often-studied race relations between blacks and whites. However, this study will reveal the commonly overlooked underbelly of America's racial hostility—intolerance of race mixing. Prejudice was not merely reserved for individuals of different races; instead, distaste peaked for those of mixed heritages. Post-Reconstruction milieu affirmed a zero-tolerance policy on race mixing, especially within the church.

As it turns out, *E Pluribus Unum* is easier to philosophize about than to translate into a cohesive societal structure. Generally speaking, Americans struggle to combine the ideals of diversity and unity along racial lines. Racial lines in America are not thinly drawn, and instead, boldly reveal themselves in unique ways throughout American history. In his book *Divided by Faith*, Michael Emerson asserts that “race is intimately tied to the American experience” (Emerson 6). The lines between race according to the journal article by Brooks and Manza which studied multiple social cleavages in America—including class, gender, religion, and race from 1960 to 1990—found that the most pronounced social cleavage resides along the white-black racial divide (Brooks and Manza 937). The Swedish researcher Gunner Mydal, observing America's white-black divide, named race as the most prominent “American dilemma” (Mydall 378). Within each period of American history, we find citizens who struggle to craft a culture where the values of freedom, independence, individualism, privacy, and liberty equally appropriate to whites and blacks. To fully understand the racially divided milieu into which American Pentecostalism was born, we must closely examine the racial structures which existed before the Post-Reconstruction era.

Michael Emerson provides a thorough study of a racialized America as he gazes through the lens of race across the timeline of America. Prior to 1770, most Americans believed, “black slaves were less than fully human, did not possess souls, and were incapable of learning” (Emerson 22). Regrettably, religion did not affect this inhumane perspective of blacks as many Anglo-Christians believed that blacks were less than human, and slavery was a necessary part of society. One clergyman went as far as to say that, “To live in Virginia without slaves is morally impossible” (Emerson 22). This thought pattern bolstered the view that slavery was an acceptable and an integral cog in American society. However, as more and more Africans arrived in the American colonies and the black slave population began rapidly expanding, whites began to view the slaves differently in the coming years.

The first half of the 18th century brought rapid growth within America, and this growth also produced an explosion in the slave population. By 1750, around 20 percent of the American population was of African descent (Emerson 22). Before that time, blacks accounted for an insignificant percentage of the American people. Their minimal numbers reinforced the behavior that marginalized and dehumanized slaves. However, with their numbers ever increasing, many Americans began to rethink their stance, and the perspective on slavery began to change. Christians began to call for the salvation of the slaves. Cotton Mather, a Congregational minister from New England who advocated Christianization of slaves, said “How canst thou Love they Negro, and be willing to see him ly under the Rage of Sin, and the Wrath of God?” (Emerson 23). Like Mather, some clergymen of the time challenged Americans, who were overwhelmingly Christian, to not shrink from their Christian duty to evangelize the lost. From Mather’s perspective, the

African slaves in America needed spiritual and social salvation — divine restoration and civic equality.

Sadly, not all Christians had such altruistic intentions as they supported the cause to evangelize slaves. Some clergy did not view spiritual and social equality hand in hand. Rather, some clergy feared revolt and utilized the tool of baptism to reinforce, empathize, and spiritualize social order. A prime example of offering salvation to reinforce social order is Francis LeJau's baptismal vow for slaves, which reads:

“You declare in the presence of God and before this congregation that you do not ask for the holy baptism out of any design to free yourself from the Duty and Obedience you owe to your Master while you live, but merely for the good of Your soul and to partake of the Graces and Blessings promised to the Members of the Church of Jesus Christ” (Emerson 24).

Regardless of white intentions to evangelize the African slave population, one result was apparent — blacks began attending white church. This was a monumental shift in religions worship patterns. George Whitefield, one of the most prominent figures in America's Great Awakening, conducted revivals and preached to both blacks and whites. Whitefield found favor from blacks in his revival meetings recounting the night “near fitty negros came to give me thanks for what God has done to their souls” (Emerson 26). Slaves found America's Spiritual Awakening appealing because revival services from clergyman like Whitefield were similar to those religious practices in African religion. This new strain of Protestantism, with a strong emphasis on evangelism, passionate revival services, and its stress of the spiritual over the corporal, was highly attractive to those from African descent. This awakening caused a cosmic shift in American church history, as predominantly white Protestant churches began attracting black congregants. For the first time in a young nation's history, the racial lines dividing church attendance

began to be challenged as “Negros began entering the church in much larger and accelerating numbers” (Emerson 26).

Surprisingly, whites and blacks mixed more in Southern culture as compared to their Northern counterparts. In the Southland, “black and white co-worshippers heard the same sermon, were baptized into communion together, and upon death were buried together in the same cemeteries” (Emerson 36). Salvation equally distributed across racial lines, but total social equality and civil liberty reserved themselves for white Americans. So, while whites and blacks worshiped in the same church, they were currently not sitting on equal pews. One former slave recounted her experience worshipping together with the whites as she said:

“Us “Niggers” has our meetin’ in de white fo’ks Baptist church in de town o’ Tuskegee. Dere’s a place up in de loft, dere now dat dey built fer de “Nigger” slaves to ‘tend church wid de white fo’ks. White preacher he preached to de white fo’ks n’ when he git ‘thu wid dem he preached some to de “Niggers.” Tell em to mind dere master and behave dey self an’ dey’ll go to hebben when dey die” (Emerson 36).

So, while these “white birds” and “black birds” might have flocked together in church, it was clear that “the birds” still noticed the color of each other’s feathers. The acceptable social pecking order remained well established within the context of the church. Whites and blacks mixed, but they were not equal. The social norm of slavery stayed steady for the next hundred years until abolition and the Civil War permanently altered the normative laws of America.

The conclusion of the Civil War and subsequent adoption of the 13th Amendment, which officially abolished slavery, sparked a new era in American history called Reconstruction and lasted from 1865 to 1877. During this time, “attempts were

made to redress the inequities of slavery and its political, social, and economic legacy and to solve the problems arising from the readmission to the Union of the 11 states that had seceded at or before the outbreak of war” (Forner). The challenge of unifying a nation divided was Northerners and Southerners had radically different visions of a good society. This difference of views meant the Reconstruction Era was ultimately one epic power struggle which encircled interracial democracy.

Many Americans answered the question of what America should do with 4 million freed slaves very differently. The President credited with Emancipating the slaves, Mr. Abraham Lincoln, had different solutions on how America should treat this freed people group. One solution included deportation, which, for financial reasons, was not considered viable. Lincoln asked Ben Butler, Massachusetts politician and former Union general, to calculate the logistics of deporting the freed slaves back to Africa. Butler reported:

“Mr. President, I have gone carefully over my calculations as to the power of the country to export the Negroes of the South and I assure you that, using all your naval vessels and all the merchant marine fit to cross the seas with safety, it will be impossible for you to transport to the nearest place...half as fast as Negro children will be born here” (Emerson 37).

America was conflicted. Does equality for the slaves mean relocation? If relocation was not an option, how does racial equality translate into a radicalized society? The South was familiar with a racially mixed society and found social equilibrium in slavery and civil inequality. As Southerners realized the racial equality battle had been lost, their tactics changed, and a new solution arose. A mixed and unequal society was no longer legal, so many Southern states adopted laws that guaranteed separate but equal rights to its citizens. The North forced racial equality across the nation, but the South countered

with legal racial segregation. Thus, a new era, Post-Reconstruction began with racial segregation as the new social norm. It was in this socially explosive and highly segregated milieu that American Pentecostalism was born.

