

AMST 430
SONGS OF PROTEST SONGS OF PRAISE
ROGER WILLIAMS UNIVERSITY
GHH 208
M, TH 2:00 -3:20
Spring, 2013

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Week of March 4, 2013

For **Monday, March 4**

Read, in *Heilbut*,

"The Women had Fits," The Soul Stirrers 76-93
"Reverend Brewster and the Ward Singers" 98 - 113
"Reverend Julius Cheeks and Reverend Claud Jester: The
Fathers of Soul" 115-116

There are quite a few themes in these chapters: One of the less often spoken about is sexuality. We'll speak about it Monday—if we have the nerve. These three chapters alternate discussion of male and female singers. So far, my guess is that female singers have somewhat dominated in the readings, watchings, and listenings. Today, the men will have a chance to get even.

The first of these looks at the effect of male quartets (and to a lesser degree, male soloists) had on women audiences. The population of gospel quartets was very much in flux. The Soul Stirrers endured, but the membership included, at various times,

- R. H. Harris
- Sam Cooke
- Johnnie Taylor
- Jimmie Outler
- Jesse Farey
- S. R. Crain
- Larry Taylon
- James Medlock
- R. B. Robinson
- Imports from The Highway Qcs (sort of a minor league training quartet in Chicago)
- Paul Foster

The second of these looks at one of the pioneer composers, The Reverend W. Herbert Brewster and his relationship with the Clara Ward Singers. Like the Soul Stirrers, the Ward Singers membership changed

from time to time, featuring not only the mother, Gertrude Ward, and the two daughters, Clara and Willa, but also

- Henrietta Waddy
- Marion Williams
- Francis Steadman
- Martha Bass
- Kitty Parham
- Thelma Jackson
- Carrie Williams and
- Jessie Tucker

Here, note the conflict between sacred and secular, as the larger public discovered and fell in love with the Gospel Sound of the era. Should that music be sung in Las Vegas Casinos and at Disneyland? Clara Ward thought so. Others disagreed.

The third of our chapters returns our attention to the men, most particularly to two quite unusual groups and their leaders, *The Swan Silvertones* (and The Reverend Claude Jester) and *The Sensational Nightingales* –later *The Sensational Knights* (and The Reverend Julius Cheeks) Cheeks and Jester are credited with the emergence of *soul music*, a secularized version of Gospel with more pop singers than it would pay to mention here but we probably should mention

- James Brown
- Wilson Pickett, but the rest on this list stuck more firmly in the Gospel track:
- Solomon Womack
- The Reverend Robert Crenshaw
- Paul Owens
- Dewey Young
- Jo Jo Wallace

Important here is the direct challenge to segregation and racism, as well as the more subtle types of challenges we've seen from time to time. It is crucial to remember the dangers involved in challenging white supremacists in Alabama, Mississippi and South Carolina... as well as the rest of the south.

INTERNET EXERCISE

Go Online to YouTube and/or Google, and plug in the name of one or more of the persons or groups mentioned above. Find some whose song or music you like, and cut and past the URL (universal resource locator) into your resource file, using the add link button. Google will require an extra step, clicking on the video button, but there are videos on such

sites as hulu which aren't on YouTube. Then see if you can find the lyrics to the song, and plug them into your resources, as well. We'll do a "show and tell" session using this material. (Of course, include the singers who are the chapters' main subjects.)

For **Thursday, March 7**

Read, in *Heilbut*

- "Bessie Can Moan and Move a Mountain" 131 - 143
- "Professor Alex Bradford: The Singing Rage" 145 - 157
- "I Won't Let Go of my Faith": Dorothy Love Coates 159-169

These three short chapters complete the second section of the book, One thing you've been reading over and over, though I haven't called much attention to it. [Bessie Griffen](#) epitomizes the "hard times" of this book's subtitle. [Part two of the article is here](#). Note that poverty isn't all of it: there's child abuse, death of family and other things. As the saying goes, "That which doesn't kill us makes us stronger". How many of the characters you've met in this book have lived lives surprising in the brutality, want, and bad breaks they featured. Would you be able to survive? Would I? How many of us could cause people to "rest in peace" as Bessie did—twice? Among the groups she fronted:

- The Southern Harps
- The Caravans

[Professor Alex Bradford's story](#) is another example of the danger of speaking one's mind in the south during the 1950s. Similar incidents have ended in lynchings. Among singers and groups associated with Bradford are:

- The Bronx Gospellaires
- The Bradford Specials
- Little Joe Jackson
- Langston Hughes' *Black Nativity* play. (Hughes was much more famous as a poet and author.)
- Greater Abyssinian Baptist Church Choir of Newark, NJ

[Dorothy Love Coates](#) speaks her mind from *within* the Gospel movement. She did not opt to add cash to her pocket by singing in "soul" venues and clubs. But that didn't stop her from being political, as you'll note from some of the comments in Heilbut. Calling Governor Lester Maddox "pitiful" was an act of immense courage. Among the singers/groups with

whom she worked were:

- J. William Blevins
- The Royal Travelers
- Original Gospel Harmonettes
- The Harmonettes (a reconstituted group)

INTERNET EXERCISE (This should look familiar)

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