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Shirley Caesar: A woman of words

Harrington, Brooksie Eugene, Ph.D.

The Ohio State University, 1992
SHIRLEY CAESAR: A WOMAN OF WORDS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of English in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Brooksie Eugene Harrington, BA, BA, BA, MA, MA

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1992

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DEDICATION

This documentary is dedicated to the memories of Mother Hallie Caesar and Mama Laura Harrington as well as to all our forebears who sacrificed so that we might enjoy greater opportunities.

To Kathi Gibson, J. Clifford Harrington, Jackie Shipman, "Honey," The Ohio State University Office of Continuing Education, Karen Montagno, Cynthia Collins, Judy Abala, Steve Busonik, Larry Jackson, Kermit Campbell, Carla Wilks, Edie and Edith Waugh, Karen Hamlet, C.O. and Billie Matthews, Stancil and Lois Harrington, and most certainly to Cindy Sweet who was angelic throughout the entire composition of this dissertation, I dedicate this writing to you.

Finally to my wife, Dr. Beverly M. Harrington, whose motivation is contagious to all those who know her, and to Baby Jewel who was constantly in my thoughts and in my heart. Thank you.

I am forever indebted to Shirley Caesar, who is without a doubt... "A Woman of Words."
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Within the scope of a work such as I have undertaken, it is impossible to acknowledge each person who contributed in the process of its completion without omitting someone. Suffice it to say, to all who stood by me, tolerated me, and supported me through this effort, a heartfelt "Thank You" is in order.

I wish to thank especially my advisor, Dr. Patrick Mullen, and my committee, Dr. Amy Shuman and Dr. Daniel Barnes.
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In her dissertation, The Tie That Binds, Trudier Harris hypothesized that the "singing quality" of black art (in terms of style and imagery as well as by insertion of poems and songs) penetrates the very heart of one kind of black experience. The African-American writing style is lyrical-poetic. Concepts and forms of singing such as "call and response" and imitations of work songs are introduced in sermons, songs, and church services. All of these elements combine to suggest a state of song. Shirley Caesar, The First Lady of Gospel Music, reproduces a "state of song" in her evangelistic ministries. It is virtually impossible to separate her preaching from her singing. Shirley Caesar says "People have to understand that I am first an evangelist, then a singer." She weaves preaching and singing so well that the boundaries of these distinct pieces of fabric come together in a seamless fashion. She is able to deliver a dynamic sermon poetically, a single composition of rhythmic discourse that reflects no artificial differentiation between the "song" and the "word of God." Shirley Caesar delivers this seamless "song-sermon" at an optimal pitch of E-flat, G, or A-flat which allows for smooth transitions into the next phase of her poetic, multi-layered artistry.

Although at this point of musical transition Shirley glides into her sermonettes, the "actual moment" is somewhat undetectable unless
you pay very, very close attention. She knows the pitch she wants to use for every distinct sermon, and her performance is planned in such a way that a specific song is capable of introducing a sermonette. These transitions are a vital part of her artistry and her performance style. Additionally, Shirley's performance style places her in a unique category unequalled by any other gospel female artist; she perfects her craft of gospel music as no other evangelistic singer recognized today. Noticeably, she also gives special credit to the fact that she is an evangelist (a preacher). Her craft is fulfilling, she says, because she is "recognized as a preacher first and a singer second." She reports "the anointing makes the difference; I am a foremost and first of all evangelist; I can reach back and get that part of my ministry."

Even though the literature related to Black American gospel music is still being formulated as well as clarified, the cultural significance of this music is beyond doubt. What began as a grassroots movement during the first two decades of the twentieth century has become a popular form of music that is performed weekly at thousands of churches across the nation, is available on scores of local and national record labels, and can be heard on regularly scheduled radio and television broadcasts. African-American gospel music is currently performed by many different ensembles such as choirs, quartets, and soloists; each of which enjoys its own performance style and unique history. Subsequently in this documentary, we will take a closer look at Shirley Caesar's total performance, dividing her verbal artistry
into five distinct categories.

To fully appreciate the analysis of gospel music and Shirley Caesar's place in the gospel tradition, it is important that we examine the definition of gospel music as a genre. Kip Lornell credits musicologist Horace Boyer for defining gospel as a "music that is rhythmically distinguished by syncopation, a driving beat, and divisions and subdivisions of the beat [that feature much] improvisation and highly embellished performances" (1988: 22). More specifically, Lornell cites an explanation given by folklorist David Evans as follows: "Evans asserts that this music serves as entertainment as well as a religious experience... [and] tends to be innovative in both content and style" (1988). The world of black gospel music is a way of life practiced by thousands, perhaps millions of people, and enjoyed by millions more on records and on local and national radio and television broadcasts. Gospel has its own stars and record companies and magazines. Gospel singers even appear occasionally on secular stages, in specially organized concerts away from the regular gospel touring circuit. But the bulk of the audience remains the already converted, or the potentially convertible -- speaking in a religious sense. Taking the above description to heart, Lornell himself concludes "Gospel music is transmitted in small group situations through oral means and to larger audiences by way of the mass media" (1988).

Only a handful of scholars such as Anthony Heilbut (1971) and Lornell (1988) have critically analyzed gospel music, its performers,
and how the gospel tradition has changed over the years.

Historian Bernice Reagon gives an appropriate synopsis of spirituals on a tape recording. Since spirituals go back to slavery days in America, Reagon cites the statement by Frederick Douglass, an ex-slave, to describe his impression of the spiritual:

"I was seated in Mount Zion Baptist Church at 'Little Row' (now Curryville), Gordon County, Georgia. Here I heard great ritual sermons preached and prayers prayed, and I sang the Aframerican religious folk songs as a child with my parents and the church folk." (Reagon, 1991)

Frederick Douglass felt that these songs presented a kind of documentation of a communal world view held by these imprisoned people. He wrote:

They told a tale which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension; they were tones, loud, long and deep, breathing the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains... The mere recurrence, even now, afflicts my spirit, and while I am writing these lines, my tears are falling. To those songs I trace my first glimmering conceptions of the dehumanizing character of slavery. I can never get rid of that conception. Those songs still follow me, to deepen my hatred of slavery, and quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds. (Reagon, 1991)
According to Reagon:

The African American oral tradition is full of references to the use of songs like "I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray," "Wade in the Water," "Steal Away," "Run Mourner Run" as signal songs of escape in general or more specifically with the efforts of those working in the Underground Railroad. Stories tell of how the songs and the singing serve the survival of the community. Spirituals were songs created as leverage, as salve, as voice, as a bridge over troubles one could not endure without the flight of song and singing.

(1991: 3)

Reagon, cultural historian and curator, specializes in 19th and 20th century African-American song and worship traditions at the Smithsonian Institution (Washington, D.C.), National Museum of American History; she is also founder, artistic director of the vocal ensemble Sweet Honey in the Rock. Reagon sums up the spiritual as a musical form by explaining its poetic dimension:

It is in the poetry carried in the bed of vocal sound of the sung spiritual that one finds the basis of the African American poetry tradition. It is in the melodies and the congregational approach to harmony that we had codified the foundation of one of the world's richest choral traditions.

Spirituals record the struggle of a people to survive, but like no other histories, have the power to touch the soul and stir the emotions of the people who sing and hear them. This African
American song, with its evolution within American society -- like a great river shooting off hundreds of tributaries to be joined together somewhere further down the way -- gives us the richest opportunity to view the African American tradition in a way that unleashes the powerful human story it holds. (Reagon, 1991)

Spirituals give the basis for the African-American poetry tradition, as Frederick Douglass said they also speak of God's deliverance, establish music harmonies, stir the emotions, and embrace the African-American Tradition.

It is vital, necessary, and essential that we provide an understanding of the spiritual so that as we notice the same phenomena occurring in gospel, we can more fully appreciate that element of its historical background. To be sure, the gospel that Shirley Caesar performs employs poetics, tells stories, speaks of God's deliverance, establishes elaborate musical harmonies, stirs emotions, and especially embraces the African-American Tradition.

One noticeable difference, however, between the spiritual and the gospel might be that most traditional spirituals are sung in a slow meter. Gospel on the other hand tends to have a faster tempo. Gospel certainly has more instrumentation probably due to the invention of the electric organ and guitar as well as the acceptance of reed, brass, and string instruments into the gospel tradition. Further, gospel music speaks more profoundly to current issues whereas spirituals offer a Biblical basis for their lyrics.
John Stewart, Anthony Heilbut, and Kip Lornell have begun to unfold gospel music's true significance and its rightful place in history. Since references that really speak to the creation and evolution of gospel music are minimal, I hope my research will add another dimension to the understanding of this great performing art. Therefore, as I approach this project, I will first review the research done by Heilbut, Lornell and other related scholars, understand its dynamics, and apply its knowledge to the study of Shirley Caesar's verbal artistry. Obviously, Caesar has become famous as a female gospel singer, but her distinct performance technique defines a unique communication that I plan to explore in the following chapters. The aforementioned scholars are, therefore, relevant to my exploration into Caesar's artistry. In addition, the lives of women gospel singers in Heilbut's text provide important parallels to Shirley Caesar's life.

Anthony Heilbut should be recognized for an in-depth portrait of gospel in *The Gospel Sound* (1971). Heilbut unveils the musical accomplishments of all-time great artists: Inez Andrews (a member of the Caravans during Shirley Caesar's years with the group, often called the most popular Caravan soloist during the late fifties), Mahalia Jackson, Clara Ward, and Shirley Caesar. Heilbut cites the popularity of male artists and gospel groups including James Cleveland, Brother Joe May, The Dixie Hummingbirds, The Five Blind Boys, and The Institutional Choir of Brooklyn, N.Y.

Heilbut reckons with, puts into historical perspective, and analyzes the above artists in an effort to record the artistic merit,
quality, and social relevancy of gospel music. Certainly, gospel listeners and performers were shaped and influenced by the impact of the music. He effectively alludes to the fact that there are political underpinnings in many song's lyrics. These political messages are deciphered only if one pays close attention. For example, the themes of Black Pride and Black Power are prevalent within gospel music. Gospel reflects the conditions and consciousness of its audience. According to Heilbut, "Gospel audiences can turn nowhere else for such fuel and passionate expression of their deepest needs, fears and resentments. For them, rock and soul can't compete" (1971: 323). One of the oldest living gospel soloists, Willie Mae Ford (as quoted by Heilbut), says "What I've got is better than liquor, it's better than a shot. 'Cause when the world's through, they've got a hangover. But when I'm done, I've got precious memories" (1971: 324).

The reason I make particular reference to the motifs for lyrics is because in The Gospel Sound, a recurring feature is how profoundly these various singers of gospel music have mastered their own style of performance which bequeaths them their uniqueness. Quite capably, then, these same artists are able to sing about social and political events in a timely manner because gospel reflects the conditions and consciousness of its audience.

Tony Heilbut brings attention to a most significant body of research that expounds on several gospel artists; and his book is recognized as one of the foremost literary documents on this subject. Heilbut introduces and remembers many gospel singers who sang during
the crucial years of the Civil Rights, the Korean Conflict, and the Vietnam War. During these years many social, economic, and spiritual changes occurred, and these changes influence the making of gospel music. Heilbut draws attention to the social upheaval in order to keep the reader focused on what has truly affected the gospel tradition. In other words, he is saying gospel reacts to its American social and political environment.

He opens his book with a brief history of gospel music's foundations. The funeral of Roberta Martin might be considered a quintessential event. He writes "Roberta Martin has grown rich from her gospel group and her publishing company. She had begun her career as a gospel singer in store-front churches, singing for nickels and dimes" (p. 9). Consequently, as we share in the reflections of Martin's funeral, I think Heilbut wants us to focus on how indebted we are to Martin and how much we need to thank her for her dedication to the foundation of gospel. The reflection on Roberta Martin is important because Roberta is sometimes referred to as the Mother of Gospel. Heilbut then introduces the reader to the first era of commercialized gospel music and places his historical commentary in appropriate context. He does so by later listing several artists who not only learned gospel music from Roberta Martin but who also benefited from the path of commercialism she paved which eventually yielded the "financial footing" needed for gospel's survival. Heilbut continues to give brief synopses of several singers. This information, which includes economic background, is important historically because
gospel music attracted an audience of the poor and less fortunate. The messages that were sung by artists and writers like Roberta Martin gave a sense of hope. Undoubtedly, Roberta Martin and many other gospel singers are yet remembered for their music as well as the culturally specific "tool" used to convey these messages. The medium of communication and the "tool" I am referring to is the verbal artistry displayed through performance.

Part of gospel as a communicative medium is performance style. An example of performance style epitomized in gospel would be Sam Cooke. Cooke, known for his silky first-tenor range, was declared by Tony Heilbut to be the greatest sex symbol ever recognized in the gospel tradition. Decidedly, gospel performers use their bodies and move in a rhythmically appreciative manner coinciding with their music. Perhaps an observer might construe these movements to exude sexuality. However, the theological nature of gospel music eliminates the possibility of sexual themes. This is just one example of personal style and performance as seen through Sam Cooke; however, Heilbut cites the uniqueness of other artists while he continues his research in *The Gospel Sound*.

Heilbut briefly traces certain events in the life of Dorothy Love Coates, which gives us a look at her personality, views, aspirations, and distinctive performance style. Dorothy Love Coates and her background singers "The Original Gospel Harmonettes" are well known for such recordings as "I'm Just Holding On" and "I Won't Let Go My Faith." Which really is to say "I, Dorothy, am rooted in the tradition
of God’s Gospel, I’m holding onto it, I’m living its philosophy daily and I am passing the same tradition onto future generations through verbal artistry depicted in music" (p. 193). Dorothy’s history reflects the shifts in self-awareness of three generations. Heilbut writes "Divorced from her husband, penniless, and vocally weakened by her illness, nothing kept her going but the old family ties and the idea of gospel" (p. 189); ultimately the two became synonymous. It was her constant belief in gospel that gave her tenacity and perseverance.

The statement recognizing family and tradition as key pillars in the structure of gospel affords me inspiration and direction as I write about Shirley Caesar. Heilbut draws unsurpassed corollaries between the singers, their songs, their family background’s as well as social, political and economic circumstances of the day. These factors have an enormous impact on the the Gospel Tradition. For example, Shirley Caesar has released a recording entitled "A Man Called King Heroin." As a singer she attacks the social dilemma of drugs in song.

During our recorded conversation, Caesar said that through stories she can also reach social, political, emotional, and spiritual arenas:

I like the songs that tell a profound story. I like to sing about current events, um, things that are happening, uh, drugs. If not sing about it, talk about it. Some years ago, I recorded a song called "A Man Called King Heroin," and um, it’s um, I just like to sing about things that are happening and let them know that
God is bigger than that problem; that He’s able to pick them up and take them out of that situation.

Drugs are bigger than you are, one dose can cause you to become addicted. The political component of this message is that it affects groups of people, the rich, the poor, all nationalities and it can even be found in our governmental system. Therefore, the drug problem develops into an economic disaster because funds are misappropriated, stolen and used to buy illegal drugs and the nation as a whole has sanctioned it.

The fact of the matter is that, Shirley, the singer, speaks about the social condition of our world through a song laden with political innuendos and concludes her message by warning her listeners of the economic disaster the world will remain as a result of drugs.

Looking again at Heilbut’s research I must say without a doubt, I have learned a lot from the format, content, and researched data published in The Gospel Sound. The author took on a huge task, one that I would be most apprehensive about because of the many, many artists he documents in this book. Each of the artists he refers to could have easily taken up much more space than he allowed them. This concerns me. Considering this phenomena, I conclude that by documenting the history of a little researched field, Heilbut shows great bravery; however, he is probably doing a disservice to the individual singers, but a positive service by providing a general history of gospel. This magnanimous attempt to be wholly comprehensive
is where Heilbut's work and my own research will differ.

After I read and reviewed *The Gospel Sound*, I was more convinced of the importance of narrowing my focus, depicting why Shirley Caesar is the First Lady of Gospel and analyzing the context in which she has achieved such status.

Another scholar who has gathered some information about religious music, its performers as well as its historical reference, is John Stewart. Stewart, in *For the Ancestors*, writes about a component of music which explores some rudimentary aspects of the gospel tradition. Specifically, he focuses on the "spiritual" because it is common knowledge that spirituals led the way for gospel, and the two genres are often intermingled in gospel concerts. Secondly, Stewart gives a detailed description of a female spiritual singer, Bessie Jones, who exhibits some of the same fundamentals of performance tradition as does Shirley Caesar. Stewart's book *For the Ancestors*, focuses on the spiritual tradition, an era of African-American religious music which preceded gospel music. He makes an important perception which is thematically and methodologically structured. He is convinced that African tradition along with the slave trade in the New World produced fertile soil for the growth of the spiritual. Stewart states that the Africans learned to cultivate certain benefits from their slave experiences. These benefits, he believes, expressed themselves in many ways, the most obvious of which being the spiritual. Appropriately enough, he chose to write about Bessie Jones, a singer of spiritual songs whose roots are deeply planted in the Georgia Sea Islands.
Stewart portrays her as a singer as well as a teacher of spirituals. The text is built on biographical references and Bessie Jones’ family tradition which gives the book a somewhat historical flavor. Since John Stewart wrote about Bessie Jones after she was well into her seventies, she reflects on many events that occurred in her distant past. Unfortunately, Bessie did not achieve her greatest recognition until she was well into her late sixties and early seventies. Since she reflects on incidents that happened in her younger years, very little of the text reveals the dynamics of fame, recognition, concert travel, and commercialism.

When I look at Shirley Caesar and her role in this text, I am interested in Shirley and her place in the gospel tradition as opposed to the spiritual tradition. I am interested in her biographical background because of its influence on her professional career which of course reflects the gospel tradition. Even though there are historical components to this argument (to construct a richer context), my study will concentrate on the current status of Caesar and the gospel tradition. We are able to take full advantage of commercialism as it impacts upon Shirley Caesar because she appears on regular television shows, she is heard on radio daily, and she has experienced fame as far back as her teenage years.

Although John Stewart’s book does not have a direct effect on the performance aspects of my research, it was the first piece I ever encountered that inspired me to write a dissertation about a singer of gospel music. Some similarities of our research analyses are: a
traditional singer; her love for the music; respect for a particular
culture's tradition; her inseparable faith in God; and most profoundly,
watching her perform what she is "called" to share, from the spiritual
genre.

One of the purposes of this study is to look at how Shirley Caesar's biographical influences affect her music. I was fortunate enough to interview Caesar on many occasions and from those interviews she shared the following background information. Without telling me the exact year of her birth, she did jokingly say that she is thirty-nine years old and holding fast. She also said her birthday was October 22. Caesar was born into an environment of fundamentalists, God-fearing people. They prayed together, went to church together and displayed their Christian beliefs in their daily life. The Mt. Calvary Holiness Church and Bishop Yelverton helped to mould Shirley into the tradition she would remain in throughout her life. She came from a large family of singers, her father, brothers, and sisters. Consequently, she became immersed in the gospel tradition; it was all around her. Shirley never went to parties nor movies, but she spent most of her spare time in church. She worked with choirs, small singing groups, went to prayer services, and she became "truly saved," to use her words, at an early age. Shirley was so engrossed in the religious upbringings of Mt. Calvary until she even pretended to "play church" at home with her brothers and sisters. She would mock the people she saw in church; she even learned to dance and shout like them. However, what is unique about her playful episodes emulating the
Mt. Calvary church family, is that while she was playing one day she says the "holy ghost" fell on her and she began crying as a result of the "playful" becoming the "real." Since that moment, Shirley has experienced many, many holy ghost encounters which have served to set her apart from the norm. Shirley has said that it was necessary for her to spend that time in the Mt. Calvary environment because she learned the "basics," the Word -- the Word she would need as a constant foundation for her music. She was therefore trained under the auspices of the "elders," and when she felt the call to separate from that church setting and go abroad, she was qualified. As she so emphatically puts it, "Who the Lord calls, he qualifies."

Culturally in the gospel tradition, one is expected to go through a form of apprenticeship. Caesar says "especially in the Black church, you just don't set out on a mission without God's approval and the approval of the elders." So the expectations of the church compelled Caesar's training for her mission. However, Shirley surpassed the church's expectation because she seemed to possess extraordinary gifts which were new and different; such gifts are often recognized as ideal to the "call." Not only did she know the Word just as all other ministers are expected to know, but she could take the same Word, interpret it and put it right down front where the people could understand it. She was able to convert the Word into stories which met the need of the listeners. The portion of her verbal artistry that possibly may not have reached her listener in sermonette, she was then able to depict through a song and consequently, no listener was left
out. She, like few other performers of her era, was able to engulf the entire audience through a performed verbal artistry aimed at everybody; that is still within the tradition, but the highest, most creative realization of it, Caesar is able to relate to her audience.

Although she has little recollection of her father, her mother served as a central force in her life, and the two of them had an inseparable bond. She has always had a great respect and esteem for the elderly which partially substantiates her choice to sing traditional music because she often draws from cultural and family tradition, including traditional Christian values as a basis for her song-sermons. The following chapter will give a more precise family description for Caesar as I analyze how great her cultural, social, familial, and demographic background was.

Since Shirley grew up watching gospel singers excite their audiences and speak to them in a fashion that was unique for that special occasion, she somehow knew that more was taking place in these church services and concerts than just the singing of a song. A total interaction between the singer and his or her listener seemed to be what a "true talent" wanted to achieve through singing. At an early age, she knew that there must be a holistic interaction between the singer and the listener. Additionally, what made a "true talent" was the singer who could successfully achieve this excited interaction through music. Shirley has said on various occasions how powerful some of those singers used to be, and she still remembers their anointed songs and concerts. She also learned to use some of the same kinds of
performance techniques to help her perfect her own style or as she said "I borrowed from others until I came into my 'own.'"

Shirley involves her audience in a multi-dimensional, call and response pattern when she performs on stage. The term "multi-dimensional" pertains to the makings of the entire context as well as the discourse practices which surround the whole experience of watching Shirley Caesar on stage. Discourse practices refer to codes and features of language which go beyond the sentence level, to ways of using language and making sense in speech. In other words, the language takes on other features that make it more comprehensible to the listener (Gee, 1986). These practices make direct reference to speech patterns that may be seen within a specific social and cultural group. Shirley’s delivery takes communication beyond merely the stringing together of words. Through vocal activity and body language, she brings the words to life -- true verbal artistry. In the culturally specific exercise she uses, or when a single person stands and shouts back to Shirley, "Sing," the recapitulation of all these ingredients go into describing the context. "Discourse practices" refers beyond the sentence level to features of language, ways of using language and making sense in speech (Gee, 1986). These practices make direct reference to speech patterns that may be seen within a specific social and cultural group.

Included in Shirley Caesar’s discourse practices are also non-verbal communication cues which further exemplify cultural and social influences. These influences, along with the spoken word, help
to paint a clearer picture of the context surrounding Caesar's music. To explain this idea a bit further, the context includes verbal as well as non-verbal interactions between the audience and Shirley, her background singers, and her musicians. For example, one must include audience participants waving their hands as a sign of approval to Shirley’s music, and a person standing and shouting back to Shirley, "Sing," to properly describe the context. My assertion is that Shirley somehow moves her spoken sentences beyond what the statement initially represents at face value. In a culturally specific expertise she uses features that Richard Bauman describes as "keys to performance" to make her language more appealing to her listeners (1977: 17). The "Keys to Performance" will be further expounded upon in Chapter 3.

I will also examine a specific Personal Experience Narrative told by Shirley Caesar and detail how that story becomes a source for her testimony, a sermon base, a lead-in to a song and a culmination for the climax of her stage performance. I will draw from the research done by Sandra K. Stahl to explore not only the creation of Personal Experience Narratives, but how history, appeal to tradition, cultural identification, as well as personal identity come to life for Shirley when she tells these narratives in story form on stage, subsequently reliving the experience (Goffman, 1974). Erving Goffman and Sandra Stahl suggest that Personal Experience Narratives are important instruments in the presentation of self and the construction and communication of a sense of situational reality. Sandra Stahl calls these narratives "personal experience stories." More significantly,
however, both of these scholars are interested in the abundance of information that is disclosed in this genre. I believe that Shirley says a lot about herself in Personal Experience Narratives because she is able to convert her discourse to a "story" and translate her story into the dialect of her listeners (plain, simple and understandable). Shirley Caesar's communication style makes both her performance unique and her interaction with the audience constant.

Shirley's personal attachment and involvement with her stories tend to accelerate during her performance. Shirley says "I live it all over again every time I tell those stories." The scholarship seems to verify Shirley's explanation. As Richard Bauman writes: "The event recounted in Personal Experience Narratives is one in which the person telling the story was originally personally involved, and the point of view from which the event is recounted is that of the narrator by virtue of his or her participation in that event" (1977: 21-26). Shirley Caesar's employment of the Personal Experience Narrative stems from understanding an oral tradition and produces many of her best sellers like "No Charge" and "I Remember Mama."