Jim Crow segregation laws did not spring up overnight, but instead developed as America's aristocrats struggled for decades to discover the new social norm in the wake of the 13th Amendment. Southern states, like the agrarian South Carolina, perpetuated their racial ideology through restricting employment of freed black men to agricultural farming. Other states followed suit, enacting restrictive laws targeting freed slaves. These laws were commonly known as the Black Codes. The Black Codes of 1865 were focused on forced labor laws in an attempt to corral the newly freed slaves back to the fields by the rule of law (Wilson 463). The Black Codes legitimacy was significantly challenged in 1875, and reinforced during the 1883 Civil Rights Cases of the Supreme Court. In *History*, the Journal of the Historical Association, Stephen Robinson wrote:

“In 1883, the majority opinion – read by Justice Joseph P. Bradley – ruled that Congress only had power under the Fourteenth Amendment to protect citizens from discriminating acts carried out by states, not acts carried out by individuals. The first and second sections of the 1875 act, which gave Congress the power to protect all citizens from discriminatory acts on public accommodations, was therefore declared null and void. Furthermore, the majority ruling declared that barring an individual from equal enjoyment of a public accommodation, such as a restaurant, did not confer any badge of inferiority or servitude on that person” (Robinson 228).

Many abolitionists and freed blacks lamented over the 1883 Supreme Court decision. For many, America was turning a blind eye to the racial discrimination which

lay at the foundation of The Black Codes. Robinson credits Frederick Douglass as accurately vocalizing African American's deep sense of betrayal towards the 1883 ruling. Douglas said, "We have been, as a class, grievously wounded, wounded in the house of our friends, and this wound is too deep and too painful for ordinary measured speech" (Robinson 229). The 1883 case not only caused immediate disappointment, but many feared the implications and impact of these rulings on blacks, especially Southern blacks. The *Cleveland Gazette* eerily prophesied that "In the South, it [the decision] will make matters worse in every way, if such a thing be possible. It is there our people will feel the full weight of this decision, because the barriers protecting the freedmen there from some of the most damnable and humiliating phases of persecution are thrown down. There every white can carry social ostracism to any extent without fear of law" (Robinson 229). Ironically, the law became the tool for whites to legitimize social ostracization and segregation. In a drastic effort to retain dominance in society, whites manufactured racially discriminatory laws aimed at blacks. Whites defended their political power by creating voting restrictions like poll taxes and grandfather clauses to restrict blacks from voting. Whites created farming alliances to ensure lower class whites job security and preserve economic power. Whites enacted railway and streetcar accommodations which further segregated America based on race due to social elitism. Then, in 1896, the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court case reinforced America's discriminatory laws.

Mark Golub discusses the landmark *Plessy v. Ferguson* case in the *Law & Society Review*. In his work, Golub confirms the well-known discriminatory assumptions related to the court case, but he also uncovers a less examined truth concerning white's intolerance for racial mixing and racial ambiguity. Golub says:

“The Supreme Court’s decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) is infamous for its doctrine of “separate but equal,” which gave constitutional legitimacy to Jim Crow segregation laws. What is less-known about the case is that the appellant Homer Plessy was, by all appearances, a white man. In the language of the Court, his “one-eighth African blood” was “not discernible in him.” The existence of growing interracial populations in the nineteenth century created difficulties for legislation designed to enforce the separation of the races. Courts were increasingly called upon to determine the racial identity of particular individuals. Seen as a judicial response to racial ambiguity, *Plessy* demonstrates the law’s role not only in the treatment of racial groups, but also in the construction and maintenance of racial categories” (Golub 563).

On the base level, *Plessy v. Ferguson* solidified the structural violence associated with segregation. On a more complex level, *Plessy v. Ferguson* perpetuated the cycle of forcing Americans to fit within two narrow racial categories—white and black. This overly simplistic approach made no accommodation for mixed-race individuals, and instead rejected the complexities associated with interracial individuals, merely categorizing them as “black.” This binary perspective disenfranchised those of mixed races, causing them to identify with one side of their heritage solely. Whites seemed to be personally offended that mixed people attempted to identify with their group. So, while *Plessy v. Ferguson* made the phrase “separate but equal” infamous, upon more in-depth inspection, the ruling exposes the noxious underbelly of how disgusted white Americans were at mixed individuals attempting to gallivant as white citizens. White intolerance of racial mixing was not limited to the Southland. Instead, racial mixing would become a lightning rod of controversy across the US, including at Pentecostalism’s early Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, California.

One of the great misnomers is that because slavery primarily existed in the South, Jim Crow's racist arms only stretched as far as the Mason-Dixon line. Unfortunately, Emerson points out that by the turn of the nineteenth century, "white northerner's thinking on race was essentially that of the white southern" (Emerson 39). The freed blacks who managed to migrate out of the Southland, expected to traverse outside the territory of racially based Jim Crow laws. Sadly, many blacks who fled West found these idealistic lands only "half-free" (Flamming 2). In his work, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America*, Douglas Flamming describes the racial conditions in Los Angeles as, "far better there than in the South, and preferable also to what most blacks discovered in the cities of the North. Opportunities for economic advancement, home ownership, and social freedom were readily apparent, but so too were patterns of everyday racism that blocked African Americans every step of the way" (Flamming 2). Many Jim Crow laws from Southern states focused on restricting blacks to the agricultural labor force, but out West, racist laws primarily focused on restricting interracial marriage. These laws were known as miscegenation laws and restricted mixing or blending of races through marriage or breeding. Robert Hurwitz, in his article "Constitutional Law: Equal Protection of the Laws: California Anti-Miscegenation Laws Declared Unconstitutional" in the *California Law Review*, described the typical response of a Los Angeles County Cleric when faced with the request to grant an interracial marriage. County Clerk's quickly denied interracial marriage license requests based on the state statute Civil Code 69 which read, "no license may be issued authorizing the marriage of a white person with a Negro, mulatto, Mongolian, or member of the Malay race" (Hurwitz 122). Californians were undoubtedly concerned with Anglos mixing with

Asians; however, Negro is placed first and foremost on their list of deplorable races found unacceptable to crossbreed with whites. During Post-Reconstruction, many white Americans rejected the notion of black equality and vivaciously worked to ensure that racial mixing was not only illegal—it was the ultimate social taboo. In one sense, blacks were freed from slavery, but like Flemming states, this freedom was only partially realized (Flemming 2). The yolk of slavery had been broken, only for black Americans to feel the debilitating yolk of segregation.

Separating religion from culture is nearly impossible. Diane Moore from Harvard Divinity School's Religious Literacy Project asserts that religion firmly embeds itself within a culture (Moore 3). Since religion and culture are interconnected, they affect one another and ultimately attempt to align. Therefore, we find the treatment of blacks during the Post-Reconstruction Era similar in the church as other area of culture. Society only granted blacks partial freedom, and the situation was no different in the church. Blacks did not have equal participation and opportunity within the American church (Emerson 39). Almost immediately after the Civil War, frustrated African Americans left their "white" churches in droves to form their own "black" churches. Therefore, as the American culture began to divide across racial lines, the segregation of the American church followed suit. Emerson says disheartened blacks "move toward racially separate churches was not a matter of doctrinal disagreement, but a protest against unequal and restrictive treatment" from within the church (Emerson 39). The church was not an exception to the segregated of society; instead, "segregated churches were the bellwether to the segregation in other spheres of life" (Emerson 40).

Many whites did not fight this voluntary segregation, and instead perceived the black exodus of the American Protestant church as a divine act of God. A white churchman from Virginia claimed, “no Christian ought to allow his conscience to be disturbed by the thought that he violates the unity of the Church by insisting on an independent organization for the colored race. The distinctions are drawn by God himself” (Emerson 39). The segregation of America had begun, and the church complied with an “Amen!” A tremendous racial schism began as whites and blacks who had worshiped together in the same church for over a century quickly parted ways. Whites and blacks went from worshiping on separate pews to worshiping in separate churches (Emerson 20).

The dream of a racial integrated church where whites and blacks knelt at the same altar seemed impossible in America. A vast canyon of social segregation divided the descendants of Europe from the descendants of Africa. Facing an uncrossable racial hiatus, the pioneers of American Pentecostalism believed a spiritual solution existed for America’s social problems. Albert Raboteau in his work, *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South*, beautifully summarizes a revival’s ability to temporarily suspend cultural trappings:

“Religion, especially the revivalistic, inward, experiential oriented religion to which many slaves and masters adhered had an egalitarian tendency which occasionally led to moments of genuine religious mutuality, whereby blacks and whites preached to, prayed for, and converted each other in situations where the status of master and slave was, at least for the moment, suspended. In the fervor of religious worship, master and slave, white and black, could be found sharing a common event, profession a common faith and experiencing a common ecstasy” (Raboteau 314).

