



ROBERT
MAROVICH

A CITY CALLED
HEAVEN

CHICAGO AND THE BIRTH OF
**GOSPEL
MUSIC**



CHAPTER 2

“When the Fire Fell”

The Sanctified Church Contribution to Chicago Gospel Music

Spontaneous in every sense of the word. No pianist, organist, or choir director interferes with the freedom. . . . A spiritual may be started any time in the service and by anyone who feels the urge to sing.

Robert Lee Sutherland, 1930

Chicago's Pentecostal, Holiness, Apostolic, and Spiritual churches—collectively referred to as the sanctified church—helped establish in the northern urban environment what historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has called an “emotional folk orality.” Working-class southern migrants brought their oral tradition, or “age of the voice,” with them when they came north as part of the Great Migration.¹ But while the folk orators of the sanctified church sought to remain close to their southern roots, they also wanted to carve out their own position of power and influence among the city's African American cultural and political elite. By becoming “oral narrators of modernity,” storefront preachers and evangelists—in person, on record, and on radio—could join their middle-class peers as thought leaders, standard-bearers, and morality enforcers for the new migrant community.²

Historians credit female evangelist Mattie L. Thornton as organizing the city's first sanctified church, the Holy Nazarene Tabernacle Apostolic Church, around 1908.³ By 1919, approximately twenty Holiness churches had been founded in Chicago.⁴ Like their Baptist and Methodist counterparts, sanctified