I base my methodology for examining Shirley Caesar's artistry on research done by Richard Bauman in *Story, Performance, and Event* and *Verbal Art As Performance* (1976). In these texts Bauman gives credibility to the perspective that an artistic event must take into consideration the performer, the art form, the audience, and the setting if we are to represent the performance situation accurately. All of the above criteria will be focused upon in order to represent
Shirley Caesar's performance style. Bauman's texts provided the structured base for my analysis. For example, as I discuss Shirley's verbal artistry and listen to her recording of "I Remember Mama," I can detect many of the same performance techniques that Bauman reports in his research. He asserts that there is indeed important culturally specific communication that occurs during a narrated performance. This recording not only exemplifies the love and respect Shirley has for her mother, but it also exposes her verbal artistry, the gratitude of her audience, and it demonstrates the performance of the personal experience story.

It is not unusual for people to rise to their feet and shout "Sing it, Shirley," or for communicators to engage in their own personal interaction. When spontaneous communication takes place, a particular member of the audience may step out in the aisle and walk toward Shirley, or she may find that specific person and walk toward him. The two of them cause their interaction to become quite personal. Shirley says she likes to be near the people, so perhaps her goal for performing in close proximity to the listener is so she can have that personal "two-way" interaction during certain moments of her performance. However, we still must keep in mind that she never excludes her other audience members, her background, nor her musicians whenever those spontaneous personal interactions take place in a concert. Undoubtedly, it is this trait of African-American expressive culture and uninhibited response that causes Caesar's concerts to remain forever impromptu and improvised. Her performances are not
static and do not depend on a written script; they remain fresh and afford an element of excitement unique to each concert. Just like a skein of yarn, bit-by-bit it unravels.

In the performance-centered approach, the formal manipulation of linguistic features is secondary to the emergent nature of performance. The performance represents a transformation of the basic referential use of language. The message somehow becomes augmented and the discourse practices show how significant cultural traditions are in understanding the dynamics of verbal art. Bauman states that in an artistic performance of this kind, there is something going on in the communicative interchange which says to the auditor "interpret what I say in some special sense." In other words, in Shirley Caesar's case, interpret what I am saying first as "A Word from the Lord," which is supposed to have an element of captivating spiritual power because it's the Lord speaking through Shirley Caesar. The same words that Shirley speak also carry double and triple meanings with moral lessons, invitations for verbal feedback, and entertainment. Therefore, Shirley gives her auditor an invitation as well as a citation that what they are receiving goes far beyond "words" alone. The words alone taken literally just can't convey that exuberant, exciting interplay which goes on in Shirley Caesar's performances. Therefore, the performance becomes constitutive of the domain of verbal art as spoken communication.

Shirley is influenced greatly by her African-American heritage, and she therefore is able to evoke audience response and participation.
Certainly, an observer who knows what he is looking for can pick out culturally conventionalized meta-communication (Babcock, 1977), which serves as the common denominator between the audience and Shirley.

According to Barbara A. Babcock in "The Story in the Story: Metanarration in Folk Narrative," metanarration calls attention to the speech event as a performance and to the relationship between the narrator and the audience and thereby supplies a "frame" (an interpretive context) from which the performance may be judged. Further meta-communication comments on both verbal and non-verbal communicative events as it refers to the framing devices and to the relationship between the performer and the audience (Bauman, 1977).

Caesar calls attention to the speech event when she engages the audience, comments on the event's genre, and establishes a frame for the event without disturbing her performance transition. So when she smoothly converts over from a song and says "Want to tell you a story," not only is she commenting on the fact that her communication style and genre is about to change, she simultaneously draws attention to the narrative as a narrative. She uses this technique to ensure that her audience remains involved in the reciprocal dialogue (right up with you).

I hope to stress to the reader that the influences of African-American heritage on Shirley Caesar's artistry may be noticed in her use of the oral tradition. Shirley draws from tradition when she tells her personal experience stories. In Chapter IV, I plan to analyze her story "Four Angels" not only for performance technique, but
also because it is a way of looking at Caesar through her own personal experiences. In "The Personal Narrative as Folklore" (1977), Sandra K. Stahl proclaims that Personal Experience Narratives serve many purposes for the teller as well as for the listener. Amy Shuman reports in Storytelling Rights (1986) that in Personal Experience Narratives, the teller claims an experience as his or her own.

Why then does Shirley Caesar tell her own stories? Shuman suggests that a storyteller such as Caesar has the entitlement to tell her own stories if, in fact, the experiences she relates are ones she has been directly involved in. In addition, the context is most appropriate for the telling of Shirley's personal experience stories because the listener will hopefully use the messages transmitted in this story as a personal direction for his future. In other words, since Shirley Caesar is telling stories that inevitably have a Biblical/Christian or moral basis, she believes that her listeners are ones who seek the kinds of messages she brings -- which also justify the storyability as well as the tellability of her narrative. Consequently, her performance becomes an artful and evaluated story (Shuman, 1986) because she dramatizes (re-enacts) the events as she tells them to her listeners. Harvey Sacks defines these narratives as being stories that are about or have to do with the people who are telling them and hearing them, and the position of the narrator is crucial (Shuman, 1986). For Shirley, some of these purposes and reasons for her stories are:
-- they offer her a greater appreciation for her family heritage, its influence on her story motifs, as well as her performance technique;
-- they help her teach scriptural lessons and lessons on morality;
-- they help her carve out her rightful place in the gospel tradition and consequently offer her listeners greater insights on how and why she is famed as Shirley Caesar, First Lady of Gospel.

For example, through Shirley's personal stories, she finds it much easier to deliver little sermonettes in story form because it helps her listener really understand the essence of the scriptural text and more importantly she reminds us "Jesus was a storyteller." This serves as her foundation. Even more knowledgeably, she is able to talk about herself and simultaneously call upon scriptural references which take the focus away from her and place it on "Jesus." For instance, she tells a story about her own illness. This specific part of the story represents Shirley and her personal bout with sickness. However, as the story evolves, she has prayed for healing; Jesus heals her and her Personal Narrative becomes a parable about Jesus healing the sick. Her brilliance, as seen in such performances, convinces the audience that she is indeed a master storyteller.

The spoken communication of an individual embodies the ideology, socio/economic environment, and culture of the person's heritage. Shirley is influenced greatly by her African-American heritage which stimulates the audience's response and participation. Certainly, one
may pick out culturally conventionalized meta-communication, a common denominator between the audience and Shirley which is observed during each concert. This communication style makes her performance unique and makes her interaction with the body of listeners constant. [It is my belief that we cannot arbitrarily separate a performance from the background of a performer. As I continue to analyze the story "Four Angels," I will again refer to research done by Sandra Stahl.] The Personal Experience Narrative serves many purposes for Shirley as Stahl suggests (1977).

Caesar borrows from the scriptural text which exemplifies Jesus the storyteller as a base for her personal experience stories. The scriptures verify Jesus' healing power, saving power, and total omnipotence through parables and stories. Caesar, on the other hand, not only extends the Jesus message which invariably represents his "gospel," but through her personal stories, she also tells the listener about "Shirley."

I will consult appropriate scholarship which will help to expound on storytelling and sacred narratives in an effort to better clarify Shirley's performance. I will also point out the similarities and differences of her artistry as I examine it in reference research done by Richard Bauman, Sandra Stahl, Amy Shuman, Pat Mullen, Jeff Titon and others.

My initial source of scholarship comes from Richard Bauman. Bauman affords me the basis for my methodology. He writes in *Verbal Art as Performance*: "a familiar example from contemporary American society
might be the personal narrative, which is frequently rendered in reportorial mode, but which may well be highlighted as performance" (1977: 13 & 26). Sandra Stahl has suggested that there is an evaluative component associated with Personal Experience Narratives which helps the teller determine the worthiness of the story he or she tells. When I asked Shirley Caesar why she told so many stories about her mother, she replied: "I had the most wonderful, the Lord gave me the best mom in the world. The best mama in the whole wide world and uh, I just, I don’t know, I think that when you’re blessed and fortunate enough to have a mother, do all you can while you can for her. She might not be the best mom in the world, but she’s still your mother. And I think because my mom was a semi-handicapped person, I felt it my duty to do all I could."

Sandra Stahl points out the relevance of the intimate context that exists in Personal Experience Narratives. In other words, not only do these stories talk about events, people, material that affects you (the teller and the listener) in some meaningful way, but the specific subject or theme of the narrative can produce different degrees of "intimacy." Consequently, the dynamic memories of her mother, converted into "personal stories," yield the greatest degree of intimacy for Shirley Caesar, and therefore helps her retell her stories, over and over again with the greatest enthusiasm, emotional attachment, and "re-liveability" all generated through that intimate context. Accordingly, the intimate context of Shirley Caesar and her mother represent a personal relation between these two figures far
different from the context analyzed in performance, because it is
during her performance that Caesar's use of public context marks the
essential elements needed for the "Performed Personal Experience
Narratives" and not just reported speech.

The short summary of Shirley telling about her mother is also a
personal experience story which can stand up to evaluative measures.
The subject "mother" warrants an element of respect from most people.
The listeners most often already expect the stories about "mother" to
be honorable and heart warming. When Shirley chose this subject to
talk about, she set the stage for her listeners' evaluative process to
begin. When she says "I want to tell you a story," Shirley draws from
her storytelling which hinges on how well she can reflect on the past
and bring it into the here and now.

Of Richard Bauman in "Keys to Performance," I apply his research to
Shirley Caesar's verbal artistry (especially in storytelling) because
it gives a greater clarity as to what takes place between Shirley and
her audience. Bauman's research also helps us to see Caesar as a
performer and not just a speaker of words. "Keys to performance" is
defined as Richard Bauman explains:

All framing, then including performance, is accomplished through
the employment of culturally conventionalized meta-communication.
In empirical terms, this means that each speech community will make
use of a structured set of distinctive communicative means from
among its resources, in culturally conventionalized and culturally
specific ways to key the performance frame, such that all communication that takes place within that frame is to be understood as performance within that community (Bauman 1977: 16).

In other words, "keys to performance" can serve as special keys to "understanding" communication that takes place within a community. In this section, as I refer to the "keys to performance," I will also define how these elements work for Shirley Caesar and her verbal artistry.

Special paralinguistic feature - These are features such as timbre, rate, stress, and loudness which cannot be readily converted into the written word, but they can alter the true perception of the verbal artistry if they are omitted. Sometimes these features may be as subtle as "huh?" or as strong as the intense loudness Shirley forces her voice to reach if she desires, and all of this is done in just a matter of seconds.

Special codes - Another performance key that Shirley uses is special codes, meaning she uses special and unique terms to represent certain aspects of her descriptions found in narration. For example, she informed the audience of her youngest sister's death, and instead of saying "Joyce is dead," she just said "and of course today she's asleep." This metaphorical representation of death is suggestive of the Christian belief that there is a 'life' after death. Joyce will wake up in heaven one day. Also, this
metaphoric representation of death may be said to ease the pain attributed to the word "death." In addition to the metaphoric implications, Shirley altered her terminology of death to appeal to her audience's sensibility.

**Parallelism** - Often Shirley Caesar uses parallelism in sermons and song because she has great mastery over repetition paired with systematic variation of phonic, grammatical, and semantic elements. It must be understood that parallelism can be marked by repetition accompanied with variation in pitch and timbre. Therefore, when she chimes to the audience "Say yea, say yea, say yea, say yes" the shift from "yea" to "yes" at the end is parallelism on the linguistic level. When she herself repeats "my, my, my, my" these words establish parallelism on the paralinguistic level because even though the words considered alone are an example of repetition, when she shifts pitch and tone, this becomes an example of parallelism. In fact, Caesar uses parallelism and many other paralinguistic features as a natural part of her performances. In addition, the pitch of these sounds go up and down depending on what effect she wants to achieve at that time.

There are moments during Caesar's concerts when one may focus on her particular artistic style of performance and then there are other times when an observer may want to pay particular attention to the narration of her dialogue which often stems from her Christian
background and her family tradition.

At this point of my research I will now shift from Shirley Caesar's performance to the concept of narrative (specifically, sacred narrative, in this section). Of the many constituents involved with sacred narratives, there are specific segments that are common to most. In an effort to understand the structural component of Caesar's sacred narratives I found an article by Patrick Mullen to be most helpful. Mullen agrees that the underlying structures, images, and functions of sacred narratives are similar. In his article "Ritual and Sacred Narratives in the Blue Ridge Mountains" (1983), Mullen analyzes stories based on personal religious events. After reading his article, I saw its significance to my research and how applicable the categories of which he divided the narrative into this configuration is the understanding of Caesar's sacred narratives. Mullen divides these narratives into: 1) conversion experience, 2) calling experience, and 3) healing experience. From my research I have observed Caesar's narratives as belonging to the same categories.

The following analysis looks specifically at Caesar's personal religious experience and how it expounds on the assertions and taxonomy suggested by Mullen:

1) the conversion experience: when Shirley actually says she became "saved;"

2) the calling experience: where she says she heard the Lord's voice telling her to go preach;
3) the healing experience: where she tells the story of God healing her which also reflects the mystical power of God, contrasted to the impotence of humans (e.g. doctors for bringing about change).

In other words, Shirley’s conversion experience, healing experience, and especially her calling experience, become sacred narratives that can be told over and over because they represent important events in her life. As Pat Mullen has suggested, these narratives do occur initially as mystical, private events (1983), but because they possess components of "storyability and tellability" (Shuman, 1986) and they become public performance, Shirley draws from these experiences to make stories. Most importantly, however, Mullen reminds us that no personal (examples cited above) experience is really complete until it has been shared, and, to an extent, validated through public testimony. Caesar brings her experiences to fruition as she performs. An additional component of the conversion, calling and healing experience, is the actual emotional awareness of God’s omnipotence. Shirley makes it known to her audience that the aforementioned experiences also embrace a practical acquaintance with the holy ghost, an intermingling of one’s spirit with God’s spirit. This intermingling of spirits accompanies the healing ritual, the calling ritual, and the conversion ritual. These experiences somehow allow one’s human spirit to take momentary leave of the natural and entreat the spiritual while "the holy ghost works through you." The
holy ghost brings about that desired affect of healing, conversion, etc. What makes all of this explanation unique is the fact that Shirley Caesar is capable of telling about these experiences through words which become personal stories.

Jeff Todd Titon certainly adds clarity to this idea as well as offering similar provocative examples and specialized discourse associated with the acts of preaching, singing, and becoming "saved." In his book *Powerhouse for God* (1988), he focuses on language, tradition, and the meaning of "the word" as used by specific groups (specifically the Independent Baptist Church in Stanley, Virginia); one gets a clear, sociological or historical view of religions and cultural practices. Again, this specialized discourse is inevitably represented through performance. Therefore, I view Titon's research as most appropriate for my analysis of Shirley Caesar because he writes about the intentional implications of prayer, preaching, and singing.

Titon writes "Language in religious practices not only says something, but also does something. A person who prays not only says a prayer, but performs the act of praying, singing, preaching, testifying and teaching." Titon credits the British philosopher J.L. Austin (*How to Do Things With Words*, 1975) for calling attention to the kind of discourse that not only says something, but also does something; he calls these kinds of statement "performatives." For example, when a person begins a statement with "I pray that" or "I testify" the person brings into being a "prayer" and a testimony.
Austin believed "in the context of worship" such statements are perlocutionary and also illocutionary because when a sermon brings a sinner to the altar, the sermon is definitely perlocutionary. If performing a hymn brings tears of joy to someone's eyes, it is perlocutionary (p. 206). In other words, sacred language commits the speaker to a performance that brings something into being which would not have existed without that particular performance. Additionally, Titon adds to this argument by stating that sacred language is especially context dependent. Which is to say, although the performed word brings about a noticeably obvious change, this change is brought about by the total sum of religious experience from which the performance derived. Finally, Titon also argues that the performed sacred word is so influential because of its "power." He says "The power is in the belief; it is the power of faith, and for the believer it makes religions and sacred language meaningful and operative" (p. 207).

What Titon has asserted is that the power of religious language allows the performer of that language to achieve perlocutionary and illocutionary changes. With this in mind, he also understands the necessity and role of the context observed in performance. In the case of Shirley Caesar, the context of worship and performance are inseparable because her performance is "worship." She never begins a concert without telling her audience "This is not a concert, this is church; see, some of you thought you were coming to a concert, but you came to church. And, these first three rows are my Amen corner." In
other words, Caesar lets her audience know right from the beginning, they came to worship God. She even sets up an imaginary church layout by sectioning off her Amen corner.

After we establish the worship setting, Shirley makes full use of her "performative" statements like "there's a song ringing in my spirit" at which time she will lead a song. At another time, she will say "my testimony today is..." and she begins testifying about her sickness being healed or her soul being saved through the spirit of God. Yet, on another occasion, she will say in a sing-song manner "Want to tell you a story," where immediately she tells a story which inevitably changes into a sermonette. The point here is that with each genre of sacred discourse Shirley achieves her goal of (a) reaching the people's spirits, (b) convicting, uplifting, and calling people to God's salvation, and (c) causing an emotional effect of her performance (e.g. tears, shouting).

This dissertation as a whole then, is not a biography, but can be seen as a narrative account built around the principal events in the life of Shirley Ann Caesar. This account forms the base of my analysis of her contribution to the tradition of gospel music.

To achieve these research goals it was necessary that I establish a rapport with Shirley Caesar, which was not a difficult task as I was received as a scholar, fellow musician, as well as a cultural affiliate because I had long been an observer of her work. The fact that I too was born in North Carolina just as Shirley was, grew up to appreciate the gospel tradition, and had read the scholarship that exists
surrounding this topic, all afforded me an advantage in synthesizing what was now becoming "Shirley Caesar - A Woman of Words."

Additionally, the fact I am Black gave us both comfort that was honest and sincere.

By traveling with Shirley Caesar over the past twelve months, listening to her concerts, interviewing her and recording her true feelings about gospel music, I have become convinced that just as Shirley has memories and stories to tell, so do the other gospel greats. The rewards would be significant if each gospel great could tell his or her own story in full. My research methods verify that there is an extensive amount of material that has yet to be revealed.

My goal is to construct an explanatory, culturally specific photograph, which will move beyond words and further the understanding of "complex communicative forms." Certainly the communicative forms that Shirley Caesar exhibits through performance include contextual interactions and nonverbal interactions which are greatly influenced by tradition and culture. I intend to serve as an interpreter from that culture, one who has a historical knowledge of the discourse in the verbal artistry of Shirley Caesar.

My ability to serve in this role derives from the experience I have had as a trained pianist who not only played the traditional classics, but also learned to play gospel. It was in Durham, North Carolina, where I served as organist for a very popular choir called "The Voice of Peace" (which recorded the album "No Body But You Lord" in 1979 on the Savoy label, one of the largest gospel companies during the 1960s
and '70s) that I was first exposed to Shirley Caesar. The "Voice of Peace" made a guest appearance at Caesar's annual crusade which convened at the Durham Civic Center. Shirley remembers my participation with the "Voices of Peace" on that particular evening. She said this event all came back to her memory quite vividly after she consented for me to join her entourage. When she saw me, she said "Oh, I remember you; you've put on a little weight." Certainly, my attendance at her crusade was one way of showing my interest in her ministry and also reminded her of my musicianship.

As a pianist/organist, I had already become quite accustomed to the dynamics between the performer and the audience. Accordingly, the stage fright associated with stage performances was by no means new to me. Although I was quite flattered to sit on stage with Shirley Caesar, I felt competent in my role. I was an "insider" because I had once been a gospel musician. Further, I felt qualified in my abilities to analyze Caesar's verbal artistry because she exemplified the ingredients of the African-American tradition, the oral tradition and the gospel tradition, all of which I was familiar with by means of cultural ties or by means of academic discipline.

In the very beginning, I asked her how she saw my role in this project and how she perceived me. She said that she felt honored that someone would want to write about her. It is her wish to leave such a work on record for the academic community as well as for the world at large, and especially for future generations. I was interested in the stories she told me about her family, her growing up and learning to
sing in Durham, North Carolina, and other details of her biography and her massive contributions to the ethno-history of black Americans.

The idea for the entire project came out of the pool of research I tapped into for my Master's thesis, and the reading of Ray Allen, Richard Bauman, Sandra Stahl, Trudier Harris, Amy Shuman, Sonja H. Stone, and most importantly, Patrick B. Mullen. These writers gave me insight on how important the representation of oral history is in the piecing together of cultural tradition. This scholarship also sparked a desire in me to do a similar project.

Such a project was complicated though, because Shirley Caesar averages around 130 stage performances annually, and she is tied up in running her business and outreach ministries. Perhaps I did just as she did -- to get her initial exposure to the world of fame -- she and I both wrote our own personal requests and sent them to the persons we believed would make the difference. After consulting with my advisor, I wrote Shirley Caesar two letters. In these short but precise letters, I explained that I was a doctoral candidate in the English Department of Ohio State University, elaborated on a few other of my accomplishments and simultaneously asked her if she would please allow me to write about her for my dissertation. For about a month, I heard nothing from her. I found the telephone number to her home office in Durham, talked with her secretaries, and was told to call back when I could speak to her business manager, Carolyn Sanders. I made several calls to Durham and finally spoke to Carolyn Sanders just as Barbara White and Bonita had promised would happen several days before.
(Barbara and Bonita are Shirley Caesar’s other secretaries who mind the office there on Club Boulevard in Durham.)

I couldn’t believe it! Carolyn was privy to my letters and my requests. Carolyn, being Shirley’s business manager, always knows where Caesar can be reached, her hotel reservations, and her itinerary and is, therefore, in constant touch with Shirley Caesar. Especially when the secretaries in the office are assigned to other duties, Carolyn is the person who Caesar talks directly to most often. After talking to me, she asked me for my home telephone number and promised she would call me back. I still had an element of doubt about the whole process because it had taken so long. About ten minutes later, as I was preparing to leave my apartment and go to the Ohio State University campus, the telephone rang. It was Shirley Caesar! She was encouraging to me and warned me she was on the road traveling a whole lot. The only way to actually see what she does was to accompany her on tour. And I did. Without a doubt, this experience was one of the most profound and exciting adventures I have ever had in my life.

It is important that I say Shirley Caesar has helped me in every way possible in the pursuit of this research. She has assisted me in my travel, lodging and general sustenance as this dissertation evolves. She has told me that as she helps other people the Lord continues to bless her abundantly.
Figure 1  Lou Rawls and Brooksie Harrington at a reception held at the governor's mansion in Columbus, Ohio.
"The People are depending on you Shirley Ann. Don't let God down, don't let the people down, and don't let me down."

This charge was given to Shirley by her mother Mrs. Hallie Caesar, and these words have been the blanket that she has cloaked herself in over the many years of her vast accomplishments in the field of gospel music. Without a doubt she believes that she was "called" to do what she does -- which is preach and sing -- and in that order. What sets her music ministry apart from the average gospel artist is the fact that she calls herself an Evangelist-Singer and to use her words "The anointing makes the difference."

Lou Rawls is a famous rhythm and blues singer who began his musical career as a gospel singer. I knew that he and Shirley Caesar were friends and occasionally performed together. Fortunately, I had the opportunity to interview him about his views on gospel music and the performance of gospel as seen through Shirley Caesar. As the conversation takes place, it is easy to notice how Lou Rawls displays his own "fluency." The pace of his speech may be said to represent a kind of performance and not simply "reported speech" (Bauman, 1977).

As an effort to represent the speech distinctions which separate Lou Rawls' conversation from the norms of conventional elocution, I
transcribed his conversation in a somewhat ethnopoetic style which indicates pauses and some of the rhythms of his speech. This ethnopoetic style is intended to suggest to the reader that Rawls' speech, very similar to Shirley Caesar's speech, surpasses the reportorial mode and becomes an oral performance. Therefore, even though the transcription of Rawls' conversation may not be a fully complete ethnopoetic analysis, which would draw attention to all of his vocal inflections such as duration, emphasis, and pace, the choice of representing his conversation in poetic phrases suggests, as nearly as possible, that Rawls' speech is closer to an African-American performance tradition. Due to the influences of many years of an acquired stage presence, it is virtually impossible for Lou Rawls, Shirley Caesar, and probably many other artists to lay aside all of their performance skills, even when they engage in a day-to-day conversation.

Lou Rawls donates a lot of time and energies toward the fund-raising of the United Negro College Fund. As part of a fund-raiser, he participates in a golf tournament hosted in Columbus, Ohio. Frank Hale, retired vice provost of The Ohio State University, was privy to my research on Shirley Caesar, was an active member of the United Negro College Fund, and knew of Rawls' guest appearance in Columbus. I asked Hale if he could arrange for me to possibly talk with Lou about my research, and he did. I met Rawls on a Monday evening around 6:00 p.m. at Governor Voinovich's mansion where a reception was held to honor Rawls. I finally managed to push my way
through the crowd, talk to Rawls briefly, and he invited me to the golf course the following day where he took the time and talked to me.