Chapter IV.

American Pentecostalism's European Heritage

Pentecostalism continually fields questions surrounding the origin, beginnings, and lineage of the denomination. Unlike other religious movements, Pentecostalism is not a homogeneous genetic monolith, but instead a convergence of diverse DNA from multiple origins. This work argues that Pentecostalism was birthed when two principal streams of influence converged; one stream originating in Europe and the other from Africa. Similar to human offspring who receive half of each of their chromosomes from a father and a mother, American Pentecostalism has two primary heritages. Historiography of the movement reveals historians polarize into two campuses when they study the movement; their work is either European centric or African centric. However, the racial diversity witnessed at the Azusa Street Revival forces the scholarship of Pentecostalism to dive into the complexities of the results of mixing distinct heritages. While both influences exist, a complete history of Pentecostalism must include a study of both heritages. Furthermore, this study of a blended religious movement within the milieu of Post-Reconstruction segregation will reveal many complex tensions. This chapter will focus on Pentecostalism's European heritage. This study is by no means exhaustive, yet we will connect the historical dots between the Azusa Street Revival and European's Christianity. This chapter will dive deep into American Revivalism, the Second Great Awakening, Holiness Theology, and the infamous Charles Fox Parham.

Holiness Theology

Pentecostalism's roots reach far into Europe, with a foundation in European Christianity. Vinson Synan, an academic authority on the Holiness Movement, states in the work *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* that Pentecostalism is “basically a modified “second blessing” Methodist spirituality that was pioneered by John Wesley and passed down to his followers in the holiness movement” (Synan xi). John Wesley, a clergyman in the Church of England, was impacted by the ministry of European Moravians and began to weave together religious beliefs around Christian piety and holiness. Early Holiness followers found salvation through “a crisis experience of conversion” and “placed a great emphasis on this conscious religious experience” (Synan 2). Theology was grounded as a stark contrast to the extreme Calvinism which dominated Europe. Wesley was also influenced by Roman Catholic and Anglican mystic traditions by works like William Law's *Treatise on Christian Perfection* and *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (Synan 3).

By 1740, Wesley's holiness theology was codified into two experiential pillars: the first, conversion; and second, Christian perfection through holy living (Synan 6). These theological terms are still used today and are respectively called justification and sanctification. Justification, also called salvation, is generally understood by Christian scholars as God's blessing of grace. The second term sanctification, though widely debated, generally describes the concept of a Christian's individual purity. While Wesley never advocated a “sinless perfection,” his Holiness theology was focused around a “second blessing” (Synan 6). Wesleyan Holiness theology states God's saving grace was the initial blessing to forgive sins of the past, but humanity needed a second blessing to

keep them away from the present and future sin. Wesley believed those who were saved through the first blessing of grace still possessed a “residue of sin within” which needed attention (Synan 6). In stark contrast to his Calvinist contemporaries who could not proclaim confidence of the first blessing, Wesley advocated the vitality for a second, experiential blessing. Second blessing theology paved the way for America Revivalism during the Second Great Awakening, which took the form of regional Camp Meeting Revivals.

American Revivalism

A precursor to the Azusa Street Revival of 1906, the camp meetings foreshadowed a burgeoning new religious fervor. “Perhaps the most famous outbreak of enthusiastic, Pentecostal-like religion in American history occurred in the great Cane Ridge camp meeting in Kentucky, in 1801” (Synan 11). A Methodist minister by the name of John McGee is credited in sparking the Cane Ridge camp meeting because he was flooded with emotion during a sermon and “shouted and exhorted with all possible energy” (Synan 12). Moments later, his congregation at the Red River Presbyterian Church was “covered with the slain” and “their screams for mercy pierced the heavens” (Synan 12). It was in these energetic and auspicious beginnings of the Second Great Awakening that the American camp meetings were born (Synan 12).

The Azusa Street Revival shared many characteristics to the exuberant Holiness camp meetings of the early 19th century. Those who attended the Cane Ridge camp meetings were not seeking mainline, civilized religion; instead, they had a general

expectation their experience would be as wild as the surrounding woods. Reports of the “godly hysteria” included such practices of “falling, jerking, barking like dogs, falling into trances, the ‘holy laugh’ to name a few” (Synan 12). In August of 1801, the Cane Ridge camp meeting peaked with an estimated crowd of 10,000 to 25,000 devoted gatherers (Synan 12). Camp Meetings, like Cane Ridge, experienced regional success which led to the Holiness Movement’s growth, sustainability, and validity. As the Second Great Awakening continued, fueled by Wesley’s second blessing theology, more celebrated white pastors emerged.

Another notable minister throughout this period of American Revivalism was Charles Finney. Finney was credited with sparking the revival in Western New York, an area known to religious scholars as the “burned-over district” (Synan 14). In 1821, Finney experienced a dramatic conversion with a secondary “baptism in the Holy Spirit” which included “unutterable gushings” of praise to God (Synan 14). Although his second blessing theology differs slightly from traditional Wesleyan-Holiness theology, Finney is a vital bridge between early Holiness orthodoxy and Pentecostal orthopraxy. Finney’s Wesleyan theology laid a Biblical foundation for a theology of the “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” which taught about a Christian experience which would include the striking characteristic of speaking in foreign languages.

Speaking in non-native dialects, commonly referred to as speaking in tongues, was a phenomenon witnessed within British Revivalism of the nineteenth century (Synan 87). In 1831, under the leadership of Edward Irving, London’s Presbyterian Church witnessed many parishioners speak in other tongues. Another recorded instance of strange tongue speaking in London occurred in 1875 after Dwight L. Moody preached at

a Y.M.C.A. It is reported that after his preaching, Moody met with a small group of men who were “on fire,” “spoke with tongues,” and were “prophesying” (Synan 88). However, the most frequent reports of speaking in tongues prior to the Azusa Street Revival came from the Welsh Revival (Synan 88).

Charles Fox Parham

The final link in the Holiness chain connecting to Pentecostalism is in a white pastor named Charles Fox Parham. Charles Parham planted the seed for Pentecostalism, and that seed fell from the Holiness Tradition’s family tree. There is perhaps no more controversial, but yet essential, a character in Pentecostalism's narrative than Charles Fox Parham. Klaude Kendrick in his work *The Promise Fulfilled: A History of the Pentecostal Movement* bestows the distinctive title of “father of the modern Pentecostal movement” to Charles Parham (Kendrick 37). Other Pentecostal historians agree, but Parham’s paternal position is not uncontested.

Charles Parham built upon the Holiness tradition of a second blessing and added a further third blessing or “third experience,” called Spirit Baptism (Synan 89). Parham was born at the end of the nineteenth century on June 4, 1873, in Iowa (Kendrick 37). Like some early Pentecostals, Parham began his ministerial career as a Methodist. Parham served in Linwood, Kansas at the Methodist Episcopal Church before disassociating with denominational loyalty. Parham continued his ministerial work in Kansas by opening a Bible School in Topeka.

In October of 1900, Parham opened the Bethel Bible School with a small band of eager students. Parham led his students through the New Testament and focused study on Revivalism, the major tenants of Holiness, and sanctification. When the class arrived at

the second chapter of the Book of Acts, Parham left his students to attend a speaking engagement. Parham challenged his students to find the scriptural evidence for the Baptism in the Holy Spirit (Synan 89). Upon his return, he was astonished to find a unanimous class decision. The students all agreed that according to chapter two of the Book of Acts, Baptism in the Holy Spirit was accompanied by speaking in other tongues. Agreeing with the student's findings and desiring to test the validity of their divine hypothesis, Parham called an all-night prayer service on December 31, 1900. Little did that small group of zealots know that a prayer meeting on the New Year's Eve of the twentieth century would establish Pentecostalism's fundamental doctrine for the next hundred years.

After many hours in prayer, a student named Agnes Ozman asked Parham to lay his hands on her head and pray for her to be baptized in the Spirit and speak in other tongues. Then, in the early hours on the first day of the twentieth century, Miss Ozman was baptized in the Spirit and began "speaking the Chinese language" (Synan 91). In fact, it is reported that for three days after that event, Ozman could only speak and write in Chinese (Synan 91). Soon after, all the students of the Bethel Bible School, including Charles Parham, experienced the Spirit Baptism by the physical evidence of speaking in unknown languages. Gary McGee in his work "The New World of Realities in Which We Live: How Speaking in Tongues Empowered Early Pentecostals" cites many of the distinct languages which emerged from unlearned lips. He cites that while Anges Ozman received Chinese, others spoke the "language of the East Indians, the Hindoos" while others spoke, "Turkish, Yiddish, and Zulu" (McGee 111). McGee also connects Parham's event of tongues to similar experiences at Azusa Street where people spoke "German,

Italian, Japanese, Bengali, Chippewa, and Eskimo” (McGee 111). However, it was Parham’s young student Agnes Ozman, who is credited as the first devotee to manifest the experience of tongues through Parham’s ministry.

Pentecostalism is universally identified for its practice of speaking in other tongues, and this devotional distinction traces directly back to Charles Parham. The German historian Hollenweger in *The Pentecostals* recognizes John Wesley's doctrinal contribution to Pentecostalism by distinguishing between “those who had been baptized in the Spirit, and ordinary Christians” (Hollenweger 21). However, historians credit Charles Parham with joining the doctrine of Spirit Baptism and the practice of speaking in tongues (Synan 89). Parham was the first minister to single out “glossolalia” (speaking in tongues) “as the only evidence of having received the baptism of the Holy Ghost” (Synan 89). Parham’s position regarding the physical evidence of Spirit Baptism was the theological and practical underpinning of the forthcoming Azusa Street Revival. For many historians, Parham’s paternal position is codified as the doctrine and manifestation of tongues as signifying the presence of Pentecostal activity.

Some scholars attempt to limit Charles Parham’s influence on American Pentecostalism; primarily because of questions surrounding his personal ethics. Hollenweger stated in *The Pentecostals* that because of Parham’s personal shortcomings, “preachers ignored him, never mentioned him” (22). Cecil Robeck Jr.’s entry in *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism* titled “The Origins of Modern Pentecostalism: Some Historiographical Issues” gives credence to Parham’s influence, but also sheds light on the complexity of this biracial movement. Robeck affirms William Seymour, a

student of Parham and primary leader of the Azusa Street Revival, viewed Parham as his Father in the Gospel (Robeck 19).

Sadly, Parham eventually disowned his Pentecostal progeny and labeled the Azusa Street ministry “a cross between the Negro and Holy Roller form of worship” (Robeck 19). Robeck reveals the complexity and tension which existed in the origins of Pentecostalism during segregation. One part of the movement had a bona fide tie to the Holiness movement and European Christianity, while the other heritage that emanated from Africa, tarnished Pentecostalism’s public image. Charles Fox Parham’s hand in creating and rejecting of the Azusa Street Revival perfectly embodies the complexity. Parham breathed life into Pentecostalism and simultaneously rejects that life. This dichotomy is reminiscent of author Mary Shelley who referred to her work *Frankenstein* as “my hideous progeny” (Shelly 10). Perhaps Parham thought he created a monster which lived in Los Angeles. Parham recognized his paternal position to the Azusa Street Revival, yet, like many white Americans during segregation, he harbored disgust for religious race mixing and rejected the amalgamated offspring. Charles Fox Parham provided the European portion of Pentecostalism’s heritage, yet he also portrays the force of resistance against Azusa’s African heritage in a Post-Reconstruction segregation era.

Chapter V.

American Pentecostalism's African Heritage

“Every day belief in an anthropomorphic God owes its origin in no small measure to the black man.”

- W. E. B. Du Bois

“When news of the [Pentecostal] revival reached Africa, it was not regarded as an entirely ‘new’ phenomenon. For the very practices of Azusa Street had long been known in the Motherland even before any Azusa-inspired messenger arrived.”

- James Tinney

At the turn of the twentieth century, William J. Seymour searched for something missing. The short, one-eyed son of former slaves was on a continental journey across America following a divine calling to minister the gospel. However, before leading the infamous Azusa Street Revival of 1906, this unlikely prophet visited no less than seven states on a quest like a desperate man searching for hidden treasure. What did Seymour hope to find? What was missing from the genetic code of his faith? What experience or

knowledge was he hoping to add to his already rich spiritual heritage? Before we examine what Seymour eventually found, we must analyze Seymour's rich religious heritage, which includes Slave Religion and West African religious traditions.

Until recent years, the scholarship surrounding African influence on American Pentecostalism was sparse. In *Afro-Pentecostalism: Black Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in History and Culture*, Yong admits that scholars have “overlooked African American agency at the origins of the movement,” even though blacks made up a substantial portion of the congregation at Azusa Street (Yong & Alexander 1). George Simpson, in an article published by the Historically Black University, Clark Atlanta University, affirms Azusa Street's African heritage as he says, “The Pentecostal Revival has been called a contribution from the black community to the white one” (Simpson 206). Stewart in his *Handbook of Pentecostal Christianity* also takes a more Southern Hemisphere approach to the study of Pentecostalism. Stewart points to the fact that Pentecost “has been the single largest contributor to the transformation of Christianity from a religion of primarily Europeans and their descendants to a religion predominated by Asian, African, and Latin America adherents” (Stewart 3). Therefore, a study of Pentecostalism would be somewhat incomplete without a thorough examination of Seymour's heritage, which includes West African religion and the hidden Southern institution — Slave Religion.

Slave Religion

Seymour and his family lived south of the Mason-Dixon line. Therefore, an examination of Slave Religion provides context to the religious milieu which surrounded Seymour. Albert J. Raboteau's seminal work *Slave Religion* gives a comprehensive

account of the religious experience of the slave community in America's Southland. Raboteau identifies black religion under slavery as the "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South (Raboteau ix). Raboteau draws influence from his contemporary Daniel Boorstin, whose chapter in *The Americans* titled 'The Invisible Communities: The Negroes' Churches' sheds light on this once hidden assemblage:

"...organized white churches did not encompass the religious life of the Southern Negro. The Negro developed a religious life of his own. Much of this life remains unrecorded because many of the independent Negro religious meetings were illegal, and most of their participants, including sometimes even the preacher, were illiterate. Still we do know that such religious meetings were not uncommon, and that they became the nucleus, and later the whole organized form, of Negro communities. The Negroes' religious life thrived in institutions that were often invisible to the white masters, and they are barely visible to the historian today" (Raboteau x).

Invisible as it may be to fully comprehend the racial binary nature of Post-Reconstruction religion in America, we must gaze deeply at the hidden religious narrative of African slaves in America. Eileen Southern in her work "An Origin for the Negro Spiritual" believes the "search for the origin of the spiritual necessarily begins with the year 1619, when black men first arrived on the shores of the mainland of the New World. Although Africans were brought here naked and in chains, they carried with them, nevertheless, an invisible kind of baggage – the rich cultural heritage of their homeland, especially regard to music and dance" (Southern 9).

In 1789, Olaudah Equiano, the first African to publish his autobiography in English, explained African culture as this: "We are almost a nation of dancers, musicians, and poets. Every great event, such as a triumphant return from battle or other cause of

public rejoicing, is celebrated in public dancers, which are accompanied with songs and Musicke suited to the occasion” (Equiano 3). The slave’s exuberant religious expression stood in stark contrast to the ridged liturgy of mainline churches rooted in European tradition. Europeans tended to focus on doctrine and studying holy texts, while Africans venerated religious experience above all else. Therefore, Seymour’s back-woods religious education included call and response chanting, ring shouting, dancing, drumming, and singing. In light of the physical nature of the aforementioned worship style, Slave Religion is primary a religion of orthopraxy. For slaves, the vivacious manner in which religion is practiced was central to their culture. A young Seymour’s orthodoxy might have been weak, but the vibrant orthopraxy of Slave Religion dynamically shaped the dubious leader. Before Slave Religion was a significant influence on Seymour, West African religion was a significant influence on Slave Religion.