From that conversation, I learned some valuable information about the evolution of gospel as well as the evolution of some well-known gospel artists. He told me that he was fascinated with my research and the "subject" of my research. He had the following to say about Shirley:

**Lou Rawls:** I met her thirty years ago when she was a kid in Chicago, singing with Albertina Walker, I'm telling you man, and the Caravans. She just stuck to her guns, and of course she's an ordained minister and all that. Now, had she made the transition (meaning from gospel to rhythm and blues according to Rawls) she would have been another Dinah Washington. But she didn't, she stayed in the gospel field and thank God for her. Because the girl is Bad. The girl kills, man. I mean you know. The one song that she does, that "No Charge" that is,
in my way of thinking
-- that's the best song anybody ever made
'cause that's calling -- and telling it like it is.

Brooksie: What do you think about her performance?

Lou Rawls: Oh, there is no question about that;
the woman is electrifying.

Brooksie: Why?

Lou Rawls: Because the woman is sincere.
She believes in what she's doing
and it shows.
Every year when she comes on the Telethon,
(Lou Rawls hosts the national annual United Negro College Fund and
Shirley makes an appearance on television in support of that
scholarship fund.)
I mean when this woman comes out to perform,
you can feel the electricity in the room.
It's like being in one of those old Baptist churches;
you know,
where the minister shifts gears on you.
You see she does that.
She does that in her music.
People that have never heard Shirley Caesar
and don’t know who Shirley Caesar is
when they do hear her and see her
-- they never forget this woman,
because this woman strikes you.
POW! She hits you right in the heart,
because she’s sincere
and she means what she’s doing.
Shirley is a little lady
who stands about 5’4" in magnificent high heel shoes.
And even though one might attribute such a powerful voice
to a larger person of stature,
this little lady holds her own quite impressively.
She takes authority in what she does
and this is evident every time she picks up the microphone to sing.
Again, she says the Lord has given her this authority
which she has been blessed with for many, many years.
Perhaps that is why she is the nominee of ten Grammy Awards,
the recipient of five Grammy Awards,
has recorded several Gold Albums,
has been awarded five Dove Awards,
and has ministered to thousands of sold-out concerts,
nationally and internationally.
Shirley has been inducted into the Gospel Hall of Fame,
continues to appear on several television shows
and has been awarded keys to most major cities in the USA. Consequently, her success remains constant, and her albums remain on the top gospel chart listings.

Lou Rawls gave me the kind of personalized details which confirmed my fascination with Shirley the artist, the singer, the performer. His conversation assured me that she was among the top in her field, and that my research was timely and important. Further, Rawl's synopsis of Shirley as he saw her led way to a conversation that Caesar and I had about her family background and how it influenced her career.

Shirley Caesar was born in Durham, North Carolina, to Jim and Hallie Caesar. She says she was a little girl with a high energy level and often found herself in normal childish pranks. She came from a large family of several sisters and brothers and often tells stories of her growing up there in Durham. Unfortunately, her father died when Shirley was around seven years old; yet she often speaks of him and his influence on her life.

On one occasion, I had flown to Durham after previously arranging a weekend of travel and conversation with Shirley. When I arrived in Durham and checked into the hotel, Shirley called me and asked me to ride with her to a funeral there in Durham; she was to sing a solo. I readily agreed to go since this would give me another chance to ask more questions, learn more about her, and listen to her sing. I gathered my tape recorder, batteries, and note pad and met Shirley on Club Boulevard. She was driving. As we rode along, she began telling
me about growing up in Durham and to my surprise, the street we traveled on gave a clear view to some important landmarks that were significant mementos of her childhood. While she slowly drove along this street, she pointed out the following.

I remember breaking out a street light and...
I took a rock and threw it,
and it broke the street light out.
The lady,
her name was Mrs. Carrington,
she called me;
she said "Come here."
And she took a switch
and she tanned my little legs,
and I cried, and she gave me a nickel.
And I said "Please don't tell it."
And she said OK.
And as I was walking in the door,
the phone was ringing.
My daddy was just coming in from the field.
He had a sack of potatoes on his shoulders.
I remember that. He put the potatoes down.
I was in the kitchen
laying in the middle of the floor
reading a comic book while Mama was cooking,
and my daddy grabbed me right here
(referring to the upper part of her back, just below the neck).
He just picked me up,
carried me in the room
and gave me a good whipping.
I remember that.

Perhaps the above underlined phrase might seem like a gesture of betrayal, at least I would say so. I never asked Caesar if she thought that Mrs. Carrington betrayed her because, after all, Mrs. Carrington did give her a nickel and promise not to tell her parents. Although Caesar tells this story humorously, she later reminded me of how intense the discipline was "under her parent’s roof," and as a result of her up-bringing, she is a morally just and honest person today.

It is significant that Shirley remembers her father as she does. She recalls him as a strong man who epitomized the father figure most children probably remember. She has great respect and honor for the memory she does have of Jim Caesar (her father) and recalls him working in Durham at Ligette & Myers Tobacco Company to provide for his family. However, in the above story, when Shirley talks about him disciplining her, she even holds this memory in great esteem because now she realizes how much he wanted her to be special, do the correct things, be honest and most of all be obedient, just as she is obedient to the Lord’s call on her life. Further, the same story produces a positive view of Shirley’s father to her because the discipline was a
valuable lesson which she never forgot. She even remembers it quite vividly today; in her words "I remember it like it was just yesterday." The climax of this valuable lesson, nevertheless, becomes more dimensional because Shirley received two whippings -- which may have seemed unjustified to her as a little girl, but today yields a greater appreciation and admiration for the "right" that her father wanted her to distinguish from the "wrong."

Such common events as happen to most children also happened to Shirley which made her no more special or peculiar than other children. Although Shirley’s father died when she was just a little girl, she has vivid memories of him being a great gospel singer. He had a quartet, called the "Just Come Four Quartet," which sang 'a cappella' and he would "pack churches out just like I do today," she would say. "I remember him singing 'I'm looking for that stone that was hewn out of the mountain,' and he would sing and walk up and down the church aisles looking behind the pews as if to illustrate him looking for 'that stone.' He was a great gospel singer as well as others of her brothers and sisters. Shirley says "I don't know why the mantle fell on me to carry on the tradition."

The afternoon that Caesar and I had this particular conversation about her coming from a family of singers and why she was chosen to take the lead role as tradition bearer of gospel music, we were riding in her car and she was driving. She was inspired to reminisce about her family while we passed certain landmarks. In addition, the subject that we discussed seemed most appropriate because not only were we
traveling familiar territory, but we had just come from a funeral that was held at Fisher's Funeral Home where she had been requested to sing "Faded Rose." Coincidentally, we also drove by the cemetery where her mother was buried and she pointed that area out to me. Appropriately, it would seem to follow then, that she would reflect quite intently on memories of her growing up, listening to her father's quartet sing, and remembering the distinct vocal talents of her other brothers and sisters.

Shirley and I were still touring the city of Durham on the afternoon following the funeral when she was inspired to tell me even more details about her family, how they sang and how she fit into the gospel tradition by carrying out the legacy of her father. Certainly this information supplies a backdrop for Caesar's gift of song.

"Why Shirley?"
I've often asked myself that question,
because I come from a family of twelve children,
all of them were singers.
I am the seventh girl
and yet I am the tenth child.
Why is it out of the twelve,
the Lord reached back and chose me?
I don't know.
If my oldest sister had lived,
she would have been sixty-nine;
and Lucille, Gertrude, Julius and Virginia, those four used to travel with my daddy and sing. Then, my brothers Leroy and Albert, those two sang quartets. Now Cleo never did sing, of course, he can, but he just never sang in a group. Then later on my baby brother, the youngest one, Solomon, he sings with a group called the Sensational Six. Even Ann was singing rhythm and blues; then Virginia started singing in clubs. Lina never did sing. She could, but she just didn’t. I cannot tell you why the mantle fell on me from my father, but it did.

Shirley says of herself that she was never looked upon as someone who would succeed in the academic world nor in the World of Fame. She tells of how the educators would tell her mom there was really no use in sending her to college. She really was not cut out for that type of life style. All that people recognized her for was wanting to go around from church to church and sing and jump and shout. When she reached her plateau in the entertainment world, however, she saw the need to return to college and complete her baccalaureate degree.
Shirley said, "I just wanted to prove it to myself, and to those who said I would never succeed academically, that I was indeed sincere about making something of myself and that I could obtain a degree if only given the opportunity." Unfortunately, her initial exiting from North Carolina Central University in Durham, North Carolina, was not due to academics, but because she was experiencing financial difficulties, and, most importantly, her call into the ministry was experienced right there on the campus of the University while she was taking a typing class.

However, as Shirley's determination reached fruition, she enrolled in college at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, and received the Bachelor of Arts degree, and subsequently was awarded an Honorary Doctorate degree from Southeastern University in Charleston, South Carolina.

The history that Caesar shared with me that afternoon, when I rode in her car and was given a first-hand tour of the city, followed quite appropriately with the sections of town we were approaching. Each street told a story, inspired another thought, and brought about memories from specific eras of her life. It was at this point of the drive that she remembers being a little girl in Durham.

As a little girl singing,
my sister and I had got a whipping for some reason.
My sister and I got a whipping
and we started washing dishes and singing behind that,
in the kitchen.
And after awhile,
different ones started asking us to come and sing for them,
so forth and so on.
But on top of that,
there was a lady that lived down there on Chatougua Street
right next door to us.
(We were riding in Shirley's car; she was driving along showing me
these significant landmarks.)
I use to travel with a lady that lived next door to us
named Mrs. Elizabeth Jones.
I called her Mama Jones.
When I was a little girl,
I started out singing also with a choir called the Charity Singers,
and the people lived right there.
And we'd go there and rehearse.
But I used to sing with Mama Jones.
She used to go up to a little town called Goosha, North Carolina
and I would go with her,
and I would sing.
After that one time,
my brother invited me to come and go with him and his quartet
and I did.
I can't even remember if they had music or not.
But at any rate
they kept up,
I remember singing 'I'm Sending Up My Timber Everyday.'
Well, the people just kept on clapping me back.
I can’t remember him taking me too many times after that.
But he took me to Lynchburg, Virginia
and that's how I got started up in that area.
I was also,
at that time,
traveling with Bishop Yelverton, my pastor.
I would sing and he would preach.
He would take me around to different churches.
Then after that,
I started singing with Thelma Bumpers and the Royalettes.
She was a blind lady,
singing lady.
Then I sang with John Landers.
But then I sang with Leroy Johnson,
and I worked with him longer than I did anybody else.
I would do sometimes four and five programs
sometimes on a Sunday back then you know.
I would run in
and I would do like three or four or five songs.
I would run from there to another place.
They would raise me an altar offering,
and I would bring that money home
and give it to my mom.
I felt obligated to take care of my mother.
I felt that it was my duty.
I felt that the Lord gave me the gift
so that I could be a blessing to her.
And as a result,
everyone else came in after that.
But I think that he gave it to me for her.

The experiences Shirley had as a child remembering her dad’s
singing and her own initiation into gospel music certainly speak to the
essence of the gospel tradition. Often in the field of music and
entertainment, one’s family having an interest or talent in that
particular field, gives way for that same interest to be passed down to
the next generation. It’s easy to surmise that appearing on four and
five programs on a Sunday to sing was no easy task. But, this sort of
ground-breaking prepared Shirley for her rightful place in the gospel
tradition, and it also gives her the right to her recognition as First
Lady of Gospel. She has said "For sure I’ve paid my dues...paid my
dues and somebody else’s too."

As time went on, more and more people became intrigued with this
little girl with the booming, powerfully-anointed voice, and she became
known as "Baby Shirley" because she began singing as a young child.
Her notoriety called her into constant demand, and she began opening
programs and concerts for famous artists. Shirley believed that if she
could ever be heard by the "right person," she would have an
opportunity to sing for the world, just as she does today.

One of her most moving testimonies was given to me in a
conversation about how she really became famous or as she calls it
"recognized and really, really recognized."

While still in her teens, she traveled to Kinston, North Carolina,
to hear the famous Caravans, a gospel group from Chicago. She wrote
her own request on a slip of paper, passed it to the program announcer
which read "Please ask Sister Shirley Caesar to sing a solo." Again,
Shirley shows her confidence in what she has always believed in, God's
anointing power, by being confident enough to write her own request.
Here in Kinston, Shirley was granted the wish of singing in front of
people who could affect a positive change in her life. She went to the
stage and sang, "The Lord Will Make a Way Somehow." I met Albertina
Walker (one of the original Caravans) in Durham, North Carolina, at
Shirley Caesar's home. This occasion was my first weekend spent with
Caesar. I was fortunate enough to arrive in Durham on a Friday evening
while Shirley's annual crusade was being held at the Omni Hotel. That
particular evening I attended the crusade, spoke to Shirley briefly,
and she invited me to a brunch that she was hosting in her home the
following morning. She told me this would be a good opportunity for me
to meet some of the "Gospel Greats."

At the brunch was James Cleveland whom I talked with, the original
Caravans: Albertina Walker, Inez Andrews, Cassietta George, Gloria
Washington, and other guests who were visiting with Shirley. That
Saturday afternoon the Caravans, James Cleveland, and Shirley were giving a concert to climax the ending of Caesar’s crusade. In addition to the above singers, I would also meet Dorothy Norwood, another one of the Caravans who would be flying in later that evening because her brother had died, and she was detained. (I spent that weekend with Albertina, Shirley, Inez, Cassietta, Gloria, and Dorothy; we traveled on Shirley’s bus to do a concert in Charleston, South Carolina. James Cleveland had to fly back to California.)

It was during the brunch that I asked Albertina if she would please talk with me because I was writing a documentary on gospel music and Shirley Caesar. Initially she put me off, but I was politely persistent. Finally she said "you keep saying you want to talk to me, you want to see me, you want to talk...about what?" Timidly, I explained my project and asked her if she would please give me a few minutes of her time. She smiled and walked with me to the lower level breakfast nook in Caesar’s house, and she (along with Cassietta George) gave me one of the best interviews I have obtained during the course of my research.

Shirley saw us sitting there talking; she was quite busy hosting the brunch, so we were undisturbed; the conversation began to flow and to borrow Caesar’s analogy "history was made that weekend." Albertina Walker tells the historical account of Shirley Caesar’s vocal confidence and her subsequent joining of her group.

Along with Albertina Walker’s interview explaining how Shirley got her start into fame, she also speaks to another facet of the gospel
tradition. Historically, gospel musicians and soloists have given birth to young, amateur artists. One singer begets another singer. She gives the background context of how famous musicians open their doors to other aspiring artists, just as Albertina did for Shirley Caesar. In the conversation, Albertina also introduces the other historically famous members of the caravans: Cassietta George, Inez Andrews, Gloria Washington, and Dorothy Norwood.

Consequently, the following data serves a two-fold purpose of introducing Shirley Caesar to the world and points an overall picture of how Shirley fits into the metamorphosis of traditional gospel music.

Brooksie: I just want to know how the Caravans got together.

How they, how you met each other.

Albertina: Well,

the Caravans were organized back in the early fifties and uh,

the Caravans were born from Robert Anderson.

They were the Robert Anderson Singers.

And Robert retired,

and the last recording he made,

we were at the studio,

and Mr. Allen and Mr. Simpson

-- they had a recording company which was States,

States Label.

And they heard me singing
and they wanted to record me.
And as I said,
Robert was retiring,
so I readily consented
and the girls that were singing with Robert,
I asked them if they would record with me,
and they did.
And the very first recording that we made
was "Tell the Angels" and "Think of His Goodness to You."
And when we got ready to do a little traveling and all,
uh, some of those girls couldn't travel with me.
In the meantime,
Mr. Allen was trying to get a name for,
for me and the group, right.
And I always sang in a group;
I never did any singing and I never did want to be by myself.
So, Mr. Allen said we got to get a name for you, you know.
I said we'll call us the Caravans
because all of us were from different places.
Elise was from Indiana,
uh, Nellie was from east Chicago,
Ora Lee Hopkins was from the south side of Chicago,
and I was right in the middle of the state,
and that is how we, uh, got that name of the Caravans.
He said
'well what can we call you, what can we call you?'
I said
'call us the Caravans'
because everybody lived in different places and all.
So that's how the name came about.
And uh,
when we started traveling,
people started calling us to come,
those girls couldn't go with me to travel.
Bessie Griffin came to Chicago to sing with Mahalia Jackson,
and she wanted to sing with the group;
so that was Bessie Griffin, myself, Elise Yancey
(one of the girls who was with Robert)
she traveled with us.
Uh, a young lady named Iris and myself,
and we went on the road as the Caravans.
And we made that tour
and when we came home,
we would always visit with Mahalia's, you know.
I knew Mahalia very well;
I'd always go over to her house
and she'd always cook for us
and we would eat and have such a good time.
And James happened to be at Mahalia's house,
'cause he knew we...
Brooksie: Cleveland?

Albertina: Yea.

Meantime, let me back up a little bit.

When I was a little girl,

James used to play for me and my sister.

So, I’ve been knowing James

(Albertina laughs to herself)

you know James used to play for me and my sister, Rose Marie; she’s deceased now.

James used to play for us.

He was our, he was our musician

and as I grew older,

this is when I began singing with other groups and all.

And so getting back to where I left off at.

I saw James at Mahalia’s house

and at that time I needed a musician

and asked James if he was busy

or if he wanted to work with me.

And he said yea

’cause he wasn’t doing anything.

So James joined the Caravans.

At that time Cassietta came to the Caravans,

and uh, myself,

Cassietta, Louise McDonald and John Aaron Alston
-- we were the Caravans.
And we worked together for about three or four years together.
And after that came uh,
Gloria Griffin,
she worked with us for awhile and Dorothy Norwood.
Dorothy Norwood,
she worked with us for quite awhile.
And then when Cassietta went,
had to go,
went to California...decided she wanted to move to California, uh.

Cassietta: Shirley came before I went to California.

Albertina: Yea, Shirley came before she went to California.

Cassietta: And Inez.

Albertina: Yea, before she went to California.

But, Cassietta for uh,
you know for quite awhile.
Then Shirley and Inez came.
Cassietta went to California.
That's when we got Delores Washington, right?

Cassietta: Yea, uh...got to back up.
Albertina: Huh?

Cassietta: Got to back up.

Albertina: OK.

Cassietta: (Cassietta and Albertina laugh)
   The Caravans, let me see.
   James, you and me in fellowship.

Albertina: Right.

Cassietta: With Reverend Evans.

Albertina: Right.

Cassietta: And they needed another singer (referring to the Caravans)
   because Bessie was leaving.

Albertina: Yea, she had left.

Cassietta: So there was John Aaron,
   Albertina, Louise McDonald, James Cleveland,
   and then Gloria came to help after Iris left.
Albertina: November.

Cassietta: After Iris went back to New Orleans.

Brooksie: Now Iris, who now?

Cassietta: Iris...that was in November.

Albertina: It was myself and Bessie,
she was a first soprano.
She worked with myself and Bessie
on the first tour that we went on.

Cassietta: Then later on,
you know,
I left for awhile and then Inez came.

Albertina: Inez, yes and Shirley.

Cassietta: And Shirley.

Albertina: Both of them came around the same time.

Cassietta: Yea, around the same time.
Albertina: Inez and uh,

Inez came first
and then we came down south uh,
right in this area,
the Carolinas and all,
and heard Shirley.
And a fellow named Eddie Williams was playing for us at the time.
Shirley told Eddie that she would like to sing with him.
I thought Shirley was a little girl,
I didn’t know that she was grown ’cause she had socks on, you know.
So I thought she was a kid, you know...and uh,
Eddie told me that she said that she wanted to sing
-- so I talked to her
and she told me that she could.
And I said ‘well I’ll have to talk to your mother.’
‘She said well you can talk to my mother
but I can go, I can go, I can go.’
So I went and talked with her mother
and her mother said she was of age,
and she could travel and sing.
That’s how Shirley came to the group.
And Shirley stayed with the group
I think about seven or eight years.
She and Inez, and Delores and myself
worked together longer at one time.
Brooksie: When you say the original ones, the ones that really, really hit...

who?

Cassietta: Yea, yes who hit:

was Albertina.

Albertina: First of all, Cassietta, Inez, Shirley, Dorothy Norwood, then myself.

Cassietta: And James Cleveland.

Albertina: And James Cleveland, yea.

Shirley reports that after she had decided to leave Durham and join the Caravans that she remembers selling her biology book in an effort to help raise the money she would need to travel and meet the Caravans. It was at this point that she also resolved not to return to college for awhile. Shirley raised the money for her ticket and took the train to New York where she was to meet Albertina Walker and the Caravans for their first practice session together. Shirley said that this was the first time she had ever stayed in a hotel. With that ever brilliant smile and with eyes sparkling, she reflects on her memories with the Caravans and simultaneously, recognizes that her ministry grew while she sang with the group. Caesar gives a detailed account of her
initial encounter with the Caravans and subsequent travels:

Well now,
when I got there
and they took me to rehearsal,
Inez, Inez did not come with them.
Inez [referring to Inez Andrews] was in Birmingham,
somebody had passed away in her family
so I had to sing some of her songs.
They asked me,
.say can you sing ah, ah such and such a thing.
I said "I can sing anything."
Well, you know I was just a young girl.
You know, I said "yea, I said I can sing anything."
I just had all of this
ah, ah, assuredness about myself.
And so, I remember singing ah
"I’m Willing to Wait"
ah, ah, Tina’s song [referring to Albertina Walker];
I remember doing ah, ah,
"He’ll Wash You Whiter Than Snow,"
that was one of the Caravan’s songs.
I remember when Inez had to go home for something,
I remember singing,
I even remember singing "Mary Don’t Weep."
But, but not at that particular time.
But, I've had to do ah,
in fact,
there was one time
when we were in the Apollo Theater ah,
and everybody in the Caravans got sick,
and I went out by myself and did the program.
Everybody was hoarse.
Another time, I remember,
for two weeks everybody was sick, musicians and all.
I went on the road for two weeks
and the "Soul Stirrers" backed me up.
I got paid;
I took all the money back to Albertina,
and you know,
and they paid all the group members.
but I was the only one who didn't get sick.
The "Soul Stirrers" did the background and played.
I had to sing somebody else's songs
because I didn't have any songs of my own,
you know.

I can imagine from the tone in Shirley's voice and from the enthusiasm she showed as she relived this story, that undoubtedly joining the Caravans must have been a truly exciting moment for her.
Listening to her speak, I could detect from her child-like response to Albertina "I can sing anything" not only an element of exhilaration resulting from this opportunity, but also a sense of self-confidence which may be attributed to her youth and innocence. She says she was excited to be a Caravan and she had to grow up fast because she was no longer in the sheltered home of her mother, she had to face reality.

Back then,
I was much younger.
I was barely out of my teens
so I was very excited about,
number one
being a Caravan,
number two
to be able to travel
to all these different cities
and go and sing.
It was very, very exciting,
yet challenging.
To the extent that
-- well at home
I never heard bad words or profanity
out there -- I was out there in the real world
so my ears became immune to it.
I had to get used to cigarette smoke also.
But at no time
did I let my guards down.
I tried to let my light shine
as being a Caravan was concerned.
Back then
when we would sing,
if we made thirty dollars a person per concert,
we were doing good.
Some nights we would make $125 a night.
Later, Albertina
(Albertina Walker, one of the founders of the Caravans)
started me on booking the group.
I moved them up to $200
to $250
to $1,000
and $1,500
and on like that later on in the years
just before I left
it became like a business.
When songs like "Mary Don't You Weep" came out,
we were the hottest group out there.
Why go and sing for $200 or $125?
So I asked Tina to let me do the booking for them,
and when I started booking them
I raised their prices.
As we can tell from Caesar's dialogue, this success story is about upward mobility. "Gospel" is certainly a calling, but it is also a business. Caesar clarifies this idea of upward mobility even more in a subsequent interview:

The business today is altogether different from what it was back then (referring to when she was on the road with the Caravans). Back then we'd sing and if we made thirty dollars per person a concert, we were doing good. But now that I have my own group and I'm older, ahh, it's, you know, well, we're close, but it's also a business. This is a business with us, you know. I've got one hundred and fifty-thousand dollars invested in the bus. Ahh, and I have the Shirley Caesar outreach ministries, my own publishing company. And I'm dealing with people who work for a living, also people who are commissioned, you know... So it's a business now. I have to pay secretaries; I have to pay a bus driver.

Often Shirley and I engaged in conversations where the subject of the Caravans came up. She convinced me of the importance that the group played in her life because she remained with them for eight years of travel, the "formative" years, she calls them. "When I went there (referring to joining the Caravans), I was just like a little girl. I didn't know anything. I was just straight out of North Carolina, straight out of school. They watched me grow up; they watched my ministry, my singing ministry grow from a nineteen-year-old girl until
I was twenty-eight, and they watched me turn into an artist."

Caesar realizes how vulnerable she was during those years, being a young girl from the south, leaving her family and adopting an extended family, the Caravans. She experienced moments of keen excitement and moments of loneliness where she missed the love and security of her family. This was new for her, she had never stayed away from home, especially this long and especially this far away. She began living in Chicago which was homebase for the Caravans. Caesar rented a room from an elderly lady who she recalls had a church downstairs in her basement. Because she also reflects back on her strong faith during these years as well as her various transitions, she credits the members of the group for being her friends, family, and support during the "formative" years. The group grew together she recalls. She saw a growth in herself and she saw a growth in the members of the Caravans.

But one thing about the Caravans,
we had a relationship that was almost like a family.
We were family.
You know how sisters and brothers would fight
and wouldn't let anyone else bother them,
well, Albertina,
Inez,
Cassietta,
Josie,
Delores,
even James Herndon,
all of us,
we were a family.
I went through some things,
but also they did too.

Shirley, once again, reminded me that the foundation of her ministry is evangelism through the word first, and through music secondly, which is the basic impetus for her leaving the Caravans. Caesar became more and more famous through her travels and performances, but she realized that she was not doing as much ministry through the "Word" as she desired; plus subconsciously, she knew she could not forever remain a "Caravan," she had to move on. She was no longer a teenager, she was a fully grown woman who believed she had to continually respond to the "call" God charged her with years before and "be about her Father's business." As time went on the door opened for her exit from the Caravans.

I had been approached by Hobb records;
they had offered me $4,000 to sign a contract.
I approached Albertina
and asked her if the group could back me on the album
and I keep $2,000
and give the group $2,000
especially since I was not under contract with Savoy
(Savoy was the gospel recording company with whom the Caravans were recording with at that time, this company became one of the largest gospel labels in the United States of America).

In fact,

no one was under contract but Albertina.

Albertina never gave me an answer.

Meanwhile,

the Caravans contracted to record an album
and I was to sing with the group.

The day that we were to record,

I kept calling the hotel where the group was staying
and I didn't get an answer
because I stayed in Jamaica, New York
and they stayed at the Cecil Hotel.

Finally,

Inez Andrews answered the phone
and informed me that Albertina
and the others
had gone to Newark, New Jersey
to record the album without me.

During this conversation Caesar tries to gloss over an apparent miscommunication and conflict which would have arisen had she remained with the Caravans. One might wonder if Albertina was somewhat threatened by the rising star. Although Shirley never directly accused
anyone of anything, the ethics of professionalism come into question as she made her exit from the Caravans.

At that time,
Inez could not record
because she was under contract with another record company.
That same week
we were performing in the Apollo Theater in New York,
and when I arrived for that performance,
I went upstairs,
hung my robe up,
and informed Albertina
that at the end of that week
I would be resigning
and she said okay."
Also,
I knew that the Lord had called me into the ministry
and this was His way of getting me out of the group.
So I left
and with just meager beginnings,
I performed
and I have not looked back.
There were times I would sing
and I didn’t even have a keyboard player,
and they would announce from the stage
"Is there anybody here who can play piano?"

But remember
we have perseverance.

Also,
there were times after I left the Caravans
that I missed them so much,
but I knew I had done the right thing.
But I could not forget
that I had been with them for eight years.

As Shirley reminded me of her eight-year tenure with the Caravans, I could begin to appreciate the important role that these artists had played in her life. Even though she faced the future with an assuredness that God would take care of her, being on the road as a solo artist afforded an element of apprehension that she had not experienced before. Finally, she hired her first keyboard player, Rainey Griffin, and she called her mother and asked her to send her sister Ann as a traveling companion so she wouldn’t be alone. Shirley said the request for Ann’s companionship reminded her of the biblical character Apostle Paul when he sent for Timothy. (Shirley smiles with a sense of accomplishment when she remembers Rainey and Ann her first group travelers.) She interjects "My sister Ann at that time was making twenty dollars a night singing Rock and Roll. I said listen, you come, all I want to do is just come and be my company-keeper on the road. I never liked to be alone. I paid her $100 a night just to be
with me, just to be with me."

Shirley said she saw the need for a back-up group, but she was still working that part of her artistry out. Finally, she began singing with choirs and sometimes she would go to places to sing and either the choir would arrive late or not show up at all. She remembers recording with a choir from Philadelphia that didn't show up for a concert. Subsequently, she solicited two female vocalists from Dayton, Ohio -- one named Linda and one named Donna, and she used her sister Ann. Linda, Donna, Ann and Shirley became the first original Caesar Singers. After her experiences with choirs, she decided to form her own group and call them the Caesar Singers.

Shirley says she could see her ministry going up, up, up, ["up, up, up" are images suggesting both spiritual and material attainment] and she was still learning more about the business aspects of the art. She remained very busy with her recordings and with her many performances throughout the nation. As time changed, so did the members of the Caesar Singers. Caesar confessed, however, that she has been fortunate enough to have worked with some fantastically talented vocalists of which the Caesar Singers rank among the top of the list. Shirley thinks proudly as she speaks of Ann, Donna, Linda, Debbie, Sue Ella, Bernard, Pete and May comprising her harmonious background she calls the Caesar Singers. Now that the current Caesar Singers -- Ann Caesar Price, Bernard Sterling, May Newton, and Pete Fields have been the Caesar Singers as long as they have been, these vocalists have become used to each other and are able to feel each other's weaknesses and
strengths which makes their harmony even tighter than it was in the beginning of their career. Ann, Bernard, May and Pete are even feature soloists in different parts of Caesar’s concerts. May has been known to grasp the hearts of an audience and bring them to full attention when she sings "I’ve been through the storms and the rain, but I made it." Bernard puts the audience in complete awe when his voice soars to a pitch that goes way beyond most average soprano’s voices in his rendition of "Give Me a Clean Heart." Ann, who has her own confidence of stage performance, never fails to beckon her listeners to a zenith when she leads "You Can Depend on Jesus" and simultaneously pulls in Bernard, Pete, May and finally her sister Shirley to climax an anointed spirit-filled message. Through her song, Ann tells her audience ‘if you depend on Jesus everything will be alright.’ At just the exact moment her sister Shirley slips in and shares the lead with Ann by chanting "Gonna be, gonna be, gonna be alright, everything’s gonna be alright." Within the time needed for the song’s tempo to reach the next phrase, the entire background has chimed in on Ann and Shirley’s song, and they all partake in the most unbelievable "lead-sharing" and call and response pattern one could ever imagine. This song always baffles the audience, excites Shirley and the Caesar Singers, and helps the entire concert reach its climax.

As Shirley moved from the Caravans, to choirs, then finally to her very own group, the Caesar Singers, she still reminds me that God has still not carried her to the potential that He wants her to reach. Consequently, she must keep on doing what she is doing while He gets
ready to take her to the next dimension of her ministry.

As we discussed the stages and ranks Caesar had moved through, we finally approached an area of her artistry that she had avoided as long as possible. I asked her when did she believe she became famous. Well, first of all, she gave me a lesson in pedagogy by distinguishing between being famous, being a star, being a mega-star for which she used Michael Jackson as an example. She told me she really felt like the term "recognized" or "really recognized" would best describe her definition of fame. Caesar believes while she tried to remain in the "center most domain" of God's will, He just blessed her so she could bless others. As she gave me a lesson on the proper terminology, she did respond to the subject of fame in the following manner:

Well, I don't take it for granted
please believe me,
because I know
that all too soon it will be gone.
So I'm enjoying it,
but I don't take it for granted,
please believe me.
Nothing lasts forever.
I think that my longevity
as far as being who I am
and doing what I'm doing
has certainly been a blessing.
Many have come
and many have gone
and yet the Lord has blessed me
to still be able to stand and sing.
But other younger singers
are being born every day.
Afterwhile,
I will have to ease on out to greener pastures
and let someone else take my place.
CHAPTER III
INVOKING AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

One can determine from observing Shirley Caesar's performance technique that each participant (the background backup singers, the audience, and the soloist) plays a major role in the perfecting of her verbal artistry. Initially, the ground rules are set and the participants are assigned an identity for their role-play. You may hear Shirley say "All right, you people seated in the first three rows, you're my A-men corner, which is to say 'I expect you to say Amen, talk back to me, and respond to what I'm doing throughout the performance.'"

In this chapter I will analyze Shirley Caesar's total performance protocol by expounding on the structural techniques she uses as a format for her stage presence. Then I will list five subdivisions to explain Caesar's unique performance style that allows her to "stay on top" in the field of gospel music.

What is it about this woman that brings out such arousing excitement from her audience? I believe it's not only her message and her sincerity, but I attribute a lot of her audience reaction to her tools, the art of performance. Again, Richard Bauman proclaims in Verbal Art as Performance, as early in the text as his introduction that "It is the performance that counts!" I would like to insist that it's not just the tools, but it's what you do with the tools.
Shirley allows these tools, first of all, to establish communication lines between her and the audience. It's at this moment, however, that the audience brings to play its point of view. In essence, Shirley knows what she is doing, and once again, she does it in such a meticulous manner that she carries her audience right along with the flow of the waters as she reaches the zenith of her concert. I like to compare Shirley's performance to the well-known structure of a short story. She gives you the introduction, the rising action, the climax, and the falling action. (This concept is usually applied to drama -- the structure of a classical play.)

**Introduction**

In other words, Shirley says:

I'm constantly building, building my concert and carrying the audience right along with me. When I say "How many of you believe everything's gonna be alright," I know somebody's gonna go with Sister Shirley. Somebody believes as I do. I don't slip in anything on my audience. I tell them what I'm doing; they know what to expect, and they can get ready.

[Which is to suggest that she frames her performance at the beginning.]

It is during Shirley's introduction that she starts to "build" her performance. Often I have observed her initial stage presentation which follows a traditional pattern of singing a short song which allows her to check the sound system as well as "grasp the hearts and
minds of the people." She also (just as she described above) informs her audience of her task of spreading the gospel through song and sermon. Her initial presentation takes on a pedagogical style because she becomes the teacher and the audience becomes the student. It might follow, that in such a manner of communication, she might ask "Now are there any questions?" Even though Caesar doesn't carry her pedagogy to that extent, she does take on the teacher's role in her initial contact with the audience. This type of introduction elicits her audience's permission to move into the next stage of performance: the rising action. Shirley reminds us again "I'm constantly building...laying my foundation and going up, up, up." By now Caesar has begun to involve her audience more. She has established a rapport with them. She knows her background and musical support are accurate and precise, and she therefore, begins to feel secure about her performance.

Rising Action

Shirley explained to me on various occasions how dependent her performance was upon the audience's reaction, and for that reason, the communication taking place from the stage to the audience had to be clearly defined. She says a good audience was "one which was truly ready for Shirley Caesar and will do just about what I ask them to do, one that is receptive." What Caesar is really saying is that if the audience is receptive, they can understand and appreciate her message. As a result of the understanding her message, both communicators (Shirley Caesar and the audience) partake in the "rising action" of the performance.
Climax

Caesar constantly checks for understanding; she evaluates and re-evaluates her performance. She may say: "Are you out there? Are you with me? I wish I had a witness. Can I get a witness?" She elicits response from her audience so she can determine the exact moment to climax her performance. By this time the pace or tempo of her performance has escalated to such a speed she can't stop. It is also at this moment that she works the hardest. I find that not only is her music intensified in rhythm, but her "speech" actually becomes more rhythmic. By now she is certain that her audience is comfortable with her style; she has gradually moved them from introduction to rising action, and now she can involve them in the climax. She no longer has to elicit response from the crowd; they are on their feet, cheering her on, and not wanting her to stop, all at the same time.

It is important that I explain exactly how Caesar uses her climax to prepare her audience for her unique closure to her performance. The climax is not the conclusion of her program, it's just the mechanism that Caesar uses to establish a period of "coming down" -- and then the actual conclusion, or what I refer to as the denouement (French word which means the final outcome), occurs. Her performance closure lends a more relaxed atmosphere for her as well as her listener, so indeed, everyone feels a sense of finale. Usually this ending includes Shirley singing a slower song, giving an altar call, and admonishing her audience "Now, you go out and make this world a better place."
As Catherine L. Peck asserts in her article "Your Daughters Shall Prophesy: Women in the Afro-American Preaching Tradition"

During song, language and movements become fully musical... It seems that the heightened spiritual emotions, that are generated during the service, are channeled into a song. As with speech, song has a strong cognitive element; the text carries important ideas in a linguistic medium. Also like speech, there is a greater continuity of thought and all members are equally involved in the performance. (Tyson, Peacock, and Patterson 1988: 173)

It is my conclusion that Caesar converts the strong cognitive elements of song sermons into a linguistic medium that her audience can relate to. This medium delineates the introduction, the rising action, and the climax.

Shirley involves her audience in a special fashion, but so do many other famous artists. However, what sets her protocol apart from that of other artists is her method of engaging the audience, which transcends the norm of execution observed in most entertainers. By developing her own performance genre, a formula which can be based on five individual components, she convinces her audience that she is worthy of her title "Shirley Caesar, First Lady of Gospel."
In order to understand Shirley's performance, we must examine the following subdivisions:

a) Audience Participation
b) Traditional versus Non-traditional unique performance style
c) Structure of performance (introduction, rising action, climax, denouement)
d) Caesar's intensity in performance and her love for gospel
e) Command and Control
f) Monitor and Adjust
g) Storytelling

In a meta-communicative manner, Caesar reveals to her listeners that it is acceptable for them to engage in a "call-response" interchange, in fact, she expects them to. As Caesar includes her audience in her performance, she also explains to them that she is about to sing a song "I hear a song ringing in my spirit" or "...want to tell you a story." By employing meta-communicative devices -- referring to her own performance as a performance, Shirley elicits the first component of her performance formula, audience participation.

As Ray Allen explains:

The role of the audience, from the opening congregational song to the closing benediction, is one of active participation. People are expected to sing, move, clap, and stomp to the music, to spur
the performers on with shouts of encouragement, and to experience the power of the Holy Spirit. If the congregation does not "rejoice in the Spirit" and "have church," they are chastised by the singers and emcee for being "cold" and "dead." And, if the groups do not succeed in "warming" them up and gaining their participation, the service will be considered a failure" (1990: 127).

As the listeners become involved with her performance, they also begin evaluating Caesar's technique. Appropriately enough, most often the first stamp of approval is given by her A-men corner, the first three rows. By giving her listeners a participatory role, she makes them feel important and needed, and they, in turn, hold their evangelistic singer in high esteem. As Shirley sets her groundwork, I could perceive the intensity of the performance beginning to rise. To use Shirley's terms, "Brooksie, I must get my audience going with me..." And depending on how impressive or non-impressive Shirley's performance is will determine how she is received by her audience. Will she score an "A" or "B" or lower. This appraisal by the audience is their evaluation of her competence in Bauman's terms (Bauman, 1977). I must say from my observations, she always scores high, and if her score starts to drop, at any one moment, she shifts gears, re-evaluates her own performance style (in other words, she monitors her own performance style), and then reaches into her repertoire of "stage skills" and snatches her performance right back to its
highly-electrifying standard; she adjusts the performance in order to engage the audience again.

Shirley knows how to build her concert so it doesn't peak too soon, and doesn't rush into an ecstasy that will eventually become anti-climatic. I asked her about her choice of songs and their pace, and she explained how strategically she plans and places each song in order to achieve the maximum potential response from her performance. She said, "building your concert is just like building a house. You lay your foundation; you build your walls firmly; you put on the roof; then you can do the detailed work inside your house." For example, she pointed out, "if you start with an upbeat song like 'Praise Him,' you may soon after want to slow things down a bit and make sure you bring your audience along with you. You don't want to do too many fast songs back-to-back too quickly, because you'll lose your audience. Then after you slow things down a bit, you start to build until you get right where you want to be."

Kip Cornell has completed some astounding research on audience participation and quartet singers. He examines what actually occurs when the quartets interact with their listeners, both verbally and musically. He recognizes that these performers have all perfected their own skills which make them popular, make people want to hear them, and make them competitive. Very similar to a routine, both the singer and the audience share in a mutual understanding, a mutual appreciation, which becomes a reflexive evaluation. I find some of the same kinds of things occurring when Shirley Caesar performs. Although
she does not sing quartet music, she carries the same religious message as do the artists Lornell writes about. Consequently, I think his description of the communication taking place between the quartet singer and the audience helps us understand the "interactive formula" of Shirley Caesar.

Along with singing and visual effects, quartet performances have also utilized other related verbal techniques. When singers address their audience, the mode of communication is different from everyday speech. It now contains ornate phrases, biblical references which are often formulaic. Although no one explicitly teaches quartet singers this way of speaking, the communicative mode, though not so long and cohesive, is reminiscent of St. Vincent "sweet talking" documented by Roger Abrahams ("The Training of Man-of-Words" 1984: 98). Its very existence implies a two-way dialogue with an audience that responds with shouts of encouragement such as "Sing it!" However, Lornell concludes his analysis by asserting the uniqueness that performers possess which establishes their popularity, and their audience reception separates the famous and professionals from the amateurs. Therefore, I can appreciate Lornell's descriptive research which draws attention to uniqueness because as I draw attention to Shirley Caesar's uniqueness, I want the reader to understand the context of "uniqueness" as a corollary with religious music, and how audience responds in favor of "uniqueness." Accordingly, we must understand that Shirley Caesar's individuality and creativity (her uniqueness) all occur within a traditional framework which is based upon the gospel tradition, the

Considering Kip Lornell's assertion, I am inclined to believe that Shirley Caesar employs verbal techniques and formulae which make her unique. In addition, I contend that a female soloist as opposed to a quartet brings with her the natural ability to engage the audience in a one-to-one spiritual bonding she share through an instinctive maternalistic gift.

I share in Kip Lornell's view that performance style is unique to each artist, but I would go a step further to say that Shirley Caesar not only enjoys her own performance style that she has developed over her career of many years, but that she knows when the exact moment is appropriate for her to "reach back and get another performing style." Finally, as Shirley evaluates the response of her audience and the context of her performances, she chooses her music accordingly.

From my observation, along with executing her performing style, she also exudes magnificent charisma and audience appeal that just baffles her onlookers. She'll do little things, such as move the microphones around, and give little witty anecdotes such as:

We don't want to sound like we're in a gymnasium, so come on and help me get these microphones right. Now everyone look at your neighbor and say 'I sure like what you're wearing tonight; I'm sorry they didn't have it in my size.'

Of course this is going to be funny for several reasons: 1) you may not really like what your neighbor's wearing, 2) you may be insulted by
the size of your neighbor, or 3) you may be male and/or the person seated next to you may be female. This she does in a joking manner, not to be taken seriously, but just to get her audience involved.

Shirley initiates her inter- and intra-audience interaction by letting the people seated next to each other interact with one another. (Shirley Caesar would say "it loosens things up a bit.") So when Caesar beckons "call and response" from her audience during her performance, the audience is already used to talking back to each other.

At that split moment, she may come to her microphone and pleasantly shock the audience by singing such a powerful song that it puts everyone in constant awe of this minute figure of 5'4" and 135 pounds. She may even test for harmony, musical coordination and total sound balance by entreating her background to sing by chanting "Say Yea," which is of course a perfect opportunity for her background singers, Ann, Bernard, May, and Pete, to respond in a harmonious quartet of "Yea, yea, yea."

The second subdivision of Shirley Caesar's performance protocol takes into consideration the comparison of her artistry in association with the traditional performer-audience relationship. During most conventional performances there is acceptable or unacceptable behavior. In the following paragraphs I will point out the fact that Caesar's performer-audience relationship differs from the traditional set of rules. She defines her rules by her own "non-traditional standards." These standards allow her verbal artistry the ability to
communicate with her audience and simultaneously entreat her audience to communicate with her. She takes the authority to not allow the traditional "stage rules" define nor affect the verbal artistry she brings to the stage. She sets her own standards and rules.

In other words, Shirley sets the stage, directs the stage, and controls the stage throughout her concert, and it is always fresh (dynamic, on-going, not static because tradition itself is dynamic). She never does the exact thing, the exact way twice. Although there are certain songs, stories, and routines that she participates in most of the time, the performance, the sequence, the dynamics and just the general feeling of the song is only determined in a brand new discovery of its potential each time it is performed.

To quote Sonja Stone, "The Black Preacher as Teacher" (1975), the following describes the traditional performance style of gospel:

Traditional black ministers adhered to a speech cadence that incorporated musical tones and elicited audience responses. Frequently, ministers as far back as slavery would drone out a sentence in musical tones, only to have that sentence punctuated by shouts of "yeah," "yes," and "Amen" from the congregation.

It's in that historic framework that Shirley Caesar masterfully maneuvers her audience.

A performance allows a person the chance to convert herself from an ordinary individual into an object of attention that can be examined
and even scrutinized by observers that we call the audience. Generally, we expect the performance style of the Euro-American to offer little or no direct participation with the action taking place on stage. This expectation often changes for the African-American performer -- and especially for Shirley Caesar. Structurally, however, at certain designated intervals -- at the end of a scene, at the closing of a song or dialogue -- it may be acceptable for the audience to offer applause in Euro-American tradition. The point of interest in this section then, is for us to recognize how traditional and non-traditional performance styles work for individual artists. Although the stage presence may not reflect the standards cited above, the end result is the same and perhaps even more dynamic because the audience is entertained. Interestingly enough, we may also discover from this section that different artists are able "to share their wares" in a unique style and yet perform from the same genres.

To further understand the concept of genre and how some genres involve their audience to a greater extent than others, we now consult Roger D. Abrahams' article "The Complex Relations of Simple Forms" (Ben-Amos, 1971: 193). Initially Abrahams helps us understand the concept of genre by writing: "Genre analysis provides a common frame of reference by which such conventions of form and use may be compared and thus permits one genre or group of genres to cast light on others either within one group or cross-culturally." Which is to say that often a culturally specific group may tend to engage in certain habits that another group or the dominant culture may not be accustomed to.
Therefore, as I have previously suggested, the style of most Euro-American performers and the interactive call and response style of many African-American performers are quite different in comparison. Abrahams goes on to explain that on a spectrum of audience participation ranging from great to none, the African-American tends toward the greater interaction between performer and audience. "...on the part of the New World Negro group...folktales and songs are performed with the expectation that the audience will become so involved with the performance that they will become a functioning part of it by making audible comments and exclamations to which the performer will react" (Ben-Amos, 1971: 210-211)

To this end, Tony Heilbut lists a group of famous gospel artists who exemplify performance at its best. In *The Gospel Sound*, he lists several famous gospel artists and comments about the originality of their performance style...Ira Tucker, Archie Brownlee, Julius Cheeks, Joe May, Queen Anderson, Willie Mae Ford Smith, Mahalia Jackson, Edna Gallmon Cooke, Bessie Griffin, Dorothy Love, Deloris Barrett, Clara Ward, Albertina Walker, and Inez Andrews who were all formidable "church wreckers." And even though these singers had their own way of doing everything, from bending notes to taking breaths to moving across a stage, each one insists that the woods are filled with "folks who can beat us with their own original style."

In a few words, the above artists demonstrated their own verbal artistry in performance and this is what makes them unique. In reference to my research on Shirley Caesar, First Lady of Gospel, she
says that having seen all of these people perform, "there have been
times in my life that I would draw from these people's style while I
was continuing to develop my own style" and, as she so comfortably puts
it "coming into my own, I used to try to imitate Sam Cooke and Mahalia
Jackson and Edna Gallmon Cooke. I'll tell you something, when I just
stand flat-footed and just sing a song, now I got that from Albertina
Walker. To just stand flat-footed and sing a song."

The relevance of all of this is, however, that Shirley indeed did
"come into her own," but in the process, she was observing all that
went on around her just as she still does when she comes to the stage.
As Shirley "came into her own," she further developed another segment
of her performance formula; she learned how to immediately request the
attention of her listeners before she began any part of her
performance. "You have to get the people's attention before you can
tell them anything," she would say. Further, she expounded on her
initial interactive style as she defined this technique as the ability
to "command and control." "Um, whenever I get up to sing, the first
thing that I do, you know, is I try to command my audience, uh, and
which means I try to get them going with me. After I sing one or two
songs, I forget almost everything. When I go out to sing, the first
thing I do, I guess, is I'll pull an 'Inez Andrews.'" Inez Andrews yet
lives in Chicago, Illinois, and was one of the most famous leaders for
the Caravans -- the group that made Shirley famous. Inez Andrews is
famous for her well-known recording of "Oh Mary Don't You Weep."
Shirley explains what she means by "pulling an Inez Andrews:"
"'Let everybody say Amen.' You know, one of those things, 'say Amen.'
What you see...I'm going to tell you something else...you can tell the
way, from the opening applause, as to whether or not you can really
command and control." During an interview with Inez Andrews, she
explained to me that just as she and Shirley had "come into their own"
and learned to command their audiences, so must all other artists if
they are to remain on top. Further she exclaimed: "The Gospel message
remains the same, but the particular artist gives it a different
flavor. All of us burn the same lamp, we just burn different oil."
[indicates emphasis in Inez Andrews' voice].