West African Religion

Raboteau states that “One of the most durable and adaptable constituents of the slave’s culture, linking African past with America present, was his religion” (Raboteau 4). However, Raboteau states that the slave’s connection with Africa is not static. Instead, their African heritage “continued to develop as living traditions putting down new roots in new soil, bearing new fruit as unique hybrids of American origin” (Raboteau 4). In this way, slaves were able to adapt their African beliefs within the context of Christian milieu. Raboteau points to three main African religious markers the Atlantic slave trade carried to America’s Southland: one supreme High God, spirit possession, and vibrant worship patterns (Raboteau 6).

The first marker is a prevalent conviction across African tribes in a High God, the ultimate creator of the world and the supreme ruler over the spiritual cosmos (Raboteau 8). The High God was regularly associated with the sky, and therefore by proxy, Africans often viewed the High God as esoteric and aloof. It is possible this African perception of God corresponds with the Christian view of God the Father, who sits high above creation on a heavenly throne. We find examples of a High God across many West African tribes. Among the Yoruba tribe, Africans venerate the god Olorun above all gods to the extent that sacrifices to any lesser divinity must be concluded in the name of Olorun (Raboteau 9). Chukwu, or *Chi-Uku*, the Great Spirit, is the supreme God of the Ibo tribe who controls rain and fertility (Raboteau 9). Their High God is the source of human life, granting humanity with *chi*, or a soul (Raboteau 9).

The second characteristic of African religion which migrated across the Atlantic is the belief in spiritual possession. Spiritual possession is deeply rooted in the fundamental African assumption in the unbreakable link between humanity and the divine. Westerners and those with scientific-centric worldviews often have difficulties reconciling the common assumption of a spirit world. However, a slave in the antebellum Southland would assume an uninterrupted connection between the spiritual and physical world. At times of spiritual fervor, the lines between the natural and supernatural would blur. Various African tribes looked to priests or holy devotees to act in service, and at times, in place of their gods (Raboteau 10). These devotees became mediums for the gods and, in the case of certain religious ceremonies, may become possessed by the gods. (Raboteau 10). This “spirit possession” is displayed as a stylized, ecstatic trance filled with dance and divine communication (Raboteau 10). While under the influence of the

spirit, the devotee temporarily becomes the mouthpiece of the gods (Raboteau 10). The belief of spiritual possession is often the most identifiable and prominent thread connecting African religion, slave religion, and the American Pentecostal Movement.

The final African marker embedded within Slave Religion is related to vibrant patterns of worship. For West Africans, religion is practiced through ritual action. While Europeans tended to place a higher value on orthodoxy, Africans primarily approached religion through the lens of orthopraxy and experiential worship. Vibrant worship, including music, drumming, shouting, singing, and dancing, played an integral part in West African worship (Raboteau 15). Among the Yoruba and the Fon, singing and drumming preceded spirit possession and were necessary ingredients in West African rituals (Raboteau 15). In this way, vibrant worship was both a unique marker of African religion and a bridge leading to other markers like spirit possession. Music and dance were so essential to West African religion that scholars, including Metraux, Roberts, and Herskovits, classify West African religion as a dancing religion (Raboteau 15).

Hollenweger, a supreme authority on Pentecostal Studies, states:

“...Where Pentecostals work in a pre- or post-literary society they do not think along systematic and logical lines but in parables and associations. Their main medium of communication is not the book or newspapers but the proverb, the chorus, the joke, the testimony, the miracle story, the television and radio program. If in a given culture dancing and singing are the form of communication, the embodiment of the message in the dancing and singing” (Hollenweger 11).

Cheryl J Sanders, author of *Saints in Exile*, and Zora Neale Hurston of *The Sanctified Church*, both claim that American Pentecostalism is in no way a new religion; instead, the movement is merely the evolution of old traditions of African religious

expression and Haitian *Vandou*. For these scholars, the practice of religious shouting is nothing new and should be viewed as “a continuation of the African possession by the gods” (Sanders 3). In the same way, the “similarities between the dance of the saints and the steps seen in Haiti when a man or woman is ‘mounted’ by a *loa*, or spirit” (Sanders 3). Philosopher Molefi Asante, in his work *Afrocentricity*, stated that “the music and dance of the church may be the essence of our Africanity” (Asante 74). Asante describes American Pentecostal worship services through the lens of African religious expression. He beautifully details a spirit-filled service as:

“The panorama of Africa is not merely unfolded but explained and amplified in the religious drama. More than this, the church services become a collective outpouring of the soul with some people getting more possessed than others but no one really escaping the influence of possession even if it is no more than the slight tapping of the foot. Syncopated pianos and organs and hand-clapping often drive the faithful into ecstasy. The rhythms run to be free, individuals shout and moan, the preacher directs this “mass madness,” which is really not madness, by the call and response, and suddenly the whole congregation is praising the Lord” (Asante 74).

For scholars like Asante, Sanders, and Hurston, Pentecostalism is rooted in Africa, not America. However, Raboteau’s position challenges the monolithic African approach to studying Pentecostalism. Raboteau eloquently explains that while “Africa influenced black culture in the United States, including black religion, it is also true that African theology” simply did not endure (86). Raboteau boldly steps further by declaring that in America, “the gods of Africa died” (86). African theology, African gods, and African orthodoxy completely dissolved under the weight of American Protestant Christianity.

However, Raboteau balances out his weighty claims with some optimism as he believes “...even as the as the gods of Africa gave way to the God of Christianity, the African heritage of singing, dancing, spirit possession, and magic continued to influence Afro-American spirituals, ring shouts, and folk beliefs” (Raboteau 92). Slaves adapted African religion to fit within the context of their new Christian culture. If the African gods did die in America, African religious expression did not. John Mbiti in *Introduction to African Religion* details how African Americans adapted one aspect of African religious tradition to fit within the context of American Protestantism:

“The phenomenon of spirit possession, one of the most significant features in African religion...was reinterpreted in Christian terms to become a central feature of expressive behavior in African-American Christianity and a necessary part to the conversion experience. Conversion was the climax of a spiritual journey called “seeking.” A prolonged period of praying “in the wilderness” included an ecstatic trance without which conversion was not considered authentic” (Mbiti 30).

William J. Seymour

The DNA of thousands of years of West African religious history, Louisiana Creole, including Haitian Vodou, and invisible slave religion were all encapsulated within Simon and Phyllis Salabar Seymour. These two former slaves came together to produce an unlikely leader. William J. Seymor was the offspring of Simon and Phyllis and was raised in the Jim Crow Era Southland. The short, stocky, one-eyed Seymour was born in Centerville, Louisiana on May 2, 1870. Seymour was no stranger to the racial malice of his time. Gastón Espinosa in his seminal work *William J. Seymour and the Origins of Global Pentecostalism: A Biography and Documentary History* superbly

describes the ugly realities facing Seymour in a Post-Reconstruction segregation era. “Louisiana had one of the highest lynching rates in the nation. He grew up hearing stories about black men being tarred, feathered, and branded and perhaps even witnessed a charred black body dangling from a lynchman’s rope” (Espinosa 48). Desperate to escape the binary segregation of the Southland, Seymour journeyed North to states like Tennessee, Missouri, Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio once of age. During his travels, Seymour connected with church groups who focused their ministries on social justice, radical holiness, and racial equality. One such group to focus on the religion’s responsibility in racial reconciliation was the Daniel S. Warner’s Evening Light Saints. This Saints heavily influenced Seymour and “provided him with one of the first visions of a racially egalitarian church — a vision he remained true to the rest of his life” (Espinosa 49). For the first time, Seymour witnessed an attractive religious alternative to the unsightly binary church of his day.

Before arriving in Los Angeles, Seymour would travel to the Mid-West and join a Holiness church led by former slave Lucy Farrow, the niece of Frederick Douglass. Farrow received the Spirit Baptism at one of Charles Parham’s revivals, and she also introduced Seymour to Parham. James Tinney in his monograph *A Theoretical and Historical Comparison of Black Political and Religious Movements* includes Parham in the list of significant influences upon William Seymour. Seymour’s influences include the slave revolt of Nat Turner, life on a Southern plantation during slavery, African Slave Religion, Louisiana Creole traditions, including Haitian Vodou, dismay over being personally rejected by mainline churches, and ultimately, Parham’s teaching on glossolalia and speaking in tongues (Tinney 222). Seymour was impressed by Parham

“who welcomed blacks, Indians, and Mexicans to his services, though always segregated from whites” (Espinosa 50). Intrigued by Parham’s ministry and his doctrine on Spirit Baptism, Seymour asked to join Parham’s Bible School.

Parham agreed to receive Seymour at the school, contingent on the condition Seymour sit and take notes in the hallway. One might wonder why Seymour, who held egalitarian views of religion, would subject himself to segregated education. Perhaps, Parham’s teachings on the baptism of the Holy Spirit fascinated Seymour enough to take notes from the hallway. However, Seymour’s tutelage under Parham was short-lived. While Seymour did embrace Parham’s doctrine of Spirit Baptism by speaking in tongues, Seymour rejected Parham’s teaching on race and religion (Espinosa 51). Parham taught that racial miscegenation caused Noah’s flood and promulgated the notion of British Israelism which claims “the Anglo-Saxo race were the lineal descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel and therefore God’s chosen race” (Espinosa 51). After Seymour identified Parham’s segregated convictions were rooted in his theology instead of the social segregation imposed by culture, Seymour knew it was time to move on.

At this point in the historiography of America Pentecostalism, scholars attempt to either emphasize or minimize Parham’s influence over Seymour. However, two matters are fairly certain concerning Parham and Seymour. First, Parham was the final religious teacher in Seymour’s life — immediately preceding Seymour’s journey to Azusa Street. Secondly, the formal doctrine of Spirit Baptism by speaking in other tongues according to Acts 2:4 was unique to Parham. Was Parham’s doctrine on speaking in tongues the missing piece needed to complete Seymour’s pre-Azusa faith journey? Was Parham’s Spirit Baptism orthodoxy the missing link needed to connect Seymour’s past orthopraxy

of African Slave Religion, to his future as the leader of the Azusa Street Revival? The fact that Seymour adopted the doctrine of speaking in tongues and that tongues became the main identity marker of Azusa Street makes it seem quite likely he had found what he was searching for in Parham's doctrine.

In January or February of 1906, a visitor named Neely Terry came to Lucy Farrow's Holiness church in search of a pastoral candidate for her home church, The Holiness Mission, in Los Angeles. Terry extended the pastoral opportunity to the unlikely Seymour, who leaped at the chance to lead a congregation. The broke, one-eyed Seymour boarded a train headed west. Even with two working eyes, Seymour could not have foreseen the colossal ministry that was to come at the end of that Westbound train. As he rode west, most likely in a second-rate segregated train car, did Seymour dream of a diverse congregation that would defy the social segregation of his day? Did he recall his days working with the egalitarian group The Saints and imagine blacks and whites worshiping together in California? Was Seymour excited or anxious to implement the newly discovered doctrine of speaking in tongues into his ministry repertoire? We can be sure of a few things; Seymour had no gauge to measure the colossal revival that he would lead in a few short months, he knew very little about the community of Los Angeles, and he had never heard of a street named Azusa.

Chapter VI

The Birth of a Movement

“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 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.”

-Acts 2:1-4, KJV

“It was the divine call that brought me...to Los Angeles.”

-William J Seymour

“There was much persecution, especially from the press. They wrote us up shamefully, but this only drew the crowds.”

-Frank Bartleman

On February 22, 1906, William J. Seymour stepped off that Westbound train in Los Angeles, penniless yet optimistic. The soon coming revival at Azusa Street was a mere twinkle in Seymour's eye. Seymour's parents had passed down the African tradition of passionate song, dance, and chant, which had survived the journey across the Atlantic

on slave trade ships. Parham had injected European Holiness theology, most importantly the doctrine of tongues speaking, into Seymour's ministry. Like a host, Seymour had carried the DNA from both heritages to Los Angeles. Once he arrived in California, Seymour had a plan, a purpose, and finally, a parish — Mrs. Julia Hutchin's Holiness Mission. His plan was to spread the newly acquired truth of Spirit Baptism through speaking in tongues, Parham's theology, with his new congregation in Los Angeles. However, his ministry dreams were seemingly dashed on March 4th when suddenly, Julia Hutchins padlocked the church door and expelled Seymour like a heretic from the Holiness Mission (Espinosa 53). Why would the person who had invited Seymour to Los Angeles suddenly turn on him? Why did the congregation not stand behind their newly appointed pastor? What was it about the church culture in Los Angeles that resulted in the majority of the Holiness Mission to reject Seymour and his claims of Spirit Baptism?

Los Angeles Culture

Perhaps conflicting cultural tension was the reason Mrs. Julia Hutchins rejected Seymour and padlocked him out of the church. Seymour's mixed religious heritage, including new Holiness theology and indigenous African worship, conflicted with the Holiness Mission's pathway to financial upward mobility, their dignified social standing, and their quest to reshape African American identity within segregated America.

Cecil M. Robeck in his chapter titled "The Azusa Street Mission and Historic Black Churches: Two Worlds in Conflict in Los Angeles' African American Community" in the book *Afro-Pentecostalism* reveals that the complete history of the African American community in Los Angeles at the time of the Azusa Street Revival had yet to be written. While many truths are buried under years of history, there are fragments

of data which give us a narrow window at which to gaze into the past. What is known about the origins of Los Angeles is that in 1781, Captain Rivera y Moncada led a small group of twelve families to settle the city; some of those founding families were of direct African descent (Robeck 22). Not only did Africans play a significant role in settling and developing the city, but Los Angeles was also a popular haven for African Americans escaping the structural segregation of the Southland, and many viewed Los Angeles as a salvific city ripe with opportunity (Robeck 23).

The African-American Christian community of Los Angeles in 1900 was divided into two distinct groups with two distinct sub-cultures. One group, the traditional or “high church,” consisted of historically African-American churches, like the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church. The group’s membership was solely populated by African Americans, but surprisingly the church culture on Sundays leaned decidedly toward the socially dominate Caucasian culture of America (Robeck 30). The traditional African-American churches in Los Angeles displayed Caucasian values like organization, opulent buildings, orderly worship, and formal lines of authority while giving little credence to prophetic words, visions, dancing, or falling in the Spirit which connected to their African past (Robeck 30). The traditional African-American church member was wary of being a second-class citizen within a segregated society and was willing to strip off all vestiges of Africa to be viewed as an American.

Larry Martin in his work *The Life and Ministry of William J Seymour and a History of the Azusa Street Revival* agrees that Seymour's message was too licentious for the upstanding brethren. The traditional African American churches rejected Seymour because his Pentecostal message heavily focused on emotional and spiritual encounters

(Martin 141). While the traditional church attempted to increase their social standing, the second group of African American churches in Los Angeles desired something much different.

Standing in direct contrast to the African-American “high church” in Los Angeles was the African-American “folk church” (Robeck 31). Not concerned with social trappings, they met in tents, storefronts, cottages, and homes. Unlike their high society counterparts, they embraced their African roots and felt right at home in Holiness tent meetings. Parallel with their African heritage, congregants expected a worship service to include prophetic words, visions, dreams, dancing, singing, and shouting (Robeck 31). Within this unpretentious style church, “traditional pipe organs were displaced by exuberant a cappella singing that was frequently accompanied by hand clapping, foot tapping, or some other form of rhythm making such as drums, spoons, washboards, and the occasional tambourine” (Robeck 31). While less dignified than its “high church” counterpart, the “folk style” church remained a commanding cultural force in Los Angeles. While the traditional church rejected Seymour’s message of Spirit Baptisms through speaking in tongues, the Pentecostal message would find the perfect home within the African American folk church. This grassroots force becomes the first community to adopt Seymour’s claims, thereby becoming the original pioneers of American Pentecostalism. No pre-Azusa Street revival garnered global attention like Seymour’s revival, which is why Azusa Street is considered the origin of American Pentecostalism. Both European theology and African heritages were needed to forge this new religious movement, and Seymour embodied both.