It is somewhat ironic that "command and control" may also imply the
reflexivity of Caesar's audience controlling her performance.
Certainly, Shirley liberates her audience. Paradoxically, however,
Caesar also gives up a lot of control by giving the control lever to
her listeners. In other words, to get control of an audience Caesar
has to give her audience a certain amount of autonomy so they will feel
a part of and successfully play their role in the performance. For
example, when the enthusiasm of her listeners begins diminishing, she
shifts gears, rearranges her performance protocol, and regains the
enthusiasm of her audience. This is obviously a "two-way street."

As I observed Shirley, I have discovered that what she refers to as
"command and control" really means that's her way of getting her
audience's attention. That's one of the most important aspects of her
performance technique; she knows how to get her audience's attention.
The authority she possesses and exemplifies when she says her first few words into the microphone tells the audience "Shirley is in control." The lower pitched entreaty she begins with "Let everybody say A-men" represents authority, control and mastery of her performing art. She recognizes this control and she recognizes the dynamics of that phrase.

In addition to commanding the audience, one other performance technique that Shirley shows to her audience is how she gets involved in her music. She said, "After I sing one or two songs, I forget almost everything. I just lose myself in my, you know, in the ministry. But nine times out of ten though, when things are going well, oh yea, I get totally lost, totally involved with what I'm doing."

The audience can tell that Shirley has become engrossed in what she's doing. They can look at her smile, the closing of her eyes at certain instances, the bowing of her head when she drops to her knees, the energy she exudes and the sweat that drops from her face, as proof that she is giving her performance everything that she has, her entire being. One might even ask the question "If Shirley didn't really, really mean what she is doing, how could she last for 90 minutes on stage, non-stop?" or "How could she have lasted for thirty years because it is obvious that she sings extremely hard?" Every time she comes to the microphone she gives her listeners all the raw material they need to evaluate her and give her performance an "A." Richard Bauman describes this appraisal as the audience judging Caesar's competence (1977: 26).
As one watches and listens to Shirley Caesar's performance on stage, it's easy to find yourself being captivated and often overwhelmed by the various tactics she employs to express her verbal artistry. For example, she phrases her words in such a way that they are as rhythmic as a verse of her song "God's Got It All In Control." She entertains her listeners, teaches her listeners, and makes full use of the cultural dynamics she borrows from her African-American tradition. Taking into consideration the metaphor of hierarchical judgment, as a school teacher evaluates his/her student's performance, the audience seems to judge Caesar's performance in the same manner. At the same time, the audience judges her against her recordings, her previous performances, and other gospel singers that they have heard in the same setting. In addition, as Shirley instructs her audience and communicates with her audience, the audience is allowed to take on the role of a pupil and simultaneously judges Shirley Caesar's verbal artistry.

Caesar considers her cultural connectedness as an overriding component of her verbal artistry. Further, she reflects a tradition that has been greatly influenced by polyrhythms, metrical poetics, oral narrative, and call-response patterns as means of embellishing her verbal artistry. When I speak of Caesar's cultural connectedness, I refer to all of those spiritual, emotional, and cultural influences that she employs in her patterns of communication -- as a result of the African-American tradition. Even more, this connectedness has a somewhat Afro-centric basis because Caesar acknowledges the folk in her
performance of the Word, and her acknowledgement of the folk and folk material as a part of her verbal artistry agrees with the Afro-centric mind-set of "I am, because we are."

It is the performance that counts. For Shirley Caesar, performance is the unifying thread that ties together the specifically labeled esthetic genre (gospel music) and other spheres of verbal behavior into a general unified conception of verbal art as a way of speaking just as Richard Bauman writes about and describes in Verbal Art as Performance (p. 5). However, to take Bauman’s assertions a step further, I believe that in addition to the unifying of verbal behavior, Shirley Caesar’s verbal artistry also unifies the non-verbal component of this communication in culturally specific ways that intensify her delivery.

In other words, she accomplishes two tasks here: (a) she connects with the audience’s own personal experiences of spirituality and cultural identity and for the new listeners who are unaccustomed to her performances, and (b) she communicates a cultural style which represents her African-American heritage. Therefore, for Shirley Caesar verbal art takes into consideration posture and gestures as means of conveying communicative expression. Kip Lornell suggests that it is clear that some of these characteristics -- dramatic body gestures, emotional vocal styles, and flamboyant behavior -- can be partially attributed to the Pentecostal movement and to African ritual (1988: 98). (This seems to logically follow considering that Shirley Caesar also has roots in the Pentecostal, holiness churches.) In other words, her use of poetics in performance (the phraseology of her
words), her ethnic background, her baptism in the Black experience, as well as the social interaction of calls and responses with those around her, establish the foundation for her own "performance-discipline."

It is my desire that I represent as authentically as possible the artistry that Shirley Caesar has so richly perfected in performance which is her expression of the oral tradition in storytelling and her representation of the gospel tradition which has given her the name "Shirley Caesar, First Lady of Gospel."

According to Richard Bauman, performance calls forth special attention to and heightens the awareness of that act of expression and gives license to the audience to regard the act of expression and the performer with special intensity (1977: 73). Consequently, there is a mutual license given to Shirley and her listeners. To continue explaining Shirley Caesar's performance formula, we shall analyze a different mode of her technique "monitor and adjust."

While interviewing Caesar one evening, I asked Shirley what if she ever went to the stage and began her concert and the music did not seem to reach her audience? If this occurred, would she change her routine? She explained to me quite clearly that she would and often does change her music at a moment's notice because she wants to minister to the people. She said she changes her order of songs almost every time she gets up to sing; it shows versatility, she explained. It also helps her meet the audience on their level.

At that point I shared with her an idea that I had thought of to define the performance technique she had just elaborated upon. "I
would like to define that as 'monitor and adjust,' which is to say, you observe your audience [monitor] and if your music doesn't appear to reach their spirits as soon as you had expected it to, you change your music format [adjust] or you adjust your music accordingly." Caesar readily agreed.

As I gave more thought to the relevance of "monitor and adjust" I came to the conclusion that perhaps many other artists employ the "monitor and adjust" technique, but as to date that specific "label" or term has not been acknowledged nor endorsed by the academy. Further, such scholars as Richard Bauman, Tony Heilbut, Erving Goffman, Kip Lornell, and Jeff Titon do not mention a specific term that embodies the alteration during the performance that an artist makes in order to reassure the success of the performance.

Perhaps "monitoring and adjusting" may be seen as an extension of "call and response" because, in essence, Shirley Caesar is re-evaluating herself in a constant need to meet her audience on their level. Trudier Harris says:

It is in the tradition of the "call and response," especially in work songs, that black Americans inherited from Africa. In the call and response, a leader gives out a line of song and workers repeat it or add another line to the rhythmic pull of unloading bales of cotton from steamboats, laying railway tires, etc. This tradition was also carried into religion with persons "giving out" a line of hymn and the congregation repeating it or responding to
it. More generally, the phrase is applied to any vocal interaction of a performer with his audience. (1973: 108)

I explained to Shirley the concept of "call and response" and further explained that, while the concept of "call and response" is not new, the principle of monitoring and adjusting -- as seen in her performance -- is my own original theory. Scholars, like Trudier Harris, Lawrence Levine, Sonja Stone, Marshal Stearns, and others, have long discussed call and response. I use Trudier Harris' definition as a point of reference because she draws upon existing scholarship to justify her assertions.

I had created these labels (monitor and adjust) as a result of observing different performances, especially Caesar's performance style. Caesar readily agreed that those labels were appropriate and seemed to describe "that process" quite accurately. In addition, Caesar expounded "You have to monitor and adjust if you are to stay on top of things."

Lawrence Levine expounds on the concept of "call and response" as an important element of acculturation. He says that:

This development is undeniably important and again manifests a strong degree of acculturation, yet it needs to be examined more closely. Even in the setting which most clearly distinguished between the singers and their audience, that of the gospel concert...the audience participated in the music in terms of motor
behavior, nodding, tapping, clapping, bodily movements, dancing in the aisles, and commonly shouted assents and comments. (1981: 187)

The well-known opera singer Martha Flowers explained in her lecture on March 18-19, 1989 at The Ohio State University School of Music, that impromptu conversation which most blues and gospel singers receive from their audience during their performance is a sign of success, in contrast to opera singers who are distant from the audience until the end of the performance.

We can see through Levine's and Flower's explanation that the interactive verbal and nonverbal response sought by Caesar and other artists helps the performer evaluate his success. My interest in call and response as a basis or component of "monitoring and adjusting," however, is somewhat different in explaining Caesar's performance technique.

What I am saying is that during Caesar's concert she is trying to achieve the success of "call and response" throughout her performance. My previous, in-depth explanation of "monitor and adjust" states that as Shirley proceeds in acquiring "call and response" from her audience, she is knowledgeable enough to "change" her performance technique so she can gain that successful plateau. Without her taking advantage of the performance technique "monitor and adjust," I would contend that she would hardly ever, or possibly never, reach that plateau of "call and response" that Lawrence Levine expounds upon in *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, nor the audience participation that Martha Flowers
explains in her lecture. Shirley incorporated this idea in the following dialogue that allows us the opportunity to see how the technique of "monitor and adjust" really works. She says:

I do it all the time. If one thing doesn't work you shift and you do something else. If a fast song doesn't work, you use a slow one. Sure, I do it. For example, when I do "Miracle" most of the time I head right for "Jesus, I Love Calling Your Name." Now if my band is with me and my back-up, I may go right into the singing. Or if my group and my audience aren't right where they need to be, I may minister just a little right here. But see, Brooksie, I change every time I get up to sing. I adjust my music to what's going on around me. I take everything into consideration, what's going on around me, and I adjust my music for my audience.

Obviously by now, the audience has given Shirley their endorsement as if to say, "Yes, Shirley, we love what you are doing. We believed you would do just as we anticipated; you did not let us down and we grade you highly. Consequently, we will continue to buy your concert tickets." In the meanwhile, Shirley's actions respond to her audience by saying "Well, if you like this performance, I will give you more of the same." Without a doubt, Caesar recognizes her ability and need to change her performance style and technique depending on the verbal and non-verbal responses of her audience. Monitoring and adjusting may be further explained as the continual audience observation that is vitally
essential if the performer is to command and control her audience. The performer adjusts her artistry accordingly. When I asked Shirley to elaborate on her usage of "monitoring and adjusting" as it affects her performance, she had this to say:

Yes indeed, I did it last night. Almost every time you hear me sing I do it, because first, if you’re singing a song and that song is not really working, you know... Now a lot of times what I’ll do, the Lord will just give me something else, uh, to add to that song. Like for an example, the song my sister (Ann) sings "You can depend on Jesus," I’ll say [Shirley falls back on her singing ability] in a sing-song fashion "Gonna be alright, gonna be, gonna be alright, everything’s gonna be alright." Really what I’m waiting for, I’m waiting for the musicians to get into a pocket; by the time they get into that pocket, phone Aunt Jane. I’ll give you a quarter if she ain’t home.

In a playful, yet serious explanation, Shirley is convincing me that she is most aware of her audience, but even more than that single awareness, she is fully aware of her control of the audience through, in, and by the potential of her ministry, her voice, her background singers, and certainly her musicians. She continues:
Then I’ll go from that like for an example, now if that song does not work, by the time I get to "Miracle Worker" and I tell the story about the angels and about how the Lord has healed me and blessed me, so forth and so on, if that doesn’t do it, you know, then I’m steady going up, up, up. Nine times out of ten though, it does. But I do know from there I’m going straight to "Jesus, I Love Calling Your Name" where I love to really involve the audience. So yes, there are a lot of things that not only me but other singers on the road will reach back and grab, if something is not working then you use something else and that shows the versatility of a singer too.

In addition to the facility and dexterity that she exhibits as she invokes audience participation, Caesar also uses storytelling as an extension of her performance. As a corollary of her verbal artistry and her total performance, we now turn to the specific messages that Shirley’s stories convey. We consider the techniques of storytelling which also includes her performance style, and we can actually see her involving her audience as an intricate part of her performance.

Good stories are like good pictures -- they often convey more in a few moments than hours of lecture may accomplish. Good stories have the advantage of making learning exciting and enjoyable. It is my contention that Shirley Caesar tells good stories and maintains or continues the same level of excitement (described earlier) during storytelling as she does in the musical segment of her concert, because
good stories, carefully selected, put the subject matter at the level of understanding with the listener. Caesar says "I like to put it right down front on a level where the audience can understand it."

When Caesar refers to "it" she actually means the biblical messages she conveys through storytelling.

In her book *Number Our Days*, Barbara Myerhoff quotes her elderly informant, a former student from the Religious School for Jewish Boys looking back on his school days, and renders a perspective on the incomparable influences on Biblical stories and biblical messages: "...Oh, the stories they would tell us would be full of wisdom and humor. They learned from somewhere, I don’t know from where, how to put into the Bible...a life you could never imagine. They could put you directly in touch with Abraham, Jacob, Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Myerhoff, 1978: 59).

I believe that Myerhoff's informant's phrase "putting you right in touch with" and Caesar's phrase "putting it right down front..." are analogous because both of these phrases suggest the possibilities of making Biblical language understandable and comprehensible by: (a) showing your listener how the Bible affects you (the teller) and them through healing and salvation, etc., (b) demonstrating through personal narratives the similarities between you (the teller) and specific Biblical characters (e.g. John, Paul, Jacob, Isaac), and (c) portraying the Bible as "real" for both the teller and the listeners by finding yourself in like circumstances as described in the Bible. By demonstrating the Bible in story-form, the Bible becomes more
significant.

An even more applicable illustration that comments on the significance of storytelling based on Biblical dialogue and the enhancement of the same dialogue through characterization is found in *Number Our Days*. Barbara Myerhoff quotes her informant (on page 59) as follows:

We always fell back to the Bible itself and played it out. When you play like you have a deep understanding of the characters, and their psychology, it's not only like reading about something. These people in the Bible grew enlarged for us, how they behaved... Until this day I can feel the greatness of those stories working in me, giving color, giving itself into my own way of thinking... For example, we would talk about Jacob, what went wrong with him? We would compare him to our own fathers. Those Bible stories taught us how to live.

Shirley not only tells her story, she lives them. She's not only an evangelist, but an actress and singer, and she exhibits these traits during her performances. As Lou Rawls says of Shirley's performance:

As far as Shirley's performance goes, what can I say. She is Aretha Franklin, Mahalia Jackson, and Dinah Washington -- all those women -- wrap them all up in one and put them in Shirley Caesar, and you've got from A to Z as far as gospel. She is sincere; she
believes in what she’s doing and it shows. There’s no question about her performance, the woman is electrifying. When Shirley walks into the room, you can feel the vibrations and Lord, don’t let her get up there and start singing. Whew! The woman is powerful, dynamite.

Another indication of her devotion to her religion and her music is in the United Artists Records news release entitled "BIO" in March 1977 describing both Mahalia Jackson and Shirley Caesar:

Among the joyful and exalted voices of worship in Gospel music today there are a few whose inspirational gifts are truly outstanding. Mahalia Jackson is one such name. Shirley Caesar is another. She has given her special abilities to make the world a better place, and her devotion to her music is a blessing to all who hear her.

Not only does Shirley Caesar draw attention to herself, the performer, but equally she draws attention to her artistry in gospel music and storytelling. Performance for Shirley then is an enactment of the poetic function because much of her verbal discourse is spoken in verse-like form, and she displays a spoken artistry that has its foundation in the African-American culture. When she begins speaking, there seems to evolve a "sing-song" pattern that is compelling to your feet, and your feet begin to move. It is almost inevitable for anyone
to hear a tune and not assign a tempo to it. For this reason Shirley's "sing-song" verbal artistry evokes continual audience participation. You may want to clap your hands, or you may want to stomp your feet because it is hard to tell when the singing stops and the preaching begins. So you just become engrossed and do as Shirley says she does herself, "lose yourself in the ministry." The reason I quote her and refer to her statement "lose yourself in the ministry" is because, as the audience watches Shirley, she does just that -- she loses herself in the ministry through her performance. It is almost as if she is eating a dessert that is so tasty to her that she can't wait to digest what is in her mouth in expectation of what the spoon is going to return with -- just more of the same tasty dessert.

Undoubtedly, Shirley Caesar is aware that Biblical stories are capable of becoming a type of religious language which penetrates the hearts and the minds of her listeners. She offers her audience her very own rendition of well-known plots, themes, and characters taken directly from the Bible. These elements serve as a basis for this segment of her performance. For example, you may hear Shirley exclaim: "I can see Jesus as he looks at the Blind Man" or "I heard Jesus when he said 'Zaccheus, come down from that Sycamore tree, today the Lord wants to visit your house. Tell your wife not to burn the bread because I am the Bread of Life." Shirley brings a lasting impression to her listener's minds; one that she hopes will change their lives at the present as well as alter the outcome of their future through salvation.
Finally, we can see how Bible messages can become religious language through narration. These narratives have a most profound, long-lasting effect on the listener if the teller is able to "put it right down front" or put the listener (you) directly in touch with "the true essence of the Word." As Jeff Titon says, "because religious language (heard from Bible stories) is performed...the context of its performance is crucial to its understanding. The voice of the spirit is understood to speak through individuals for a given purpose at a given time and the listener is especially open to this inspired language" (Titon, 1988).

My emphasis here then is to help you understand how Shirley Caesar extends her performance technique and invokes her audience's participation by relating personal experience through a Biblical context. For example, Shirley may begin telling a story about how she was spanked for a childhood prank, and almost simultaneously move the personal story into a Biblical context by citing such scriptural verses as "for whom God loves, he also chastens." Hence, she has used personal experience narrative and Biblical phrase to serve her purpose in ministry.

It is common knowledge that stories entertain, educate, socialize, and moralize; however, the teller must remember that her story is a "word picture" in which there is a need for careful wording, sentence structure, and sequence of events (Bascom, 1977: 7). If the audience misunderstands or misses some important detail in the story, there is no opportunity for them to read it as if it were a book. I mention
these restrictions and specifications for successful storytelling because Caesar masters the art of storytelling as if she were trained in a special "thematic pictorialization." To this end, Caesar explained to me what takes place mentally and emotionally during her stories. "It's almost like I close my eyes, and I see those events all over again. I actually visualize the people and the places when I start to recall. When I was a child, I was so mischievous I got into a lot of things, and I got spankings. Now most people know what it is to get a spanking. Not only do I tell the stories I can relive on stage, I tell stories people can identify with."

Shirley therefore chooses subjects and symbols that are clearly identified and are adaptable to the ages, background, and appreciation of her audience. When I asked Caesar "What are the particulars necessary for a good story?" she summarized the following depiction that I now paraphrase. Every good story should have an introduction, should explain the setting, name the characters, and describe the characters. For example, when Shirley tells her story "I Remember Mama," she actually helps her audience "see" Mrs. Hallie Caesar, her mother. "My mom was semi-handicapped on one side; sometimes she took a little longer getting from the kitchen to the front door. But she would limp through that house [as Shirley mimics her mother's walk, she brings to light another performance device -- dramatic enactment], come to the front door, and say 'Come here Gal. The word is you've been stealing.'"
Shirley prepares her listeners for the events that are to follow by letting them know (a) she was on the outside of the house and her mother was inside, in the kitchen, (b) how they could visualize an older woman limping as she pretends to limp like her mother, and (c) how she could spark their interest by telling them her mischievous prank of stealing. Shirley Caesar realizes unless she gives her audience a detailed introduction at the beginning of her storytelling where she includes specific descriptions of the setting, the characters, and the mood of her narrative, the audience is forced to divert its attention from the rest of the story (plot and theme) in order to supply the essential details needed to give the story cohesion; this puts the audience at a disadvantage.

After the introduction, Caesar acknowledges "how the events should fall into the correct order." Which is to say, the continuity of events should be sequential, even with supplemental details if necessary. In the story "I Remember Mama," Shirley immediately captivates her audience's attention by telling them she had been stealing, as transcribed. Logically, the next questions to enter the listener's minds might be (a) What had she stolen? and (b) What kind of disciplinary actions were her mother to take?

Shirley Caesar goes on to explain her story by confessing that she had stolen some popsicles (ice cream) from the neighborhood store after walking home from school that afternoon.
When I was a child,
I used to love popsicles,
and I would do almost anything
to get to go to the store.
One day after school,
I had saved a nickel from lunch at school
and I was going to buy a popsicle
instead of going directly home after school
like mama had told me to do.
I slipped off to the store.
My other sisters knew I had gone to the store
and they went home and told mama.
Well,
when I got to the store,
I stole three popsicles
-- red, orange, and purple --
and I hid them under my arm
and ran out of the store.
My sisters saw me with the stolen popsicles
and they ran home and told mama.
Well,
I walked home through the graveyard
so I would have time to eat the popsicles.
By this time
the popsicles had started to melt
and juice ran down the inside of my arms on my dress.

When I finally finished the popsicle,
I walked home.
Mama met me at the door.
Mama said "Come in here, girl,
the word is
you've been stealing."
"No mama," I said.
Mama said
"Open your mouth and stick out your tongue."
Inside my mouth and on my tongue
was red and orange and purple
from eating the popsicles.
And she saw my dress was all
red and orange from the melted popsicles.
Mama said
"Today, Shirley Ann,
I'm gonna whip you for lying.
Tomorrow, I'm gonna whip you for stealing."

Needless to say, during her story Shirley has exemplified great
ergistic in establishing a background which serves as an introduction
and describes the setting. She gives just enough details in the
introduction to draw her listener's into yearning for the story's
outcome. After she describes the characters, the setting, and the
plot, she very strategically completes all the other intricate details of her narrative including mocking her mother's gait from the kitchen to the front door. Shirley uses the element of suspense to stimulate a heightened interest to the subject matter of her story. The suspense also provides an emotional background for Caesar's audience to respond to her plot.

The theme of "spanking" arises in two of the childhood stories that Caesar tells in our interviews. One might ask why she mentions these stories more often than she does the ones about playing with her other sisters or learning how to jump rope or even running track (as she also mentions on one occasion). I contend that the stories about "spanking" hold such a lasting impression on her that they automatically come to mind when she reflects back on her childhood. Shirley reminds me that her parents were strict on her because she believed even at an early age of "seven or eight years old" that she possessed a "uniqueness" that told her family there was a call on her life.

For this reason, even though Caesar remembers many other childhood experiences, the other experiences do not have the impact on her "call" as does the spanking stories. As a result of her chastisement, she is a better person, stands up for the right, and as she responds to her "calling" likewise she responds to good morals, honesty, and fair dealings which she believes she acquired as a result of her "home training" which includes her childhood spankings. Additionally, it follows that the pedagogical purpose here is to communicate these values to the audience; the need for discipline and even punishment
within the family, whether it be on stage or in an interview.

In conclusion, since these childhood stories are life experiences it would follow that the childhood spankings would help to define Shirley Caesar and her artistry. Jeff Titon develops this idea in a workable manner as he asserts that life stories represent true evidence of the storyteller's identity in the act of the telling "...the life story presents who the storyteller thinks he is (his identity) and how he thinks he came to be that way." It also explains why the teller persists in being as he is -- for Shirley Caesar, why she remains a "called evangelist" (1988: 41).

Finally, Shirley made it clear to me that every good story has a climax. The climax is the surprise or the height of emotional elevation in her story. Of course in "I Remember Mama," the combining factors of Mrs. Hallie's seeing the different colors on Shirley's tongue and the proclamation that she was going to get spanked served as the pinnacle of the story and evoked emotional response. Certainly all people have done "wrong" and have been punished for their "wrong" in some fashion at some time during their lives, and even more specifically, everyone recalls childhood punishment.

By presenting a subject in story form, her listener becomes emotionally involved just as they become physically and emotionally involved with her music. Somehow Caesar has perfected her verbal artistry to the point that whichever mode of performance she calls upon, she entreats her audience to become a part of that performance. She appeals to their emotional interests by "putting it right down
front where they can get it." She also chooses themes, motifs, and plots that most people can identify with and appreciate. For example, as we reflect back on Shirley's childhood stories, she describes how she threw a rock, broke out a street light, and an on-looker (Mrs. Carrington) reported the news to her father.