A few days after being locked out of his church, Seymour called a series of prayer meetings at the home of Richard and Ruth Asberry at 216 Bonnie Brae Street. As the small embers of revival were fanned at Bonnie Brae Street, Seymour observed the first glimpse of his vision to create an interracial worship environment. These prayer meetings initially followed typical African-American “folk style” worship patterns and attracted African Americans from the surrounding neighborhoods. However, as prayer services grew, they began to attract a few whites like Louis Osterburg and Frank Bartleman. Whites and blacks, who were largely segregated throughout society, especially on Sunday morning, readily crossed racial barriers to attend Seymour’s prayer meetings at 216 Bonnie Brae Street. As the racial dynamic of the meetings shifted, so did the religious culture. Whites and blacks converged at Bonnie Brae Street to spawn a fresh religious movement displaying African, Haitian, and even Wesleyan rituals.

Seymour esteemed racial unity under God, but interestingly, unity was also a precursor to the Pentecostal experience had by Jesus’ disciples. The fundamental Pentecostal passage in Acts 2 unfolds the two-thousand-year-old narrative of Jesus’ disciples speaking in tongues. Seymour taught “The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is a gift of power upon the sanctified life” just like “the disciples received on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:3,4), in speaking in new tongues” (Seymour 2). Seymour desired to replicate the Biblical account in Acts 2 and taught the disciples “were all with one accord in one place” (Seymour 7). The phrase “one accord” from the New Testament scripture is the Greek word *ὁμοθυμαδόν*, which means of one mind or unified in a singular passion (Blue Letter Bible). This phrase does not measure geography or proximity, nor does it describe the homogenous nature of the disciples' race. This Greek word penetrates beneath the

skin and speaks to a unity of the heart and mind. Unity was an essential ingredient in the prototypical Pentecostal experience in the Book of Acts, and similarly, unity across distinctly racial lines was a hallmark of Seymour's meetings at Bonnie Brae Street.

A month after being fired and locked out of his church, Seymour's folk-style prayer meetings at the Asbury's on Bonnie Brae Street crescendoed with unprecedented speed. Gastón Espinosa in his work *William J. Seymour and the Origins of Global Pentecostalism: A Biography and Documentary History* provides an account of Seymour's burgeoning ministry at Bonnie Brae. On April 9, after calling a ten-day fast for a revival, "at 7:30pm in the Asberry's living room, Seymour preached from Acts 2:4 about the Spirit baptism" (Espinosa 55). Before Seymour could finish the message about the disciple's experience in the Book of Acts, "tradition has it that 'the fire fell down,' meaning that God poured out His Spirit on Bonnie Brae like on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:4 and people erupted in tongues. The Azusa Street Revival was ignited" (Espinosa 55). According to Seymour himself, "The beginning of the Pentecost started in a cottage prayer meeting" at the Asberry's on Bonnie Brae. Interestingly, Seymour's interracial prayer meeting attracted so much local interest, "the weight of the attendees overflowing onto the Asberry's front porch was so great it caused the porch to collapse" (Espinosa 57). The growing number of attendees, cynics, and spectators quickly outgrew Bonnie Brae and forced Seymour to relocate the revival to the former Stevens African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church at 312 Azusa Street. Seymour's burgeoning revival instantly moved into the mainstream when it moved to 312 Azusa Street.

The Azusa Street Revival

Something new took place at Azusa, a revival like no one alive had ever seen. Whites were familiar with Holiness camp meeting revivals and blacks were familiar with unstructured African worship services, but Seymour's meetings combined the best of both heritages. While Azusa's eventual impact was global, its pre-1906 origins are best explained emanating from two main roots; one stretching from Europe and one from Africa. American Pentecostalism's dual origins manifested at Azusa over the three-year period of peak revival. Whites flocked to Seymour's Apostolic Faith Mission and witnessed services five hours long bursting with unstructured and exuberant worship. Blacks flocked to Azusa desiring to receive the newfound spiritual power: speaking in tongues. Both groups of religious seekers found something familiar and something new at Azusa. The two largest races in America had worshiped separately for one hundred years, but at Azusa, whites and blacks voluntarily desegregated for spiritual unity. "The 'color-line' was washed away in the blood" of Jesus, Frank Bartleman famously quipped (Bartleman 61).

First, let us look at the African tones noted at Azusa Street. The worship leaders at Azusa Street were almost always African-American women (Robeck 145). Like the instrumentless Slave religion worship leaders of the past, these church mamas only needed one thing to worship—passion. David Daniels in his article "'Gotta Moan Sometime': A Sonic Exploration of Earwitnesses to Early Pentecostal Sound in North America" describes the free-flowing, African style, *a cappella* chanting at Azusa Street as the "most remarkable incident of the sweetest singing I ever heard by about a half dozen women, all in unknown tongues, in which at intervals one voice would die away in very plaintive strains, while the others carried the song. Then the former would break out

in rapid strong language, filled with unction, and others would give tones as of singing in the distance. This was most enchanting and filled with tender love” (Daniels 7).

Aside from singing and chanting, other African characters surfaced in the Pentecostal revival at Azusa Street. Some devotees of the revival reacted similarly to the African practice of spirit possession, and their bodies became submissive to the spiritual world. As in African religion, the spiritual world directly impacted the physical bodies of the congregants:

“The intensity of their encounter with God led many at the mission to respond in ways that before their encounter they could “only imagine.” It was a life-changing moment, a transformative time that produced a range of responses. There were those who...broke into dance. Others jumped, or stood with hands outstretched, or sang or shouted with all the gusto they could muster. Others were so full of awe when they encounter God that their knees buckled — they fell on the floor, ‘slain in the Spirit’” (Robeck 131).

One scholar explains how Azusa’s exotic African heritage enticed whites to the revival. Wolfgang Vondey in his article “The Making of a Black Liturgy: Pentecostal Worship and Spirituality from African Slave Narratives to American Cityscapes” describes the unique appeal of Azusa Street for those from a European religious background. “In contrast to the structural Anglo-European liturgy to which many of the established America churches adhered, with its conceptually fixed, written, priest-centered, and performance-oriented framework of sacramental celebration, Pentecostalism offers a distinct alternative. As a liturgical movement, it exhibits a destructuralizing, flexible, oral, participation-centered, and pneumatologically oriented “open arrangement” of worship, prayer, and praise” (Vondy 164). Perhaps the newly discovered worship style

attracted curious whites who were bored worshiping in all-white mainline churches. Perhaps, the socially taboo practice of race mixing at church added a tantalizingly provocative spark to church attendance never felt before. For whatever reason, whites from a European heritage engaged with brand-new, African-based religious methods at Azusa Street. However, to classify the Azusa Street Revival and American Pentecostalism as a purely African phenomenon would only tell half the story.

Pentecost's European heritage also helped set the tone of Azusa. Scholars either minimize or maximize American Pentecostalism's European roots according to typical binary approach in crediting Pentecost's success to either African or European heritage. While Pentecost's African heritage is apparent, American Pentecostalism's European heritage also reveals itself during Seymour's Azusa Street Revival. Once Seymour intersected with Parham and adopted Parham's European Holiness theology, Seymour united with an old, deep root of Christianity.

James Tinney, an African American scholar and a supporter of Pentecostalism's African heritage, also points to the European lineage of Pentecost by echoing the LIFE magazine article which called Pentecostalism a "Third Force" behind Catholicism and Protestantism (Tinney 220). This European perspective views Pentecost's roots stretching unbroken across the pond and into the very heart of Christendom. The European side reveals itself most distinctly at Seymour's revival with Parham's theology of speaking in tongues. In fact, the belief and practice of speaking in tongues is the definitive identity marker for Pentecostalism. Seymour's Azusa Street Revival, while famous for race mixing, actually attained cultural infamy because of promulgating and practicing Parham's doctrine of tongues speaking.