First of all, most of us have played throwing rocks either at an individual or at a person. Two common everyday themes of playing, and throwing rocks are the initial components of this childhood story that we may possibly identify with. Secondly, Caesar lets us know that her father found out about her mischievous deed. Here again, most people have found themselves in very similar, if not the exact circumstance. Thirdly, Shirley confesses to her receiving a spanking as a result of her deed. Most significantly, Caesar speaks to her audience on their level as she humbles herself to the point of being spanked by her father. As Caesar offers commonplace themes for her audience to analyze, all she is doing is saying "Look, I am not better than anyone else. I am human. I have made mistakes. If the Lord could take me, convert me, and forgive me for those mischievous deeds, he can do the same thing for you." To this end, her message is complete. To illustrate Caesar's accomplishments in storytelling, consider the following. The stories that Shirley Caesar performs: a) entertain, b) educate, c) socialize, d) moralize, e) appeal to tradition (oral, Biblical, African-American), f) lengthen the climatic segment, and g) offer an emotional release.
Finally, Shirley presents her stories in a timely manner. Knowing that she is on stage for ninety minutes, she can only spend a limited amount of time on each story or song. Yet, each segment -- be it story or song -- must provide its own subordinate peak designed to move closer to the ultimate climax. What is so fascinating about her timing, however, is that the highest emotional state is induced in the performer-audience relationship at the climax. The audience screams, yells back to Shirley, cheers for her, and even laughs with her as the climax peaks in an emotional release as the story ends. In other words, the listener has followed Shirley all through the sequential events of the story, has built up an enormous expectation for the story's closure, and now experience the emotional release associated with the climax. The emphasis here is brevity, so that the impact of the climax is not lessened, and the main thrust of the story will linger on the hearts and minds of the people.

It is at this point that I believe Caesar again sets herself apart from most storytellers. She has formulated and she exhibits in an unparalleled, unprecedented performance style attributed to few other performers. Her unique closure to her stories serve as a reflective mirror on the climax. Consequently, the climax has a longer-lasting effect on the audience because she doesn't lengthen her conclusion to the point of "over-riding the climax." The conclusion becomes a derivative of the climax in contrast to the climax diminishing into a derivative of the conclusion.
Trained observers and Shirley, herself, are aware of the subtle movements of the songs and stories that move in a progression to bring a climax to her performance. John Rockwell, a writer for The New York Times, has observed and experienced the skill and sincerity that moves Shirley Caesar around the stage and through a performance. Note the following paragraphs that will help the reader visualize a performance which is unique to Caesar. [See Appendix A for other journalistic descriptions of Shirley Caesar's performances.]

But most characteristic was the hand-clapping, soul-stirring excitement of the Rugged Cross Singers, the Gospel Keynotes and Miss Caesar and her group. The Gospel Keynotes had the small but deliriously enthusiastic audience literally jumping, and Miss Caesar, with her powerhouse of a voice and personality, made a fitting headliner. (May 4, 1975)

Yet music lovers who enjoy today's black music or the stirring anthems of older blues, rhythm-and-blues and soul singers would do well also to consider black gospel. Gospel is widely referred to in histories of rock as the roots of the blues and hence of rock itself. Its ecstatic, shouting style, its surging peaks of emotion and its rhapsodic use of repetition invariably make a profound impact on a listener already attuned to modern-day black popular music. (December 26, 1980)
To heighten the enthusiasm of Caesar's performance, she willingly explains the impromptu style associated with her concerts.

...Miss Caesar, the evening's featured performer, insisted on Saturday night that her portion of the program wasn't a show. "We're going to have church," she proclaimed.

But Miss Caesar's preaching, testifying and singing were certainly theatrical, and the Institutional Radio Choir had been "having church" -- singing the gospel with passionate commitment and infectious good humor -- throughout the first half of the program; "Get On Board!" was more consistent than Miss Caesar seemed to think. Some of the dancing (which was choreographed by Loretta Abbott and Al Perryman) did seem a little incongruous in a gospel setting, and the choir occasionally seemed uncomfortable with the demands of the staging. But ultimately the program held together, and it was a delight. (December 29, 1980)
Figure 2  Shirley Caesar during one of her performances.
Figure 3  Shirley Caesar during another performance.
Figure 4  Shirley Caesar: receiving an award; her album cover; and posing in front of her ten Grammy Awards.
Shirley Caesar’s story about "The Four Angels" is a personal narrative that represents her belief system and is centered around a supernatural experience she had when God healed her kidney stones. She tells the story in first person, and at the core of this narrative she shares with her audience her true religious convictions about God’s healing power.

In *Powerhouse for God*, Titon (1988) cites the different views of scholarship on personal narrative which pertain to Caesar’s personal story. Some scholars may refer to her story as a "memorate," while other scholars may refer to it as a "sacred narrative." Two well-known scholars, Patrick Mullen and Sandra K.D. Stahl, offer different views about the labeling of stories such as those told by Shirley Caesar. Stahl argues that the memorate dealing with the supernatural is quite appropriate for stories such as "The Four Angels" because it is a personal story that expresses a traditional attitude (Stahl, 1977: 21-26). Since Caesar’s story is one of traditional attitude surrounding her own personal belief, why not call it a memorate? However, as we shall continue to see, a personal narrative about a supernatural experience can be based on God, so there needs to be a distinction made between the secular and the non-secular. Obviously, Caesar’s story is intended to be understood as non-secular.
Patrick Mullen has challenged Stahl's distinction between memorates and the personal experience stories arguing that such stories as conversion narratives should be called "sacred [personal] narratives:"

Stories based on personal religious events are difficult to classify generically. One definition [Stahl's] limits personal narratives to discussion of secular experience in order to distinguish the genre from memorates which are defined as dealing with the supernatural. Sacred personal stories do resemble memorates since they have a supernatural quality; but, unlike the memorate, the core belief in the sacred narrative is part of a system of folk religion [as opposed to superstition]. The crucial connection between sacred narrative and religion is significant not just in terms of classification of these narratives, but also in terms of understanding their function. Sacred narratives must be considered in the context of the folk religion from which they have emerged (1983: 17-18).

In other words, Mullen suggests that there needs to be a distinction made between memorate and sacred narratives so that there will be no question as to the vital role that "God" plays in the story, not superstition. Also, we must really understand that the foundation of these stories rests on the religious belief system of the narrator. For these reasons I chose to call Caesar's story about "The Four Angels" a sacred narrative because not only does it talk about the
miraculous power of God -- it too exemplifies her religious convictions that she has based her ministry on, and she continues to preach these convictions in performance (Titon, 1988).

Shirley's sacred [personal] narrative about "The Four Angels" exemplifies:

A) her distinction between the secular and the sacred (God),
B) her own personal religious belief, and
C) her storytelling technique converted into sermon.

One evening while traveling to Valdosta, Georgia, I asked Shirley how the story of "The Four Angels" actually came about. As we sat in her compartment at the rear of her tour bus, listening to the hum of the engine carrying the bus across Interstate 77 South, Caesar explained the details of her story. Fortunately, we were uninterrupted while she talked and this recapitulation became a performance.

I had some pain on my right side.
I kept traveling and singing,
and the pain kept getting worse.
I finally had to stop and go to the hospital
-- right here in Durham at Duke Hospital.
They took x-rays
and told me they probably wanted to do surgery.
I told them I had to go home
and think about it.
I was sick, sick, sick.
Well, one of my family members drove me home
and helped me get dressed for bed.
But before I got in bed,
I started to pray;
I said "Now Lord,
I’ve been traveling all around the country,
in and out of the nation, everywhere
telling everybody that you are a healer.
Now I believe you can heal me.
I’ve preached of your goodness;
now Lord, I’m giving this situation over to you..."
The Lord gave me a satisfied heart
-- a contentment within my spirit.
I can’t continue to preach one thing
and ahh, ahh,
if I’m going to preach it,
then I’ve got to exemplify it.
Meaning that if God said it,
I’m going to take Him at His word
and rest in the Lord.
Because He did say it,
I can rest on that.
What I want my audience to comprehend
is that I am trying to show them the difference
in hearing the Lord saying you're healed,
and then going back
and hearing the doctor saying "How can it be?"
When just yesterday
he had seen the stones.
So I had to give the contrast
of what the doctors had said
and then what the Lord had said.
This, of course,
brings me to the climax
because anytime the Lord says something
it is an automatic climax.
If I'm trying to show the goodness of the Lord,
well this is the way He is revealing this to me.
There is a need for me to let them know
that when the doctors checked me the second time,
they found no stones,
no more pain.
I hurt from here all the way around
(Caesar points to the area where the pain had localized).

Even though Caesar becomes somewhat repetitious in her explanation,
her main purpose in this repetition is to stress the fact that God is
certainly a healer, and she witnesses to this fact.
Caesar’s sacred narrative "The Four Angels," can be told as part of an interview or performed as part of her gospel show. As part of the analysis of "The Four Angels," attention will be drawn to her continual performance style. This style includes her monitoring and adjusting, as well as her usage of call and response, and most of all, the fact that this story’s theme of healing epitomizes Caesar’s religious beliefs which mirror the "sacred [personal] narrative" described earlier by Patrick Mullen.

I recorded the story about "The Four Angels" one evening I accompanied Shirley to Winston-Salem State University’s Auditorium for Performance in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Shirley Caesar has spent a lot of time performing in this area because she is well-known in the Carolinas. The concert was a sellout performance and people were even standing against the walls. The fact that the concert was held in an auditorium on a college campus did not deter the excitement of a church-like atmosphere when Shirley took the stage. Once again, she established the fact that the first three rows were her A-men Corner. Her listeners became totally involved in her performance, and Shirley Caesar commanded her audience for ninety minutes.

The actual story "The Four Angels" follows a segment of Caesar’s concert which offers an inside-description of the performance environment. I purposefully supplied this contextual background so that the reader may acquire a clearer picture of the heightened intensity that exists when Shirley tells this powerful story.
The story about The Four Angels:

SC: How many of you believe
that everything’s gonna be alright? [yeah]
I don’t know about anybody else,
but I prayed about that war [the Persian Gulf],
and I praise God
that the war has come to an end.
They had ordered twenty-five thousand bags,
ahh, to put bodies in,
now I’m talking about over here;
twenty-five thousand coffins.
They’d sell burial plots and say
you’d better come on and get you a plot now.

At this point, to heighten her message and intensify the moment, she began singing:

Gonna be,
got to be,
gonna be alright.
Everything’s gonna be alright.

The group started to sing along with her in a perfect example of call and response:
Group: Gonna be,  
gonna be,  
gonna be alright.  
Everything's gonna be alright.

SC: (singing) Beeee alright... (serves as the transition)

Group: Everything will be alright.  
Oh, everything will be alright.  
Oh, everything will be alright.

SC: Hallelujah, Hallelujah,  
there's a song I want to sing  
and I want to dance a little bit on this one  
...just a little bit.  
Because the dance is given to those  
who have the victory. (Melody and Rhythm)  
Some years ago when I started out,  
wasn't quite out of my teens,  
yet with the Caravans, somebody said to me  
"Why do you dance so much?"  
I said because I've got the victory.  
"Why do you preach so much?"  
I said because I've got the victory.  
I want to give you two good reasons
why I praise the Lord.
Are you all back there?
[referring to the musicians -- in other words, musicians stay with me]
Number one,
when I think about the goodness of Jesus and all
...and all...alllll that He’s done for me.
My, my, my, my, my,
my soul, my soul,
my soul cries out hallelujah
for one day the Lord saved me.
(Audience Response)
Took out that old heart of stone
and gave me a heart of flesh;
took out hate and gave me love;
took out prejudice and gave me pride.
Yea, yea, yea, ohhhh, yea. Mike, play some bass over there
[referring to Michael, the organist who plays the Hammond B3].

This is an excellent sample of her expertise in staying in touch with her audience, her musicians, and her background singers. Shirley explains on another tape how she is so consciously aware of her performing environment as she sings, that she’s almost a perfectionist when it comes to traditional gospel music and how she wants her sound to be.
SC: That's number one.

Number two, is there anybody here that knows, and knows that you know, that you know, that you know, that you know, that you know, that you know, that He's able, that He's able to take a sick, frail, broken-down body and speak to it and the pain will go away, speak to it "Cancer's got to get its hat and coat and God speak to it and the Death Angel's got to go.

Hey, hey, come on Amen Corner, you all looking at me strange.

Soliciting the audience's involvement, she is doing all of this to get the stage set, the audience ready, and make sure that her musicians tight so she can get the most out of the story she is about to tell. The story begins in a singing fashion, and there is a seamless transition as she moves from the introduction to the story to the song:

SC: The doctors,
some years ago, (Once upon a time) wanted to take my right kidney out. The doctors at Duke Hospital told me "You'll hurt the rest of your life
if you don’t get it out."
The inside of the right kidney
was all raw and ate up
with rocks and stones in my kidney.
They came by my room one morning,
said to sign the papers.
We’ll take you up early in the morning.
I said
"Well, before I sign the papers,"
I said
"I’ve got to get a second opinion
-- yea, yea, yea, yea, ohhhh, yea.
They said
"We’ll bring another doctor by."
I said
"Don’t you bring nobody else.
I’ve got a doctor
that I want to talk to myself,
hallelujah."
He said
"Well who are are you gonna talk to;
don’t you know you’re gonna need an appointment?"
I said
"I don’t need an appointment.
Can I get a witness?"
And I said
"If you'll just let me go home,
I'll come back early tomorrow morning
and I'll bring the papers signed
if that's what,
if that's what this doctor tells me to do."
So I checked myself out of Duke Hospital,
heyyyyyy.
Well, I believe I feel the holy ghost's help now.
So I checked myself out of the hospital
and I made my way home.
I was in so much pain,
if I got down
I couldn't get up,
and if I got up
I couldn't get back down.
So one of my family members came and got me
and took me upstairs to my bedroom
and they took off my hospital clothes
and they put on my bed clothes.
They turned the covers back and said
"Come on Shirley Ann, and get in."
I said
"Wait a minute,
before I get in
I've got to go down."
So I went down on my knees,
yes I did.
Wait a minute Brother Johnny,
(referring to Johnny, the bass player.)
And while I was down on my knees,
I was in so much pain
I lay with my face buried in the covers,
but my spirit, man,
was looking up to Chicano glory.
Have you ever been like that?
And looks like when I was looking,
my spirit was looking up into Chicano heaven,
looks like I saw four angels waiting in line.
I saw Michael;
I saw Gabriel;
I saw Sinclair;
looks like I saw Raphael.
And each one of the angels were standing in line saying:
"Lord,
let us go down there."
I was in so much pain,
my pajamas that I had on were hurting my body,
and Mr. Michael stepped up and said
"Ohhhhh Lord,"
said "if you let me go down there
I can be there in about two and a half seconds.

God said
"I'm sorry,
I cannot use you."

Gabriel stepped up
with his trumpet in his hands,
and said
"I can do something else other than blow a trumpet.
I can be there in two seconds."

God said
"Nooooo,
I need somebody right now.
Can you hear me say right now?
Say, right now."

If you've never been sick,
you don't know what I'm talking about.
If you've never been in pain,
you know what I'm talking about.

I don't blame you,
I wouldn't say A-men either.

Raphael stepped up and said
"I can be there in less than a half of a second,
or maybe in about a half of a second."

God said
"No, I need somebody right now."

"Well, well, well,"

Sinclair said

"Let me go, Lord. I got the healing in my wings. I can raise my big wings and I can swoop down there and I can heal her on your word."

God said

"No, none of you can be there in time."

So the angels took two steps back.

Come on, you all help out (referring to her back-up singers: Ann, Bernard, Mae, and Pete).

Let's take two of them back (they all step back).

And they looked at God and said

"Listen, Jehovah Rappah, since we cannot get there in time, why don't you go yourself?"

And God took even two more steps back and looked them eye ball to eye ball and said

"I have to go
'cause I'm already there!
I'm already there!"
Say yea,
say yea, say yea, say yea.
That's what I like about the Lord,
he's already here.
You don't have to walk out like you came in.
The healer is in here.
The deliverer is in here,
hallelujah.
The provider is in here.
Jehovah El Shadai is in here.
Jehovah Shalom is in here.
Jehovah Rappah is in here.
Somebody say yea,
say yea, say yeaaaaa.
I went back to the hospital the next morning
still in pain.
But I gave them the papers
because the Lord told me to get up off my knees
and get in the bed.
And I heard Him when He whispered in my ear,
He said
"Rest in Me.
Rest in Me."
I got up early the next morning,
went back by myself,
had the papers in my hand.
They came and tried to help me out.
I said
"Here is the papers."
He said
"Well alright."
When he opened it up and looked at it,
he said
"But you didn’t sign it."
I said
"I know I didn’t.
I’m resting in the Lord;"
I said
"It’s alright.
Hope says that everything will be alright."
You all ain’t saying nothing. (audience solicitation)
"But Faith says that everything is alright."
Ain’t that alright?
Can I hear you say that: Faith says

Group: Faith says

SC: That everything
Group: Everything

SC: Is alright.

Group: Is alright.

SC: They x-rayed me again.
When they got through,
before they finished,
the pain left
and it hasn't been back since.
Can I get a witness?
I jumped up off the table,
but I jumped off that table
and put my clothes on.
Dr. Johnson took the papers;
no, no,
he took the x-rays
and gave them to the x-ray technician.
They went back there with the pictures,
came back scratching their heads.
Looked like the cat that swallowed the canary.
But I pointed my finger and said
"Didn't I tell you?
Didn’t I tell you?"
Didn't I tell you?
Is there anybody here that knows what I'm talking about?
Won't He heal your body?
Won't He heal your body?
Won't He make a way?
I know that!
Say Yea!
That's good enough to dance on by itself.
(She begins singing:)
"Here I Come Again Lord, Waiting on a Miracle."
Come on Carl (referring to Carl, the drummer).

What Makes the Four Angels Work

Caesar tells the story about "The Four Angels" in a unique fashion. The story exhibits the pattern of a conversion ritual, but is a different genre, the healing story. It is also clearly told within the church context, as testimony and a conversion does take place. She is converted from a state of "pain" to a state of "non-pain." Had this been a typical conversion ritual, however, Caesar would have progressed from a state of "sin" to a state of "sinlessness." Accordingly, what is memorable and impressive about this particular sacred narrative is that her performance can be categorized into the following areas:

(a) contextual background -- Caesar sets the stage and the mood for her sermonettes. For example, note the manner in which
she sets the stage for "The Four Angels." Initially, she questions the audience "How many of you believe everything is gonna be alright?" She reassures her audience that everything will be alright by referring to a previous experience of VICTORY! "I don’t know about anybody else, but I prayed about that war [meaning the Persian Gulf War], and I praise God that the war has come to an end." Her audience should elucidate from that message that just as Caesar prayed for the Gulf war to end and it did, that being a messenger from God, she has power to be victorious in almost any situation.

(b) illness identification -- Caesar stated that the inside of her right kidney was all raw and ate up with rocks and stones...

(c) the healing process (prayer component) -- Caesar eluded to the angel Sinclair who said, "Let me go, Lord. I got the healing in my wings...I can heal her on your word."

(d) communitas resulting from the healing process, also liminality (contact with the angels) -- Caesar delivers the idea what God has done for me, He will do for you. "That’s what I like about the Lord; he’s already here. You don’t have to walk out like you came in. The healer is in here."
(e) call and response -- Multidimensional communication occurs during Caesar's performances. She communicates with the audience. The audience speaks back to Shirley. Caesar calls to the musicians and the backup singers, likewise, respond back to Caesar. "Mike, play some bass over there (referring to Michael, the organist). Somebody say yea, say yea, say yeeaaaa" (referring to the audience). The audience in turn says "yeeaaaa!"

(f) keys to performance -- Caesar strategically makes use of several unique devices known as "keys to performance" (Bauman, 1977: 17). One specific key to performance employed by Caesar is register shifts or elevated intonation which assist her audience in focusing in on certain words or certain phrases that are keys to understanding the gist of her sermonette. A register shift is shown in the following section: "When I think about the goodness of Jesus and all...and all...and alllll that he's done for me. My, my, my, my, my soul, my soul, my soul cries..."

In order to categorize the following transcription to match the taxonomy represented above, I have placed appropriate lettering beside examples of the elements cited in 1-6. For example:
1 - contextual background [C]
2 - illness identification [II]
3 - healing [HP]
4 - communitas [CT]
5 - call and response [R]
6 - keys to performance [K]
   (specifically identified)

Thus, in this section, I will analyze the structure of "The Four Angels," how Shirley Caesar makes her story successful, and I will also support these assertions with examples from the performance. Further, I will continue to reflect on Richard Bauman's "Keys to Performance" as a means of explaining Shirley Caesar's verbal artistry.

Shirley Caesar is sure of her walk with God, and she is also certain of her intimate relationship with Him. Her intimate relationship with God directs, controls, and defines her own world view. She therefore ignores the conventional rules of establishments and replaces the conventional with a set of rules of her own informed by the Christian (and Pentecostal) tradition. Shirley, then, lives by these rules and embraces her own standards. What makes Shirley successful in these upheavals is her constant ability to meet her own standards by virtue of the "gift" -- her call to evangelism. Caesar is able to exhibit her standards of artistry, her world view, and her call to evangelism through the extent of her vision.
A perfect example of Caesar's vision is captured in this performance of "The Four Angels." Just before the story opens, Caesar tells her audience that she is about to become overwhelmed by the spirit of God in her next song-sermon. "I want to dance a little bit on this next one" she says. Somebody asked "Why do you dance so much?" Shirley tells her audience that she dances "so much" because she has got the victory. She discusses the manner in which God replaced her heart of stone with a heart of flesh, replaced hate with love, and prejudice with pride, and tells cancer, a fatal illness, "to get its hat and coat!"

Caesar's vision is mirrored in her performances in that while she lays the groundwork or context [C] which builds emotional excitement for her listeners, simultaneously her dance builds emotional excitement for herself.

Secondly, after Shirley establishes a context for "The Four Angels," she then tells the intricate details of her dialogue -- the first category being [II], illness identification. As the story begins, Shirley quickens her audience with a formulaic opening line: "The doctors some years ago wanted to take my right kidney out." Immediately the audience's attention peaks. The thought of surgery and the thought of one's kidney being removed is quite, quite serious. Shirley then gives more details as to the condition of the kidney that was to be removed. "The inside of the right kidney was raw and all ate up with rocks and stones." Inch by inch, Caesar unravels the plot of her story just as one might unravel a tightly woven rug. Interestingly
enough, Shirley is able to make use of narrated event, a recapitulation of the healing of her faulty kidney, as a mechanism of hope for her audience here and now (Bauman, 1977: 70-71).

However, what makes the story work for Shirley is that once her audience is taken with the condition of her kidney, she then goes against the systematic rules of the medical establishment (surgery) and turns the plot of the story upside down in that she attributes her healing to a supernatural power. She changes her story from one of being sick to one of becoming healed, but this follows the conventions of the healing testimony within Pentecostal tradition. As I stated in the beginning of this argument, Shirley Caesar sets her own standards, ignores the conventional rules, and she communicates this message at Duke Hospital: "The doctors at Duke Hospital told me 'You'll hurt for the rest of your life if you don't get it out.'" (Babcock, 1977)

In other words, Shirley consulted the expertise of the medical establishment. She went to Duke Hospital in Durham, North Carolina, one of the most prestigious University hospitals in the nation. She consulted Dr. Johnson who is probably one of the most respected and well-known physicians in the nation. As the story continues, we detect an element of indecisiveness on Shirley's behalf because she asks the doctor to let her go home. The interesting contrast here, however, is the idea of the structured world (the doctors and the hospitals and the human institutions) versus the world of communitas: God, the angels, and the spiritual realm. As I will discuss later, Victor Turner offers a clear perception of the spiritual realm. Accordingly, Shirley uses a
metaphor as a key to performance to emphasize the distinction between the two realms: God is compared to a doctor, but "He" is the greatest doctor of all, transcendent of this structured world. One might think that most people in their right minds would agree to getting this matter taken care of in a timely manner, especially after listening to the description of the kidney and suffering from the pain it was causing. Instead, Shirley Caesar refuses to accept the professional standards offered to her by Duke Hospital. Shirley is not confined to the standards of the "world" because, as a result of her intimate relationship with God, she can prioritize her own world view.

Further, I perceive Caesar's relationship with God very similar to that of a father/daughter relationship. We know that Caesar's father was a black man who only wanted the best for his daughter. He protected her and would even go so far as to heal her if it were in his powers. I would also surmise that if there existed in Caesar's subconscious a picture of God, he would portray the protective features of her real father. Shirley looked upon her father as an all-caring man who worked and sacrificed -- even to the point that it may have cost him his life -- so his family would be comfortable. She views God as an all-loving and all-powerful father who also sacrificed -- even to the point of dying on a cross -- for his children.

Identification with her earthly father establishes for Caesar a traditional acceptance of the "heavenly father" -- a black man who wants the best for his daughter. Consequently, as Caesar ignores the standards levied to her by Duke Hospital, she also ignores the white
doctors, their medicine, and their opportunity to destroy her through the practice of their medicine. Why should Shirley Caesar, a woman "called of God" to spread the good news of God's healing power, submit her own body to the hands of the "establishment" (Duke Hospital) and pay money for them to destroy her.

So, what does Caesar do? She goes home. She goes home to her own family where she finds comfort, and there she prays. What is interesting to note here, however, is that Caesar also educates her culture through the pedagogical question: "Why do we take our black bodies to white doctors to get them fixed?" I don't think Shirley is saying that all doctors are bad; she is only saying that through God you can create your own healing and that you do not have to let anyone tell you how you feel or convince you of how you don't feel.

"The Four Angels" continues to work for Shirley and her listeners because she tells the audience of the "universal" importance of home, family, and tradition. She is offering her listener an element of her performance that they can most often identify with.