On Wednesday, April 18th, the Los Angeles Daily Times headline read “Weird Babel of Tongues.” The subheadings within the same article read “New Sect of Fanatics is Breaking Loose,” “Wild Scene Last Night on Azusa Street,” and “Gurgle of Wordless Talk by a Sister” (LA Daily Times 1906). Although the final headline alludes to Azusa’s radical ministry style of letting black women speak in a mixed congregation, the main phenomenon of speaking in foreign tongues was the ultimate news. In the same manner that the newspaper press imprinted those notorious headlines onto blank paper, those headlines indelibly impressed the practice of speaking in tongues into the cultural identity of American Pentecostalism. Parham’s European Holiness Theology, most notably the Baptism in the Spirit by speaking in tongues, became synonymous with American Pentecostalism.

Holiness ministers and missionaries from around the globe flocked to 312 Azusa Street to receive the new blessing revealed to Seymour. Clarence Hardy in his work “‘No Mystery God’: Black Religions of the Flesh in Pre-War Urban America” describes one minister’s journey to Los Angeles. William Durham, an early leader in the Pentecostal denomination, The Assemblies of God, said at the revival “It seemed to me that my body had suddenly become porous and that a current of electricity was being turned on me from all sides” (Hardy 132). “He [God] worked on my whole body, one section at a time, first my arms, then my limbs, then my body, then my head, then my face, then my chin, and finally at 1 a.m. Saturday, Mar. 2 after being under the power three hours, He finished the work on my vocal organs, spoke through me in unknown tongues” (Hardy 132).

Daniel Woods in Hunter and Robeck's *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy* tells the story of another minister who headed West to receive tongues. The Southern Holiness minister G.B. Cashwell believed in Wesleyan second blessing theology, but upon hearing of a new spiritual experience for the sanctified was drawn Westward with "hunger and thirst" (Woods 93). Cashwell purchased a one-way train ticket and fasted from food on his journey to California, wholly determined not to return south until he received the new gift of tongues from God (Woods 94). Upon arrival, Cashwell situated himself in "an upstairs room in the Mission" and sought God for many days (Woods 94). Then one day, "the windows of heaven" opened and the "light of God" purified Cashwell's mind (Woods 94). Cashwell returned to Azusa's main meeting hall where he reportedly spoke in the foreign tongues of German and Greek (Woods 94). The stories of Cashwell and Durham repeated hundreds of times over as white Holiness ministers from around the globe descended on Seymour's Apostolic Faith Mission to receive the gift of tongues.

In this way, the European and African religious heritages combined at Azusa as well as European and African descendants. Seymour's interpreted Parham's theology of Spirit Baptism through his lens of African-American religious history and the combination produced a cultural environment for racial reconciliation. Seymour envisioned a ministry at 312 Azusa that would supernaturally reverse the evils of racism and segregation by establishing a church where whites and blacks could worship God together. William J. Seymour's dual ethos embodied both heritages, influencing him to instill a hybridized DNA into the Los Angeles revival. In his own publication "Apostolic Faith," Seymour proclaims, "if some of our white [Pentecostal] brethren have prejudice

and discrimination (Gal 2:11-20), we can't do it, because God calls us to follow the Bible. We must love all men as Christ Commands (Heb. 12:4)" (Seymour 10). In a time when society valued binary segregation and utterly rejected mixed races, Seymour's egalitarian revival stood as a monument to racial confluence, racial convergence, and racial integration. Robeck agrees:

"The Azusa Street Mission...was nonetheless quite different from nearly all other existing African American congregations in the city, its differences lay in the fact that it attracted participation from more Caucasians than did any other African American congregation in the city. And its worship style was not consistent with that shared by the upwardly mobile majority of African Americans. In fact, it represented more the style of slave churches in the African American past, the style of frontier rather than urban worship, a style from which much of Los Angeles' African-American population had attempted to distance itself" (Robeck 35).

Gaston Espinosa beautifully connects the historical significance of Seymour's interracial congregation choosing the site at 312 Azusa Street, a former AME church. The African Methodist Episcopal Church is one of the oldest black denominations in the United States. The denomination started in 1814 after Absalom Jones was asked to pray in the segregated seating in the rear of St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia (Espinosa 58). Jones refused and left to co-found the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Almost a century later, the Methodist Episcopal church, like most churches across America, were still segregated by race. "However, at Azusa...blacks and whites transgressed this social prohibition and prayed together at the front altar" (Espinosa 58).

Pentecostalism's immense global impact and Azusa Street's multinational appeal is undeniable. Most scholars point to the fact that at its pinnacle, over twenty nationalities

worshiped in one accord at Azusa street (Espinosa 56). While dozens of nationalities participated in Azusa, the vast majority of its pioneers and attendees came from either a European or African heritage. What began as an all-black prayer meeting between Seymour and a handful of African American friends on Bonnie Brae Street transformed into a racially diverse movement with “far more white people than colored” attending (Bartleman 61). During the peak of the Azusa Street Revival, whites and blacks gathered together three times a day, seven days a week. History shows that over a three-year period the Azusa Street Revival reversed the social norm of segregation not once, but three-thousand two-hundred and eighty-five times.

Chapter VII.

Conclusion

A brand-new religion, which combined the best aspects of two long-standing heritages, one European and one African, greeted the devoted masses which diverged on Los Angeles from 1906-1909. Adam Stewart in the *Handbook of Pentecostal Christianity* verifies “The Wesleyan Holiness movement and African America religion in the United States...were responsible for giving shape to the early Pentecostal movement” (Stewart 4). Scholars like Cheryl Sanders and John Philips agree that, to speak about movements like American Pentecostalism, one must become an expert in America, African, and European culture (Sanders 8). Also, Joe Newman in his work *Race and the Assemblies of God* agrees that the confluence of “Wesleyan-Holiness sanctification and the intense emotionalism of slave religious experience” united to create the distinctly new strand of Christianity called American Pentecostalism (Newman 2). The unique religious amalgamation received interesting societal responses.

Similar to a magnet, which contains two distinct polarities, American Pentecostalism polarized its observers. Some critics, like those at the Los Angeles Daily Times, were repelled by the European influence of tongues speaking. Others were polarized by harboring disdain over the interracial aspect of Seymour’s meetings, equating Pentecostalism to African barbarism. Interestingly, American Pentecostalism’s

two most prominent characteristics, which directly contributed to the creation of the unique movement, become its most polarizing forces. However, Seymour's revival did not repel everyone. Drove of religious seekers flocked to Los Angeles like flies mesmerized by a bright, dazzling light. The building at 312 which housed the Azusa Street Revival was ordinary, but by comparison, the reported events which transpired inside its walls were extraordinary. In his extensive work *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: the Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement*, Cecil M. Robeck Jr. eloquently illustrates a picture of the crude building which spawned American Pentecostalism:

“The building in which they met was “tucked away” in a transitional neighborhood. It was nothing to look at — little more than a poorly whitewashed, burned-out shell with makeshift essentials. On its sawdust-covered dirt floor sat a collection of nail kegs and boards, and an assortment of discarded chairs. Because it lacked insulation and air-conditioning, and its’ ground floor was built of rough-sawn studs with only the outside lumber as walls, during the summer months the building grew intensely hot...In spite of these problems — the substandard facilities, intense heat, lack of ventilation, and swarms of flies— people came by the thousands” (Robeck 129).

Hearing tales of the revival at Azusa, religious seekers flocked with anticipation and curiosity; unaware what they would find in Los Angeles. Surprisingly, these seekers found a new, yet familiar religion. European and African heritages merged religious traditions to create a newfound, yet recognizable religion. American Pentecostalism's thrill drew in the crowds, yet its familiarity was enough to make them stay. For a brief moment, whites and blacks reversed the cultural norm and transcended binary segregation, flooding Azusa Street by the thousands.

Appendix 1.



216 Bonnie Brae Street

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Front Porch of Bonnie Brae Street

Used by permission from Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center



The Azusa Street Revival's Biracial Leadership Team

Used by permission from Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center



Facilities at 312 Azusa Street

Used by permission from Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center



Charles Fox Parham

Used by permission from Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center



William Joseph Seymour

Used by permission from Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center

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