Shirley continues her story by saying "I said 'If you all just let me go home, I'll come back early in the morning.' So one of my family members came and got me..." Caesar goes home, gets dressed for bed, but before she lies down, she gets on her knees so she can pray. The significant point here is that Caesar wanted to go home to familiar surroundings in order to communicate with her God. Obviously, she couldn't have this kind of conversation at the "establishment" (Duke Hospital; again, structured contrasted to unstructured; home is a
metaphor for Home or heaven); her spirit was restricted there.

At home she wouldn't have to make an appointment, her God is always available -- unlike the doctors at Duke. Further, she knew God intimately; she didn't know the physicians. Shirley Caesar is certain of her relationship with God, his abilities to work in her, and she has no qualms about ignoring the conventional rules because, through "God," she finds success in her own establishment, the call into evangelism. Herein lies the healing process of Shirley's story, "The Four Angels."

While Shirley prays to God, he reveals to her his healing process. Quite expertly Shirley describes the dialogue of the four angels -- Michael, Gabriel, Sinclair, and Raphael -- offering their service to God in an effort to heal Shirley's body. Caesar tells us that these angels could not get to her quickly enough, so God himself came and healed her.

It is at this point of her story where Shirley establishes community with her listeners. She wants her listeners to share in the goodness of God. If He does this for me, He will do the same for you. "I am saved, I am healed, I'm totally delivered, and you can be too."

We can conclude that it is while Shirley is on her knees that she experiences a sense of communitas, the unstructured oneness of all humanity with God. Very similar to a vision that may appear through a conversion ritual when a person gives his life to Christ and experiences a holy ghost empowerment, Shirley Caesar and her audience share the experience of communitas through healing.

Pat Mullen writes:
Sacred narratives describe the liminal phase of *rites de passage*, a phase which culminates in an experience of communitas, a mystical contact with God and a sense of the oneness of mankind. Thus, sacred narratives are a significant means of re-incorporating the communitas ideal into social structure: the oral narrative form structures an unstructured mystical ideal in order to communicate it meaningfully to the world. (1982: 36)

Shirley Caesar’s sacred narratives can be better understood through the application of Victor Turner’s concept of ritual process (1969). Turner uses the term "liminality" which represents the stage of separation that a person goes through when he finds himself "detached" from the normal social structure he exists in normally. As I take these explanations into consideration, I think it is necessary to remember Mullen’s ideas (1983) and Turner’s ideas as they effect the analysis of Shirley Caesar’s personal experiences and her performance techniques. For example, Caesar also talks about her existence in a state of liminality when the "Lord deals with her." She can testify to the power of God through healing because the Lord has healed her; and she can verify her belief in the results of God’s converting power because she responded to His call, and she is known as Evangelist Shirley Caesar. The call to the ministry and the ritual of healing were given to her in the state of liminality as she replied to the Lord’s voice. The victories Shirley has acclaimed through the stage of liminality serve as an underpinning for the dialogue she performs as
Caesar also talks about existing in a liminal stage when the "Lord deals with her" because she has already achieved healing, and responded to the "call" while she was in this state. The victory she claims through such stages serves as an underpinning for the dialogue she converts to story form.

The story, then, functions more directly to provide evidence of God's healing power. Just to culminate the healing process Shirley offers tangible evidence:

They x-rayed me again. When they got through, before they finished, the pain left and it hasn't been back since. Can I get a witness? I jumped up off the table, but I jumped off that table and put my clothes on. Dr. Johnson took the papers; no, no, he took the x-rays and gave them to the x-ray technician. They went back there with the pictures, came back scratching their heads. Looked like the cat that swallowed the canary. But I pointed my finger and said "Didn't I tell you? Didn't I tell you?"

What else makes the story "The Four Angels" work? I contend that, once again, Shirley Caesar shows her expertise in "monitoring and adjusting," and "commanding and controlling," as well as the power of her evangelistic gift when she reaches her audience on a personal, individual level.
In other words, even though Shirley is aware that some people in her audience are Christians and can appreciate her performance and her message on a more sacred plane, she does not forget that her audience is heterogeneous -- consisting of people from all kinds of cultural backgrounds. The multistratification of her audience governs the kind of performance she must offer her listeners. She goes beyond the different ethnic groups, breaks down the barriers of the group's subconsciousness, and the group doesn't even know what has taken place or when. A listener might conclude "I was just at a concert last week where I heard 'person X.' Why didn't I enjoy his performance as much as I am enjoying Shirley Caesar?" The answer is "person X" just didn't reach you on your own personal level like Shirley Caesar does.

To explain this idea a step further, it is common knowledge that Blacks have always had to be bilingual and assimilate in whatever areas they were placed in if they were to survive. So Caesar is used to appealing to the dominant culture. For example, everyone loves a good story. She is a storyteller and uses this talent of storytelling which becomes for her a universal human element. Just like her music, it transcends race. Consequently, her entire performance reaches listeners on a number of levels that also transcend cultural boundaries; these elements include stories, music, charisma, and stage presence.

Shirley uses her performance keys to teach the Christian ethic. If she doesn't reach you through sermonette, she reaches you through singing. Her performance keys are the devices she uses to get her
message across. Ethic addresses her content and style. However, one cannot separate Shirley Caesar's use of her performance devices from her Christian ethic. She lives what she talks about and is the Christian she exhorts others to become. Remember her references in previous chapters about allowing God to heal her and being a true preacher; elements of the preacher may be heard in "The Four Angels." For example, during the story "The Four Angels," about every two minutes of the ten-minute performance, Shirley breaks into a semi-musical parallelism such as yea, yea, yea, yea, yes or my, my, my, my. Or she may chide her audience for not quite remaining at the level of exuberance she requests for the narration of her story.

After I played the recording of "The Four Angels" to some listeners, one student, Larry Jackson, concluded "It is the moments of singing in repetitive melody that really holds my attention throughout the tape. I keep waiting for Shirley to break out into those little song-like intervals; that's what really holds my attention." I am certain that just as Larry is attracted to this particular component of Caesar's performance, so are other listeners attracted to yet different segments of her performance.

Larry Jackson is a black male from Baltimore, Maryland, who says he has Christian beliefs and has suddenly begun to notice a spiritual connection with these beliefs as I shared some of the ideas related to this chapter on "The Four Angels." He compared those feelings to the feelings he experiences when he goes back home to attend the Christmas eve services in his church and the choir begins to sing "The Holy
Night, Prince of Peace, That's when my savior was born" (not to be confused with "O Holy Night").

Why else does "The Four Angels" work? Because everyone is included in the performance of this narrative. A vivid example of Caesar including everyone in her story can be observed through her exerting herself with the audience as well as the musicians. Nothing is beyond her scope. Notice that she converses with her organist, Michael; her guitarist, Johnnie; and her drummer, Carl all in the same flow of speech while she performs: "Come on Brother Johnny. Are you back there, Carl?" In the same breath, she says to her audience "I don't blame you, if I hadn't ever been sick I wouldn't say Amen either."

In other words, your (the audience's) role in this performance is to stay up with me, talk back to me, and say Amen. Reflection back on the "Keys to Performance" discussed in Chapter 3, the underlined phrases in this paragraph would all be examples of metacommunication because even here Shirley Caesar exhibits her performance skills. Both of these direct references to her band and the direct address to the audience (second person objective pronoun "you") are examples of metacommunication because this flow of communication reflects back to Caesar's listener as well as speaks to the genre of Shirley's performance. Shirley talks to her audience in a "this-could-happen-to-you" tone, telling people that if they have such experiences it will change their lives. She knows that somewhere in her message she is reaching you (the audience) right at the level that you can understand. "I like to put it right out there where my audience can
get it."

Obviously, everyone has experienced some kind of sickness sometime in their lives. Consequently, you feel quite inadequate if you don't witness to what Caesar is saying; so you find yourself responding "Amen!" Finally, as Caesar works all the nuts and bolts of her verbal artistry, her audience and her musicians, she achieves success in reaching all the strata of her listeners, and she brings them all together.

Caesar's performance of "The Four Angels" is pre-established and pre-ordained. She issues a specific for all who hear her narrative, and she assigns each task in such a way that no one wants to let Shirley down. Everyone responds! Everyone wants to fulfill their end of the performance. Without a doubt, Shirley Caesar has a vision and sets the standards of quality for the performance.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish." Proverbs 29: 18
CHAPTER V
FEET, DON'T FAIL ME NOW

Shirley Caesar describes herself as a determined, energetic woman. She says she has always been that way. To her advantage, she learned at an early age to channel those energies into directions which would work for her and help her accomplish her goal. This determination is vivified in a story Shirley told me one evening while we traveled on her tour bus from Nashville, Tennessee to New Orleans, Louisiana. She and I were sitting in her private room designed just for Shirley at the rear of her bus. We had engaged in several different audio recorded conversations, and as we talked, the time seemed to pass more quickly.

It was during this uninterrupted interview session when she told me that just like all other Blacks, she too had and still does confront the racial issue. She also reminded me that since she has roots in the South, she is no stranger to the disgusting existence of prejudice. "It's all over" she would say. Whereas Caesar appears to hold no animosity toward the past, nor situations she has suffered through as a result of her color, she by no means becomes so complacent and comfortable in her current life style as to forget she is of African-American decent.

Even more timely, in correlation with the telling of Caesar's story ("Feet, Don't Fail Me Now"), we were traveling through the very heart of Dixie, and subconsciously this may have served as a catalyst for
Shirley to tell this particular narrative.

Then,
traveling as Baby Shirley,
with Leroy Johnson,
we were on our way
from Tarrboro, North Carolina
to Columbia, South Carolina.
We stopped to get gas.
The driver was Reverend Jackson;
he was sleepy
and he kept stopping
-- trying to stay awake.
So we stopped to get gas at this little place
on highway fifteen.
I was fifteen years old;
I’ll never forget it.
They got out
and went into the store.
While the man was out there
filling up the tank,
there were six or seven other white guys
that went into the store.
So they went in
and they got them a soda,
and soda at that time
was like ten cents.
Leroy Johnson,
who was at that time
I was singing with him,
started to make a smart remark about him
because he couldn't remember
when they had gone from seven cents
to ten cents.
So anyway,
he stood there drinking his soda.
He was on crutches
because,
you know,
he has only one leg.
And a little girl came in
and she asked for some "Mary Jane" candy.
And so
they were playing with the little girl
as if they wanted Leroy to say something about it,
but he wouldn't.
So there was a young guy
about seventeen years old
with us in the car
'cause there were six of us in the car:
the minister’s wife,
me,
Leroy,
another missionary,
the minister,
and this seventeen-year-old boy.
I was sitting up front in the middle,
and so the boy woke up,
and he came into the store.
He came in yawning,
just like I’m doing now
(Shirley actually is yawning because this interview took place very late at night.)

And while he was yawning,
he said
"I want some peppermint candy."
And the man tricked him,
the white man tricked him.
He said
"Did you say peppermint candy?"
The boy said "Uhhh huh."
The man reached down to get the candy
and said to him,
said "Did you say ‘Uhhh huh’ to me, Nigger?"
And he said
"Uhh huh."
The man went down this time;
he didn’t come up with peppermint candy this time;
he came up with a hammer and said
"Let’s kill ‘em all."
The boy ran out of the store.
This was on a Saturday morning.
We had been seeing policemen all morning,
all night.
And patrol cars did not see,
not a one,
a one.
So they jumped on the minister;
they hit Leroy.
Well me,
I was still out there in the car asleep.
I woke up
and looked back there in the back seat.
The woman had left me in the car.
Leroy had gone into the store.
The preacher and the man,
they had fought their way out.
I saw them pick up a big oil drum
and hit him,
and he would fall to the ground.
And he would get back up
and they would hit him again.
I remember seeing him get one good lick in.
I remember that
just like I remember what I am saying,
just like it was yesterday.
And he had on a light green pique shirt
and a cap,
you know,
like with the bib.
He had bled so on his shirt
'til the only way you could tell what color it was,
was to see it from the back
because the front was bloody.
So I jumped out of the car,
and I ran across the street,
across the highway
to the other side.
And as I was getting ready to run,
I saw the minister's wife on the other side
with a white shawl about her shoulders,
looking down at the ditch,
scared to jump the ditch.
I said "Girl,
you better jump that ditch!"
And as she got ready to jump it,
one of the men threw a Coca-Cola bottle
and hit her,
and she fell in the ditch.
Well,
I said
"Feet, don’t fail me now.
Feet, if you’ve ever done your duty before,
please sir,
do it now."
I crossed the street
and took out for running.
Leroy,
by that time,
was coming around the side of the store.
And the, the minister
jumped in the car
and he was panicking.
He was passing up everybody.
Leroy was saying
"Wait for the women,
wait for the women.
Get the women,
get the women."
Some how or another,
they had taken all of our luggage
and threw it in the mud.

Anyways,
I kept running.
The boy,
when they slapped him,
he ran out
and ran 'cross the field.
They got in a light blue 1949 Ford (referring to the white men)
and followed him.

I mean,
they were determined to kill him.
They followed him around that field,
and they were driving along the road
following him
so that they could pick him up
at a point when he would come out of the field.

He ran,
and he saw this man out there raking leaves.
And the man picked him up
and brought him to the police station up the road.

I don't even remember passing him.
We were about two miles,
or maybe a mile and a half,
from Bennettsville, South Carolina.
When they found me,
I, I,
I had truly panicked,
because when I looked behind me,
they were running down behind me
with pitch forks and a hoe
and all that crap.
But I ran track
the season prior to this
and they never got close to me.
(Shirley laughs to herself.)
I said
"Feet,
don't fail me now...phewwwww.
I took off."

Shirley Caesar tells a story that elaborates on her gift of evangelism, her gift of survival, and most profoundly, her gift of being able to put racial abuse in its proper perspective. As described in the previous transcription, Shirley recalls an eventful travel experience which took place in the early 1960s where she could have possibly been tragically hurt or even killed.

While Caesar and five others were traveling in a car headed to Bennettsville, South Carolina, the driver of their car, Rev. Jackson,
became sleepy and decided he would stop the car at a road-side store so that he and anyone else who wanted to could refresh themselves. Unfortunately, Rev. Jackson and his passengers fell victim to an attack by a group of white men who -- by the details of Caesar's narration -- would have killed them had they not run for safety. Caesar tells the story, and just by listening to her details, one can't help feeling the fright and intense anxiety she must have felt by actually being present at the scene of this racist attack. Even more importantly, this even occurred very early in Shirley Caesar's career while she was just becoming famous and traveled with the name "Baby Shirley." She was only fifteen years old. Can you imagine the trauma that all the passengers in the car must have felt, and can you imagine how even more intense this trauma must have been for a fifteen-year-old girl?

In this story Caesar gives elaborate details of the dramatic racial tension and racial slurs that they suffered through that morning as they traveled to South Carolina. She also stated "During the '60s racial unrest was at its peak in the south." Since Caesar has such a clear recollection of the events that took place in this narrative, I contend that her retelling this story serves many purposes -- some of which I will analyze in this section. She says of "Feet, Don't Fail Me Now:"
A) "It reminds me that my race is still struggling."
B) "God gave me the gift of survival, what I call perseverance"
C) "Since he spared me, I have to tell it."
D) "He didn’t bring me this far to leave me."

A) When Caesar says "my race is still struggling" she also implies that she, as a rising star, was no better off or no more safely protected from racism than any black person living during that era or even today. In other words, what Shirley experienced that morning was not just her problem as an artist, or a musician, or even as a woman; this was a "RACE" issue. This was a problem that affected the African-American race as a whole.

In addition to this, even reminding Shirley that her race was/is still struggling, the event was a humbling experience which reminded her that she was no better nor any different than the average black person who may have been an unskilled laborer or a domestic worker. It is my assertion -- as I have tried to make clear throughout this text -- that it is due to personal experience, just like this one, that helps Shirley Caesar keep her life as an Evangelist, storyteller, and performer in proper perspective. Hence, it governs much of her behavior, and thus she relates to this tradition through her verbal artistry. And, although Caesar was becoming more and more recognized in the entertainment industry, she was forced to stare at the brutality and harsh treatment associated with that part of the black experience during the '60s.
John F. Kennedy signed the civil rights bill in 1963. Martin Luther King, Jr. was reaching his pinnacle. And here was a teenager named Shirley Caesar making her way in the backwoods of South Carolina in the early stages of what would become a stellar career. Yet, she stood face-to-face with the threat of death due to racism.

Out of this came a stronger Shirley Caesar. Her experience with the real face of racism gave her real-life material to use in her performances. And, being a black female, the harsh reality of the situation gave her an incentive to go out and fervently tell others about the evils of racism, as well as extoll the virtues of her religion.

B) Secondly, Caesar believes that God protected her life from the brutality of the white male attackers and that she is one of the chosen few who are called by God to spread the good news of the Gospel. Therefore, she has the authority and the autonomy over a special kind of verbal artistry because God gave her the "gift." Consequently, she views her gifts as: the gift of Evangelism, the gift of Survival, the gift of having such an impact on the world that she can bring about a change. While spreading the Word, Caesar gains a unique credibility because she had such first-hand experiences as her brush with death as described in "Feet, Don’t Fail Me Now."

C) Shirley Caesar continues to speak from experience, this is where the textual/storytelling mastery comes from in her verbal artistry. She relates well with her audience because she knows that they have had some of the same experiences; at the same time, it is
unique because many people in her audience would be unfamiliar or naive and just don’t have that first-hand experience.

Paradoxically, as Caesar relates to her audience on such levels as poverty, sickness, motherlessness, and racial issues, she is also recognized and highly respected as The First Lady of Gospel who has received five Grammies, an accomplishment surpassed only by two other famous African-American musical artists -- Michael Jackson and Stevie Wonder.

D) Which brings me to the significance of this chapter, "Feet, Don’t Fail Me Now." Literally, as well as metaphorically, when a person thinks of traveling and advancing upwardly, one also thinks of how important the feet are in this ascension. The metaphor in this case is an example of figurative language and is accordingly a key to performance. Not only is the phrase "Feet, Don’t Fail Me Now" both literal and metaphoric, Shirley Caesar uses this phrase repeatedly to draw attention to the theme of her story. She also repeats the phrase at the end -- to both frame the story (closure) and to suggest the importance of this phrase as a metaphor. Step-by-step Shirley Caesar has progressed through poverty because she knew this was only a temporary state; she has survived through racism as exemplified in "Feet, Don’t Fail Me Now," and she has already progressed through the personal experience of leaving the Caravans and starting out on her own. Shirley continues her walk by faith, and once again, exemplifies this faith by ordering her own world. Just as people depend on their feet to carry them from one place to the next, Caesar depends on her
faith in the Word. In other words, for Shirley, the conjunction between the "folk tradition" of storytelling and the "Christian tradition" of praising the Lord created a hybrid tradition to which she would become permanently attached. This unusual inheritance (very much like a mulatto baby) compelled Shirley's devotional oratory to appeal to hearts and minds of black folk. To further explain, I believe that one single component of Caesar's "tradition" would not fulfill the dynamic role that she plays as a result of having the best of both worlds: the African-American tradition as well as the Christian tradition. This driving force that compels her devotion to evangelism, the evangelism that affords her the Word that she uses to reach the hearts of man. This oratory Caesar says keeps her strong, "dynamic," on-going, and ultimately represents her mission here on earth. The phrase, "Feet, don't fail me now," is said to be a common colloquialism often used by blacks as an encouragement to continue and persevere. If one were to examine the standards of living that blacks were subjected to during share-cropping, it would be easy to understand the appropriateness of "Feet, Don't Fail Me Now" as it relates to the survival of Blacks during this era.

Ironically, however, Blacks have taken many negative situations and have assigned a more positive or humorous context to these events in an effort to survive the evils of poverty, racism, and other misfortunes placed upon them from society. We can see how Shirley Caesar uses this exact idea in surviving this racial encounter by assigning a humor theme to a pathetic and disgusting experience. In *Black Culture and*
Black Consciousness. Lawrence W. Levine expounds upon this idea even more (pp. 333-341):

Indeed, the humor that they (Blacks) utilized to turn American racism on its head, to emphasize its absurdities, to unmask its hypocrisies and double standards, to play with its stereotypes, indicates that they (Blacks) understood with great precision the intricacies and perversions of the system in which they lived...no other mechanism in Afro-American expressive culture was more effective than humor in exposing the absurdity of the American racial system and in releasing pent-up Black aggression toward it.

This is what Shirley Caesar is doing when she repeats the phrase "Feet, don't fail me now."

Ironically the true meaning of "Feet, Don’t Fail Me Now" has been misconstrued by the movie industries in the United States which often depicts a Black character who possesses little or no mental and/or physical motivation. The general population has come to associate this phrase with the negative failure to succeed or advance.

Stepin Fetchit was one such character who is known to have portrayed that stereotype that the movie industry supplied its audience with during the 1930s, and the phrase "Feet, don’t fail me now" came to be associated with him. Donald Bogle describes Stepin Fetchit’s role in this era of movies as a dim-witted Negro.
In the year 1934 -- at the age of thirty-two -- Stepin Fetchit was already a legend and one of movieland's few authentic oddities. Only a few years earlier, no one could have predicted that this actor who gave the appearance of being a lanky, slow-witted, simple-minded, obtuse, synthetic, confused humbug would take an entire nation and an era by storm. But Stepin Fetchit went far beyond anyone's predictions or expectations, and in his own inspired way he did so brilliantly. In the early 1930s he was the best known and most successful black actor working in Hollywood. At a time when contracts for black players were unheard of, Fetchit was signed, then dropped, then spectacularly re-signed by Fox Pictures. From 1929 to 1935, he appeared in some twenty-six films. Often working in as many as four movies at a time, Fetchit was the first Negro to receive featured billing, and special scenes were often written into pictures for him. He popularized the dim-witted, tongue-tied stammer and the phenomenal slow-lazyman shuffle. So successful was he with his slow gait that for years audiences thought Stepin Fetchit actually could not run. Negro boot-blacks and bus boys were said to have imitated his notorious walk on the streets (1989: 39).

In other words, Hollywood stripped the phrase "Feet, Don't Fail Me Now" of its true effect which had originally symbolized the "feet -- escape" image. Blacks knew that as many close calls as they had found themselves in the middle of, the one certain defense they could always
depend on was their feet. Any person -- from criminal to saint to anyone who found himself in a tight situation -- could depend on the feet as a means of escape. The true meaning of "Feet, Don't Fail Me Now" is even more urgent and essential to the Black experience if one considers the escape of slaves from their masters. It is common knowledge that the slaves had to rely on their feet, their only means of transportation, as they fled the plantations en route to underground railroads in search of the goal of freedom.

It is my contention that in her personal narrative "Feet, Don't Fail Me Now," Shirley Caesar overturns the movie and television imagery of Stepin Fetchit and his depiction of laziness, slothfulness, and simple-mindedness. Whereas Stepin Fetchit was viewed as a constant feet-shuffling buffoon, a stereotype laughed at by a white audience. Shirley Caesar reclaims the phrase, gives it back its original symbol of victory, upward mobility, and freedom, and she proves how capable she (as well as other Blacks) have been challenging a negative situation into a positive outcome.

Certainly, even at the young age of 15, Caesar knew that in order to save her life while trying to travel the backroads of South Carolina, the only survival mechanism that was certain was her feet. She didn't have time for logical reasoning or judicial sanctions. Had she tried any other route of escape it may have cost her her life.

Once again we see how Shirley Caesar takes the negative and changes it to the positive by establishing her own rules of survival. I yet contend that she believes she has the capacity to set her own
standards, which seem to work for her -- because she is God's chosen vessel. In this racial story we find ourselves gaining a greater insight on this lady's ministry and our initial understanding of the theme "Feet, Don't Fail Me Now" embellishes.

In Shirley Caesar's case this phrase takes on a multi-dimension of symbolic and religious meaning because she is certain that her feet are planted firmly in the Word (to use Caesar's exact terminology) and the Word, like her feet, has not failed her. She is convinced, even as she was "talking to her feet" in the story, that the dynamics of her combined folk and religious inheritance won't leave her listing in the sea of a second Middle Passage. Caesar's convictions about the Word also implies that she doesn't want to do anything that would be displeasing to God or that might jeopardize nor diminish her powerful gift as an evangelist-singer; nor her gift as a dynamic performer.

Whether talking about the woes of racism or the wages of sin, Shirley Caesar performs with the same intensity. She moves her audience with her "this-could-happen-to-you" tone, drawing them into a conversation-like posture. The shouts of "yes," "yeah," "sing Shirley," "preach Shirley," and "Amen," are there because people identify closely with what she's talking about.

If she says "I wouldn't say Amen either, if I'd never been sick," she touches someone because certainly there are those in the audience who have been sick.

If she says "Feet, don't fail me now," surely there are those in the audience who identify with the cruelty of racism or have
experienced some kind of intense fear. But, by opening these doors so her audience can identify with what she’s saying, her performance becomes more than mere singing, preaching, and storytelling. It becomes a type of catharsis and indeed does change many people’s lives.

 Appropriately, it would follow that Caesar’s capability to affect a change in people’s lives is evident through her verbal artistry. It would also follow that just as her verbal artistry serves as a vehicle to express Shirley’s call into evangelism, the combination of God’s word and Caesar’s personal experiences come together as Shirley Caesar responds to the Great Commission.

 Earlier in this text, I explained how closely attracted Shirley Caesar was to her mother, and how even today, how equally attached she is to her mother’s memories. When Shirley first began her career as a gospel artist, her mother gave her some advice that became almost a "theme" for Caesar’s entire ministry; the advice was analogous to a commission: "Don’t let God down. Don’t let the people down. And don’t let me down.” This commission was strong even at the moment that Mrs. Hallie Caesar gave it to her daughter; so strong that Shirley says "When mama said these words, they buried themselves in my heart at that very moment and they are ‘real’ with me even today."

 My point is this, Caesar declares that she has tried to live by the advice of her mother’s commission all during her career, and just like climbing the rungs of a ladder, she has stepped right out of poverty into fame, yet she has still retained the humility of her mother’s commission. Like the unusual conjuncture of folk artistry and
"praising the Lord," Caesar combines the understanding of her popularity with her mother’s commission to remain humble, close to the Lord, close to the folk, and aware of her human frailty -- "Feet, Don't Fail Me Now."

In accord with this same idea, Caesar’s belief and dependency on the Word helps her to conquer the unconquerable because the Word transcends the physical. She exemplified this idea in talking about "The Four Angels." She re-arranges her own world. Although she sees herself as becoming more popular and becoming "really recognized," she believes "I still have a long way to go until where God really wants to take me." I believe that Caesar already knows that she has enough historical credibility to take her as a "vehicle of the Word" to national, international, and world fame.

Finally, my assertion is that just as Caesar believes her future is bright and she still has a tremendous agenda in front of her, subconsciously, Caesar is carrying out her mother’s, Mrs. Hallie Caesar’s, commission -- "Don’t let God down. Don’t let the people down. And don’t let me down." One might even go so far as to say that the combining forces of God’s call on Shirley’s life, along with the powerful commission given to her by her mother, cause Shirley’s gift of evangelism, verbal artistry, and musical abilities to reach her listeners. In that same thought process, however, also resides a heavy burden of responsibility and delegation. The question is then, to whom exactly does Shirley owe herself to? Most certainly her first obligation is to God because he is the source of her entire being; he
is the source of her musical talents and her verbal dexterity. It would seem evident (at least to me) that as Caesar carries out her commission to God, she simultaneously carries out the request of her mother: "Don't let God down. Don't let the people down. And don't let me down."

Shirley Caesar vividly remembers how rugged some of the paths were that her feet have trod. She recalls that some of the paths were unpleasant and, in fact, often they were life-threatening. Caesar elaborates: "So often as you travel, you look back and see where you've come from and that keeps you humble. It reminds me that I am no better than anybody else...only thing, the Lord chose me and gave me the gift. And if you handle it wrong, he can take it away from you."

Finally, I am convinced that Shirley Caesar's dexterity with the Word, alongside her magnificent verbal artistry, help her transcend the ordinary. She has the gift, she is the First Lady of Gospel, and she is obligated to return her gift back to God and the people. Shirley Caesar's mother, Mrs. Hallie Caesar, knew this capsule of wisdom many years ago. And she advised her daughter accordingly to the call of God to carry "the Word." Shirley Caesar does fulfill the Great Commission:

"Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations...teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

Matthew 28: 19-20
SHIRLEY CAESAR

Figure 5
Shirley Caesar, A Woman Of Words leads the reader to an acknowledgement of and an appreciation of the verbal artistry discovered in the field of Gospel music, an acknowledgement that few other scholars have researched to date. Whereas, certain genres of music like classical, baroque, or popular may have been examined more closely by more scholars in the past, currently there seems to be a new surge of interest in the production, composition, and performance of Gospel music. As Shirley Caesar puts it "Today, Gospel music is a money-making industry." Since Gospel music is a "money-making industry," it tends to draw more and more attention to itself because the public now gets to see such artists as Shirley Caesar, Bobby Jones, John Key, Take Six, and even members of the original Caravans [the group that first made Shirley Caesar popular] on television shows like Arsenio Hall, NBC, and CBS specials as well as Emmy and Grammy Awards televised specials which bring special recognition to the genre of Gospel and its artists.

One of the purposes of this text is to help the readers notice that just as television recognizes the talent in the field of Gospel -- very much like recognizing talents in the fields of classical, popular, and other secular music, the boundaries between secular and non-secular music appears to be collapsing. Further, through media exposure and
through the advances of the record industry, the general public has become more aware of similarities and dissimilarities of the secular and non-secular. At the same time, they exposed noticeable differences found in the composition and performance of Gospel music. Simultaneously, the composition and performance of Gospel music has become augmented to the point of reaching more and more souls, thus proclaiming the Word of God.

The question now arises, what has kept Shirley Caesar's ministry and performance on top of these advanced changes, especially since she proclaims that she has been singing Gospel music for about thirty years, I believe Caesar has taken advantage of the "collapsed boundaries" between secular and non-secular. By no means am I suggesting that Caesar desires to perform secular music nor is her message secular; however, she takes advantage of a secular situation and turns it on its head and uses it to make a point that can be easily tied in the "Jesus Story" and thereby carries with it her call to evangelism. So, even if her exposure may be primarily through a secular medium like television versus a church setting or an auditorium, Shirley Caesar is able to make her marked definition of the secular and non-secular. Caesar knows that she must meet her audience at the point of their needs, on a level that they can understand. In other words, she is totally aware that she may not always be singing to an audience of Christians. Perhaps some of her listeners may not even believe in Jesus. Whatever the case, she must choose a subject to present to her listeners that anyone and everyone can understand and
appreciate. She must help her audience discover the religious significance in everyday subjects. Caesar explains the importance of storytelling by comparing its similarities to Country music.

Well, let me say this, I like Country music, OK I love Country music because Country music tells such a profound story, and because it tells such a profound story, I find it easy to relate to it. I'm not one who likes to delve into a lot of deep stuff, though every now and then I might, but not like everyday. I like the common touch; I like to hear a song that I can understand and I can relate to, and so consequently, I find myself telling stories because I can break it right down on any level and they will be able to understand it and relate to it.

... Keep in mind Jesus, Jesus was a storyteller and you see His message was not as hard to understand as some preachers try to make the Gospel, but you know he broke it right down on the listeners' level where they could understand it -- and I think that's what I get out of storytelling -- because it helps me to, well, it enables me to tell a profound story and get to the point and ultimately at the end because if it starts out with cursings, it ends up with blessings.

Notice in Caesar's final remark how she alludes to the fact that if she begins a story on a somewhat secular theme, she ends up by bringing that same theme around to such a conversion that it culminates into a
Gospel message. This message, in turn, ties together the loose ends of the secular, the musical, and the Gospel into an innovative, symbolic trinity. Even more explicit, notice the manner in which Caesar tells the story of "The Four Angels" in Chapter 4 and reveals the underlying theme of sickness which ends up becoming a message of God's authority over the "rocks that had attached themselves to the inside of her kidney" just as much as taking authority over the orders given to her by the doctors at Duke Hospital.

In a somewhat poetic fashion, Shirley Caesar takes the personal experience narrative, songs, marked speech patterns, fiction and Biblical sermonettes and presents them in an evangelistic collage during her performances. As she describes it "I can break it right down on any level and they (the listener) will be able to understand and relate to it." Caesar goes on to explain that Jesus was a storyteller. Does it stand to reason that if stories worked for Jesus they will also work for Shirley? The point being, Shirley Caesar draws from a wealth of tradition -- the Christian tradition, the Gospel tradition, and the Black experience -- which all have their roots in the oral tradition. It would follow that since African-Americans are so used to the messages heard in storytelling because stories teach lessons, teach morals, entertain, and preserve one's culture. Caesar, an African-American Gospel singer, would also draw from these sources of the prevalent orality yet existing in the Black community.

These same messages urge a people on the verge of co-option by an impersonal and profoundly divisive economic system that their very
survival -- and here the significance of integrity once again asserts itself -- depends, and has always depended, on community. Shirley Caesar's message is much the same, save that it is more than a message, indeed, she enacts the very thing she urges.

Lawrence W. Levine writes:

While the message of black Gospel music manifested the dissolution of the traditional sacred world and a high degree of acculturation to a modern religious consciousness, its style and performance were being revitalized by an intensified connection with the roots of traditional Afro-American religion and the sounds and styles of the twentieth-century secular music of the black community...

Musically they reached back to the traditions of the slave past and out of the rhythms of the...black music world around them. (1977: 189)

Caesar not only draws from the black community her appreciation and her dexterity in storytelling, she also exhibits a natural sense of rhythm that can be observed in her music, in her hand clapping, and most profoundly, in her swift moving feet which seem to carry her along with such a pace, one wonders if her heels ever rest completely on the ground. As Levine explains above, Shirley Caesar possesses an intense connection with the roots of the Afro-American religion as well as the traditions of the slave past, and these influences cannot be denied when an observer looks at Caesar perform.
The tradition that Shirley bases her performances on gives her the foundation for a modern, innovative style that she adds to her traditionally founded music. She believes in what she is doing and she conveys that belief to her listeners. Without a doubt, she is convinced of her ministry to the people during this modern era of uncertainty.

This is a time now of pressure, crises, and drugs and people are in their spiritual, horrible pits and they want a way out and they feel that Sister Shirley has a message from the Lord that can help pull them out. That's number one. I think that the songs right now that I'm singing, like the woman who would not give up and "Hold My Mule," and "Peace in the Midst of a Storm" are songs with a powerful message. In "Worship Him" I'm dealing with seven different ways in Hebrew of worshipping the Lord above. I believe that it's all the different types of Gospel, the different types of Gospel music, that I'm presenting. I might be projecting a lot of it like in ah, its traditional, but I've got so much of a contemporary feel to it that any audience will accept it.

As Shirley continues to carry out her call to evangelism, she employs all of the components of her verbal artistry and musical talents along with the influences of tradition to broaden her audience. In the above quote, Caesar confesses to "adding such a contemporary feel" to her traditional Gospel music that one might not even classify
her music as traditional. However, the message is still there; the
message is clear; and the message is the same as it has always been for
Caesar, "Jesus saves!"

What I have discovered about Shirley Caesar is that she has an
unflagging belief that her own will and her own consciousness is
manifested by God. I said in previous chapters that Shirley sets her
own rules, sets her own boundaries, and defines her own world -- and it
works for her. During the episode at Duke Hospital, after being told
by Dr. Johnson to return to the hospital for surgery, Caesar chose to
go home and pray. The story reveals how she says God healed her and
when she ever did return to Duke Hospital, she arrived there a healed
woman. This healing process worked for Caesar. However, the question
arises "Would the same God do the same thing for others besides
Shirley?" Caesar answers that question "If he'll do it for me, he'll
do it for you and you and you." As Caesar continues to "order her
world" under to the unction of God's gifts to her as an evangelist, I
think she makes a statement about the development and purpose of her
religious belief, for her as well as the black community. Blacks come
to see God as the epitome of their earthly will. They transformed
their social networks into symbolic traditions such as Gospel, tropes
such as the irony to escape the powerlessness of the sterile European
tradition, and developed an enjoyment for their own African cultural
holdovers. Shirley Caesar exemplifies the best elements of both the
cultural traditions and the religious traditions. The dynamics of
Caesar's individual creativity is unsurpassed.
Shirley Caesar's performance style is just another bridge or connection between the cerebral (calculated) performance and the emotional (spiritual) judgment. Caesar is quoted as saying: "Yet, I never say anything the same way. I cannot sing a song the same way. I've got to add something; I've got to do something because that keeps it alive in my heart. I like to be a versatile singer." Her performances come to epitomize innovation, creativity, and tradition. For example, she says "I never know what I'm gonna do when I go out there on stage... I can't do the same thing the same way twice." It seems to me that the crucial distinction here is certainly not that Caesar operates without a sound "ideal" or a "perfect moment" in mind, but rather that she aspires to a sound "ideal" which has yet to be discovered. Therefore, there is no stale, sterile question of recapturing, but one of creating. This is a performance orientation which manifestly allows Caesar and her audience to attend to that exact moment and event. The analysis described in *Shirley Caesar, A Woman of Words* reveals her as an artist of great improvisational expansiveness and sophistication who employs techniques like "monitor and adjust" and "call and response" which involved everyone in the creation of a performance which becomes an artistic experience. When Caesar suddenly makes a spur-of-the-moment choice while taking into consideration her audience's mood and prospective response, both the performer and the listener share in a unique artistic experience which places the First Lady of Gospel on a shelf like a precious gem.
Currently, Shirley Caesar sits on the very top of the genre of Gospel music. She has set a pace for future performers of Gospel as well as set standards for those in her field today. I would say she has borrowed from the past, cultivated her tradition in the here and now, and helped to pave a promising future for the Gospel tradition. Not only has she had an affect on Gospel music, but she has also affected popular music. Her harmonic patterns may be heard in groups such as En Vogue, Jodeci, and Boys II Men. Her rhythmic patterns are equally as elaborate as those heard from modern-day rappers. Caesar takes control of her artistry and makes every component of it work for her. She sees her future as bright and exciting, and sums up her views as follows: "I still have a long way to where the Lord wants to take me."

As the Lord allows her ministries to grow and she steadily becomes more and more recognized, she will continue to use the authority the Lord has given her to master the verbal artistry which makes her "Shirley Caesar, A Woman of Words."

Shirley leaves us with the following message:

I believe with all of my heart that a lead singer should command their audience. Now let me turn around and tell you what I mean by that [Shirley was sitting in the front seat of the car and I was sitting directly behind her in the back seat]. You don’t let, you don’t let the audience command you, but you grab that audience in the palm of your hand and you give them what the Lord has given to
you to give to them. Now I speak like this because, ahh, I can really say the same thing about a rhythm and blues singer, but since I sing all Gospel... Michael Jackson does the same thing all the others do. You know, they come out and they grasp the hearts of people like right away, and this is what, this is what I learned from Inez Andrews, but I could do it all along. But I saw Inez do it a lot. Inez would walk out and say "Leeet eveeerybody say AMEN." Dorothy Love Coates did the same thing and commanded her audience. In other words, I command you to listen to what the Lord has to say through me.
Appendix A

Written by John Rockwell, the following articles appeared in The New York Times.

**Miss Caesar Sparks Black Gospel Fete: Seven Groups Sing**

"I don’t like to sing in a theater," Shirley Caesar shouted yesterday afternoon, "I don’t like to sing in the dark."

But Miss Caesar and her Caesar Singers are doing just that this weekend, for six shows as part of the ongoing black gospel series at the RFK Theater, 219 West 48th Street, that began on April 4. And anyone who is at all interested in black or popular music should make an effort to catch one of the two remaining shows this weekend, at 3:30 and 7:30 P.M. today.

Gospel singing remains a vital, evolving part of black music, but white audiences don’t usually venture to the black churches or the Apollo Theater, which are its principal showcases in this city. The current Broadway series gives them that chance, and it’s a pity more aren’t availing themselves of it.

Secular black music has its virtues, certainly. But black gospel at its best uses the same idioms and infuses them with a vitality that some of the slicker, more sophisticated forms of soul have chosen to ignore. Yesterday afternoon’s show offered seven groups within the course of two hours, and they gave a broad and bracing view of present-day black gospel.
The groups ranged from the earnest sincerity of the Mount Vernon Community Ensemble to the rocking traditionalism of the Five Blind Boys of Mississippi and Charley Storey and his Junior All Stars to the theatricalized, musically complex gospel avant-gardism of the Andrea Vereen Ensemble.

But most characteristic was the hand-clapping, soul-stirring excitement of the Rugged Cross Singers, the Gospel Keynotes and Miss Caesar and her group. The Gospel Keynotes had the small but deliriously enthusiastic audience literally jumping, and Miss Caesar, with her powerhouse of a voice and personality, made a fitting headliner. (May 4, 1975)

**Gospel Music Is the Star This Weekend at Brooklyn Academy**

It is easy to think that our society can’t keep secrets anymore. In the past, we are told, there existed vast pockets of regional and subcultural activities that the rest of the country knew little or nothing about. Now, in the era of a television set in every house and standardized education and culture, such underground phenomenon have supposedly died out.

That may be true for many aspects of American culture, but there are still considerable areas of our society that carry on in ruddy good health today, largely ignored by the arbiters of national taste, whether elitist or populist.

The world of black gospel music, for example, is a way of life practiced by thousands, perhaps millions of people, and enjoyed by
millions more on records and on local and national radio and television broadcasts. Gospel has its own stars and record companies and magazines. Gospel singers even appear occasionally on secular stages, in specially organized concerts away from the regular gospel touring circuit. But the bulk of the audience remains the already converted, or the potentially convertible -- speaking in a religious sense.

The Roots of the Blues

Yet music lovers who enjoy today's black music or the stirring anthems of older blues, rhythm-and-blues and soul singers would do well also to consider black gospel. Gospel is widely referred to in histories of rock as the roots of the blues and hence of rock itself. Its ecstatic, shouting style, its surging peaks of emotion and its rhapsodic use of repetition invariably make a profound impact on a listener already attuned to modern-day black popular music.

This weekend, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, which has often rented its facilities to private groups for gospel shows, is producing its own gospel revue, "Get On Board." This is an ambitious undertaking, starring one of gospel's finest singers, Shirley Caesar, and featuring Brooklyn's own 40-member Institutional Radio Choir, which first attained national prominence more than 10 years ago, when it recorded two disks with Miss Caesar, and which -- along with its smaller spin-off group, the J.C. White Singers -- has since gone on to win recognition on its
own. Mr. White is composer and conductor for the choir, although Carl Williams is listed as music director. Esther Marrow, who appeared on Broadway in "Mahalia" and "The Wiz," is soloist with the choir.

In addition, Al Perryman and Loretta Abbott, a dance team that has appeared on Broadway and at numerous Brooklyn churches, experimenting with a gospel-based religious-dance style, will perform in the revue, as well as choreographing and staging it.

Performs Main Set by Herself

Miss Caesar and the Caesar Singers, who include five instrumentalists (one of whom sings) and four backup singers, will appear by themselves after the intermission for 40 minutes. Although Miss Caesar is scheduled to join the other 55 performers, including the dancers, in the grand finale, and although she says she has no objections to sharing a program with religiously oriented dance, she prefers to perform her main set by herself.

Miss Caesar, who will say only that she is "over 21," is a woman with one of those screaming, triumphant sopranos that can nonetheless be reined in with exquisite control. Although she has all the vocal equipment for success in popular music or jazz, she has never performed secularly. "I cannot have two masters," she remarked the other day from Durham, N.C., her hometown, to which she had returned for Christmas.

Miss Caesar is not just a singer, but an active evangelist as well. She leads what she calls Jesus rallies throughout the
country and has her own "radio ministry" every Sunday, which can be heard in the parts of North Carolina and Virginia within reach of a Durham radio station. She also is host of an annual gospel convention, called the "Shirley Caesar Crusade Convention," in the third week of July in Durham.

Choir Has Sunday Radio Show

...Miss Caesar, for one, says she sometimes has to fall back on craft, but that she is most of the time genuinely moved in a religious sense to do what she does so well.

"Sometimes I go on stage, and I know it's a job and I have to do it," she says. "But by the third song, that feeling leaves. And usually when I first go out there, and I start to talk and exalt, before I've even sung a song, I feel the inspiration."

"Get On Board" can be seen in the Brooklyn Academy's Opera House tonight and tomorrow at 8 and on Sunday at 2 P.M. and 7 P.M. Tickets cost $5, $10 and $15; the box-office number is 636-4100.

(December 26, 1980)

Another trained observer, Robert Palmer (pop music critic, author of Deep Blues), wrote this article for The New York Times:

Gospel: A Shirley Caesar 'Celebration'

The evangelist and gospel singer Shirley Caesar didn't fit seamlessly into "Get On Board!," a "Holiday Gospel Celebration" that was presented by the Brooklyn Academy of Music over the
weekend. Most of the show featured dancers, eye-catching staging, and dramatic set pieces built around Brooklyn's Institutional Radio Choir. It was a show with gospel music. Miss Caesar, the evening's featured performer, insisted on Saturday night that her portion of the program wasn't a show. "We're going to have church," she proclaimed.

But Miss Caesar's preaching, testifying and singing were certainly theatrical, and the Institutional Radio Choir had been "having church" -- singing the gospel with passionate commitment and infectious good humor -- throughout the first half of the program; "Get On Board!" was more consistent than Miss Caesar seemed to think. Some of the dancing (which was choreographed by Loretta Abbott and Al Perryman) did seem a little incongruous in a gospel setting, and the choir occasionally seemed uncomfortable with the demands of the staging. But ultimately the program held together, and it was a delight.

The Institutional Radio Choir carried most of the evening with its impressive ensemble work and an exceptional array of distinctive soloists. Esther Marrow was superb in two appearances as a guest soloist, and Rudy Stevenson's band did a fine job of keeping the production's rhythms flowing. Miss Caesar sang with intensity, and her group demonstrated admirable dynamics and split-second timing in a set that was no less powerful for having been polished to a high gloss. (December 29, 1980)
United Artists Records submitted the following news release entitled "BIO" in March 1977:

... Born to the Reverend James and Hallie Caesar, Shirley Ann was born in Durham, North Carolina, one of twelve children. James Caesar died when Shirley was very young and her mother was left to raise the family alone. During these years of struggle, Shirley was guided by her natural feeling for Gospel music and her strong belief in God.

Her unwavering popularity and tremendous accomplishments are well known and recognized throughout the world, and she has contributed service in the furtherance of Gospel music and the evangelical movement as a whole. She has appeared in Madison Square Garden, the Apollo Theater, the Astrodome, and auditoriums, colleges and churches across the country. She headlined, with the Rev. Roy Wilkins, at memorial services for Martin Luther King in Washington, D.C. Miss Caesar has also toured Europe, singing to thousands, and among her many accolades she has won a Grammy Award and Ebony Magazine's award for the best female Gospel singer. She has certainly earned the title by which she is most widely known, "The Gospel Princess."

The surprising depth of feeling which Shirley Caesar and her singers bring to Gospel music is a stirring and powerful force. The emotion she captures rings out with real sincerity.
Shirley Caesar has garnered two gold LPs, *Stranger On The Road* and *I'll Go*, and a gold single "Don't Drive Your Mama Away."

Shirley Caesar knows her business and as such, she is making a profound mark in the history of Gospel music.

Evangelist Shirley Caesar runs her own Gospel Enterprises, which co-ordinates a huge annual crusade, and a drive to feed the hungry. Presently she is heard regularly over two radio stations in North Carolina.

Shirley Caesar is quickly becoming one of the most respected names in Gospel music, a singer dedicated to spreading an important message to people everywhere.

The following article was written by Eleanor Blau and appeared in *The New York Times* on July 31, 1972:

**Shirley Caesar Teaches Gospel In a Running Sermon of Songs**

The evangelist Shirley Caesar belted gospel hymns and danced in the front-row aisle of Alice Tully Hall yesterday in an exuberant service that marked the midway point of "Soul at the Center," the two-week black arts festival at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

In a kind of running sermon that bordered on singing, bursting frequently into unrestrained gospel song, Miss Caesar, assisted by the three Shirley Caesar Singers, brought many members of the audience to their feet, clapping and dancing.
However, more than half of the 300 spectators remained in their seats, clapping or, in some cases, sitting quietly. The audience, about a third of whom was white, filled the front third of the 1,000-seat auditorium.

"Singing and preaching go together like ham and eggs," the 33-year-old revivalist declared at the start of the session.

Mocking the kind of church service in which parishioners solemnly fold their hands, she said, "We're letting our hair down." And Miss Caesar urged the audience to "shake somebody's hand and say, 'Neighbor, I came to have a good time today.'"

Miss Caesar, wearing a white robe and silver shoes, brought the audience to a pitch of excitement at one point when she said, "I don't know much about politics, but I know that God lives. God is not dead," she added, repeating the phrase until she broke into song.

A tambourine player in the balcony joined in with the well-amplified guitar, organ and piano on stage as the evangelist walked down the lavender-carpeted stage stairs to the front aisle. There she danced and sang with members of the audience.

Miss Caesar, who lives in Durham, N.C., conducts crusades in various parts of the country, frequently on college campuses. She is a member of the Church of God in Christ, a rapidly growing, predominately black Pentecostal denomination.

In an interview before the service, Miss Caesar talked about her style. "I like for everyone to feel 'she's talking directly to
me," she said. "I cannot do this dead and dry. I've got to move."

Although she did not study voice or train for the ministry, Miss Caesar, who recently won a Grammy award for her gospel singing, believes she was called to her work by God. "I am most contented when I do this," she said. "This is my life."


